

PSALM 79

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 79

A Psalm of Asaph.

This psalm was not written by one Asaph, who is supposed to live after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, or, according to some, even after the times of Antiochus, of whom there is no account, nor any certainty that there ever was such a man in those times; but by Asaph, the seer and prophet, that lived in the time of David, who, under a prophetic spirit, foresaw and foretold things that should come to pass, spoken of in this psalm: nor is it any objection that what is here said is delivered as an history of facts, since many prophecies are delivered in this way, especially those of the prophet Isaiah. The Targum is,

“a song by the hands of Asaph, concerning the destruction of the house of the sanctuary (or temple), which he said by a spirit of prophecy.”

The title of the Syriac versions,

“said by Asaph concerning the destruction of Jerusalem.”

The argument of the psalm is of the same kind with the Seventy Fourth. Some refer it to the times of Antiochus Epiphanes; so Theodoret; but though the temple was then defiled, Jerusalem was not utterly destroyed; and others to the destruction of the city and temple by Nebuchadnezzar; and why may it not refer to both, and even to the after destruction of both by Titus Vespasian? and may include the affliction and troubles of the Christians under Rome Pagan and Papal, and especially the latter; for Jerusalem and the temple may be understood in a mystical and spiritual sense; at least the troubles of the Jews, in the times referred to, were typical of what should befall the people of God under the New Testament, and in antichristian times.

Ver. 1. *O God, the Heathen are come into thine inheritance*, etc.] The land of Canaan, divided among the children of Israel by lot and line for an

inheritance, out of which the Heathen were cast, to make room for them; but now would come into it again; (see ~~<1985>~~ Psalm 89:35), and this is called the Lord's inheritance, because he gave it as such to the people of Israel, and dwelt in it himself; and the rather this is observed as something marvellous, that he should suffer Heathens to possess his own inheritance; or the city of Jerusalem, which was the place the Lord chose to put his name in; or the temple, where he had his residence, called the mountain of his inheritance, (~~<1257>~~ Exodus 15:17), and into which it was always accounted a profanation for Heathens to enter; (see ~~<423>~~ Acts 21:28,29), into each of these places the Heathen came; the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar; the Syrians under Antiochus, as in the Apocrypha: ``Insomuch that the inhabitants of Jerusalem fled because of them: whereupon the city was made an habitation of strangers, and became strange to those that were born in her; and her own children left her.'' (1 Maccabees 1:38) ``Now Jerusalem lay void as a wilderness, there was none of her children that went in or out: the sanctuary also was trodden down, and aliens kept the strong hold; the heathen had their habitation in that place; and joy was taken from Jacob, and the pipe with the harp ceased.'' (1 Maccabees 3:45) the Romans under Pompey, Vespasian, and Titus; and the Papists have since entered among the people of God, who are his heritage or inheritance, and have lorded it over them, and made havoc of them, and who are called Heathens and Gentiles, (~~<1916>~~ Psalm 10:16 ~~<6112>~~ Revelation 11:2,18),

thy holy temple have they defiled: this was done in the times of Antiochus, by entering into it, taking away the holy vessels out of it, shedding innocent blood in it, and setting up the abomination of desolation on the altar, and sacrificing to it, as in the Apocrypha:

“Every bridegroom took up lamentation, and she that sat in the marriage chamber was in heaviness,” (1 Maccabees 1:27)

“Thus they shed innocent blood on every side of the sanctuary, and defiled it.” (1 Maccabees 1:37)

“And pollute the sanctuary and holy people:” (1 Maccabees 1:46)

“And whosoever was found with any the book of the testament, or if any committed to the law, the king's commandment was, that they should put him to death.” (1 Maccabees 1:57)

“For thy sanctuary is trodden down and profaned, and thy priests are in heaviness, and brought low.” (1 Maccabees 3:51)

“And they called upon the Lord, that he would look upon the people that was trodden down of all; and also pity the temple profaned of ungodly men;” (2 Maccabees 8:2)

and by burning it in the times of Nebuchadnezzar and Titus; (see ~~1974B~~ Psalm 74:7), and the church, which is the holy temple of God, has been defiled by antichrist sitting in it, and showing himself there as if he was God, by his dreadful blasphemies, idolatrous worship, and false doctrines, (~~5111B~~ 2 Thessalonians 2:4),

they have laid Jerusalem on heaps; the walls and buildings being pulled down, and made a heap of stones and rubbish: in the times of Antiochus and of the Maccabees, it was set on fire, and the houses and the walls pulled down on every side, and was greatly defaced, and threatened to be laid level with the ground, as in the Apocrypha:

“And when he had taken the spoils of the city, he set it on fire, and pulled down the houses and walls thereof on every side.” (1 Maccabees 1:31)

“And that he would have compassion upon the city, sore defaced, and ready to be made even with the ground; and hear the blood that cried unto him,” (2 Maccabees 8:3)

“That the holy city (to the which he was going in haste to lay it even with the ground, and to make it a common buryingplace,) he would set at liberty:” (2 Maccabees 9:14)

and this was thoroughly done in the times of Nebuchadnezzar and Titus, when the city was broke up and burnt with fire, and laid utterly desolate; so the Targum renders the word for “desolation”; it sometimes signifies a grave; (see ~~4812B~~ Job 30:24), and the sense may be here, that the city of Jerusalem was made graves to many; and multitudes were buried under the ruins of it. Aben Ezra interprets it, low places which were dug to find hidden things; the Septuagint translate it “a watch”, or cottage “for apple orchards”, and so the versions that follow it; signifying to what a low condition the city was reduced. Jarchi and Kimchi interpret the word as we do, “heaps”: this, as it is true of Jerusalem, which has been trodden under foot by the Gentiles, and remains so to this day, (~~4212B~~ Luke 21:24), so

likewise of mystical Jerusalem, the holy city, given to the Gentiles or Papists, