

Psalm 79

Do you have a favorite Bible passage? What is it? This morning we will focus on the least popular psalm in the entire Bible (according to stats compiled by YouVersion—the Bible app on most of your phones): **Psalm 79**.

In Our Sunday School, we take the following approach to each Bible text: read, explain, apply, and personalize. So, let's start by reading this text.

Read (What does it say?)

A Psalm of Asaph.

**1 O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance;
Your holy temple they have defiled;
They have laid Jerusalem in heaps.**

**2 The dead bodies of Your servants
They have given *as* food for the birds of the heavens,
The flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth.**

**3 Their blood they have shed like water all around Jerusalem,
And *there was* no one to bury *them*.**

**4 We have become a reproach to our neighbors,
A scorn and derision to those who are around us.**

**5 How long, LORD?
Will You be angry forever?
Will Your jealousy burn like fire?**

**6 Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You,
And on the kingdoms that do not call on Your name.**

**7 For they have devoured Jacob,
And laid waste his dwelling place.**

**8 Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!
Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us,
For we have been brought very low.**

**9 Help us, O God of our salvation,
For the glory of Your name;
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,**

For Your name's sake!

**10 Why should the nations say,
"Where is their God?"**

**Let there be known among the nations in our sight
The avenging of the blood of Your servants *which has been shed*.**

**11 Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You;
According to the greatness of Your power
Preserve those who are appointed to die;**

**12 And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom
Their reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.**

**13 So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture,
Will give You thanks forever;
We will show forth Your praise to all generations.**

Explain

Bible study is asking and answering questions, so let's ask some questions.

What is the historical context?

It's helpful (especially in the **Psalms**) to try to determine what the historical setting is (if applicable). For **Psalm 79**, it's a time in Israeli history where Jerusalem was destroyed. Thankfully, this is unusual in Israeli history, so we think it's the **Babylonian** captivity of 587 BC. The Jews thought/think this, as evidenced by **Coffman: The Jews have recited this psalm upon the 9th day of the Jewish month Ab, commemorating the two destructions of Jerusalem (by the Babylonians in 587 B.C., and by the Romans in A.D. 70)**. But even if it's not, when we get to the end of the lesson tonight, I think you'll see that the applications and personalizations aren't dependent upon this assumption.

Are there any literary/structural observations?

Yes—this psalm is broken up into several different stanzas. These stanza breaks are a modern English typographic element, so I don't want to go too far with them (e.g., if you compare **Psalm 79** in different English translations you'll see there are differences in the stanza breaks), but most translations see a break after **Psalm 79:4, 7, and 10**. Some have more and some have less, but this feels about right relative to the content of each stanza.

What are the most repeated words?

Your/you (20), our/us/we (14), they/them (7)

What do the words mean?

A Psalm [properly, instrumental music; by implication, a poem set to notes: psalm] **of Asaph** ["collector"]. **[Who is Asaph?** There are different Asaphs in the Bible. Twelve of the **Psalms** are Psalms of Asaph. In **1 Chronicles 6**, David appoints Heman and Asaph to be singers in God's house. Asaph also is listed as someone singing in **2 Chronicles 5** at the dedication of Solomon's temple.

So, he's obviously associated with music and singing—which makes sense he'd show up in the **Psalms**.

The only problem with the Asaph mentioned in **Psalm 79** being the Asaph that King David knew is the timeline—the Asaph that David knew was dead 300+ years before this Psalm was written (unless this is a prophetic psalm—which it could be, but it appears unlikely).

So, we think that "Asaph" may refer to either the musical tune the psalm is set to (as in, Asaph was the composer) or this is referring to the family of Asaph—rather than the original Asaph at the time of King David.]

1 O God [*elohiyim*], **the nations** [a foreign nation; hence, a Gentile; also (figuratively) a troop of animals, or a flight of locusts: Gentile, heathen, nation, people; used in **79:1, 6**, twice in **10**] **have come** [qal perfect] **into Your inheritance** [properly, something inherited, i.e., (abstractly) occupancy, or (concretely) an heirloom; generally an estate, patrimony or portion: heritage, to inherit, inheritance, possession];

Your holy temple they have defiled [*piel* perfect; to be foul, especially in a ceremonial or moral sense (contaminated): defile (self), pollute (self), be (make, make self, pronounce) **unclean**];

They have laid [qal perfect] **Jerusalem in heaps** [a ruin (as if overturned): heap]. **[Where is this?** Jerusalem]

2 The dead bodies of Your servants

They have given [qal perfect] **as food for the birds of the heavens,**

The flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth. **[Does this sound like a small defeat or a total wipeout?** A wipeout]

3 Their blood they have shed [qal perfect] **like water all around Jerusalem,**

And there was no one to bury them [qal active participle].

4 We have become a reproach [rebuke, reproach(-fully), **shame**] **to our neighbors,**
A scorn [derision, scoffing: derision, scorn (-ing)] **and derision** [a laughing-stock: derision] **to those who are around us.**

5 How long, LORD [*yehovah*; (the) self-Existent or Eternal; Jeho-vah, Jewish national name of God: Jehovah, the Lord]?

Will You be angry [qal imperfect; to breathe **hard**, i.e., be enraged: be angry (displeased)] **forever?**

Will Your jealousy burn [qal imperfect; to kindle, i.e., consume (by fire or by eating); to be (-come) brutish: be brutish, bring (put, take) away, burn, (cause to) eat (up), feed, heat, kindle, set (on fire), waste] **like fire?** [**Who does the Psalmist hold responsible for this defeat of Jerusalem?** God]

6 Pour out [qal imperative] **Your wrath** [heat; figuratively, anger, poison (from its fever): anger, bottles, hot displeasure, furious(-ly, -ry), heat, indignation, poison, rage, wrath(-ful)] **on the nations that do not know You** [qal perfect],

And on the kingdoms that do not call [qal perfect] **on Your name.**

7 For they have devoured [qal perfect] **Jacob,**

And laid waste [hiphil perfect; to stun (or intransitively, grow numb), i.e., devastate or (figuratively) stupefy (both usually in a passive sense): make amazed, be astonished, (be an) astonish(-ment), (be, bring into, unto, lay, lie, make) desolate(-ion, places), be destitute, destroy (self), (lay, lie, make) waste, wonder] **his dwelling place.**

8 Oh, do not remember [qal imperfect] **former iniquities** [perversity, i.e., (moral) evil: fault, iniquity, mischief, punishment (of iniquity), sin] **against us!**

Let Your tender mercies [compassion (in the plural); by extension, the womb (as cherishing the fetus); by implication, a maiden: bowels, compassion, damsel, tender love, (great, tender) mercy, pity, womb] **come speedily to meet** [piel imperfect; to project (one self), i.e., precede; hence, to anticipate, hasten, meet (usually for help): come (go, (flee)) before, disappoint, meet, prevent] **us,**

For we have been brought [qal perfect; to slacken or be feeble; figuratively, to be oppressed: bring low, dry up, be emptied, be not equal, fail, be impoverished, be made **thin**] **very** [properly, vehemence, i.e., (with or without preposition) vehemently; by implication, wholly, speedily, etc. (often with other words as an intensive or superlative; especially when repeated): diligently, especially, exceeding(-ly), far, fast, good, great(-ly), might(-ily, -y), (so) much, **quickly**, (so) sore, utterly, very (much, sore), well] **low.**

9 Help us [qal imperative; to surround, i.e., protect or aid: help, succor], **O God** [*elohiym*] **of our salvation** [*yehsha*; liberty, deliverance, prosperity: safety, salvation, saving],

For the glory [properly, **weight**, but only figuratively in a good sense, splendor or copiousness: glorious(-ly), glory, honor(-able)] **of Your name;**

And deliver us [hiphil imperative; to snatch away, whether in a good or a bad sense: defend, deliver (self), escape, part, pluck, preserve, recover, rescue, rid, save, spoil, strip, take (out)], **and provide atonement** [piel imperative; to **cover** (specifically with bitumen);

figuratively, to expiate or condone, to placate or cancel: appease, make (an atonement, cleanse, disannul, forgive, be merciful, pacify, pardon, purge (away), put off, (make) reconcile(-liation)] **for our sins** [an offence (sometimes habitual sinfulness), and its penalty, occasion, sacrifice, or expiation; also (concretely) an offender: punishment (of sin), purifying(-fication for sin), sin(-ner, offering)],

For Your name's sake! [Who ultimately provides this? Jesus. Jesus provides atonement for our sins. Jesus takes the poured-out wrath of God the Father in our place (v. 6). Jesus' blood covers our sin and makes us acceptable to a holy God. And when we share the gospel and leave out the wrath of God toward sin and sinners, the cross doesn't make any logical sense. So, don't leave out the wrath. Don't be a jerk about it, but don't leave it out.]

10 Why should the nations say [qal imperfect],

"Where is their God [*elohiyim*]?"

Let there be known [niphil imperfect] **among the nations in our sight**

The avenging [avengement, whether the act or the passion: avenge, revenge(-ing), vengeance] **of the blood of Your servants which has been shed** [qal passive participle].

11 Let the groaning [shrieking: crying out, groaning, sighing] **of the prisoner come** [qal imperfect] **before You;** [Who is the prisoner? Israel]

According to the greatness [magnitude (literally or figuratively): greatness, stout(-ness)] **of Your power** [the arm (as stretched out), or (of animals) the foreleg; figuratively, force: arm, help, mighty, power, shoulder, strength]

Preserve [hiphil **imperative**; to jut over or exceed; by implication, to excel; (intransitively) to remain or be left; causatively to leave, cause to abound, preserve: excel, leave (a remnant), left behind, too much, make plenteous, preserve, (be, let) remain(-der, -ing, -nant), reserve, residue, rest] **those who are appointed** [a **son** (as a builder of the family name), in the widest sense (of literal and figurative relationship, including grandson, subject, nation, quality or condition, etc., (like father or brother), etc.): afflicted, age, (Ahoh-) (Ammon-) (Hachmon-) (Lev-) ite, (anoint-) ed one, appointed to, arrow, (Assyr-) (Babylon-) (Egypt-) (Grec-) ian, one born, bough, branch, breed, (young) bullock, (young) calf, child, colt, daughter, firstborn, foal, very fruitful, postage, kid, lamb, man, meet, mighty, nephew, old, people, rebel, robber, son, spark, steward, stranger, them of, tumultuous one, valiant(-est), whelp, worthy, young (one), youth] **to die** [execution (as a doom): death, die];

12 And return [hiphil **imperative**] **to our neighbors** [a resident; by extension, a fellow-citizen: inhabitant, neighbor, nigh] **sevenfold into their bosom** [to enclose; the bosom (literally or figuratively): bosom, bottom, lap, midst, within]

Their reproach [contumely, disgrace, the pudenda: rebuke, reproach(-fully), shame] **with which they have reproached You** [piel perfect; to pull off, i.e., (by implication) to expose (as by stripping); specifically, to betroth (as if a surrender); figuratively, to carp at, i.e.,

defame; to spend the winter: betroth, blaspheme, defy, jeopard, rail, reproach, upbraid], **O Lord** [*adonay*]. [**Is this a Biblical prayer to pray today?** Not for a NT believer]

13 So we, Your people [a people (as a congregated unit); specifically, a tribe (as those of Israel); hence (collectively) troops or attendants; figuratively, a flock: folk, men, nation, people] **and sheep of Your pasture** [pasturage; concretely, a flock: flock, pasture], **Will give You thanks** [hiphil imperfect; literally, to use (i.e., hold out) the **hand**; physically, to throw (a stone, an arrow) at or away; especially to revere or worship (with extended hands); intensively, to bemoan (by wringing the hands): cast (out), (make) confess(-ion), praise, shoot, (give) thank(-ful, -s, -sgiving)] **forever;** **We will show forth** [**piel** imperfect; properly, to **score** with a mark as a tally or record, i.e., (by implication) to inscribe, and also to enumerate; intensively, to recount, i.e., celebrate: commune, (ac-) count; declare, number, penknife, reckon, scribe, shew forth, speak, talk, tell (out), writer] **Your praise** [laudation; specifically (concretely) a hymn: praise] **to all generations.** [**What's up with this sudden shift at the end?** It's what we do—we lay out all of our concerns and resolve to thank and praise God forever no matter what.]

Apply (What is the point?)

1. Little known **≠** little value
2. Christians can praise God in **any** situation (whether it be fame, captivity, wealth, poverty, health, sickness, etc.)
3. God's ultimate deliverance is far away
4. **Sin** requires judgment
5. Telling God's story shows His praise

Personalize (What do we do with that?)

1. Don't forget the **unpopular** (true of Bible study and of relationships)
2. Praise Him right now
3. Praise Him despite the **distance** (for these Israelis, Jesus was hundreds of years away—and Jesus' second coming is an undefined period of time away for us in the future, but we are called to praise Him now in the midst of the waiting)
4. Know that **Jesus** took the judgment (and this, Christian, whatever you are going through right now—is not judgment—but it might be discipline)
5. Tell **His** story

Next week: 2 Peter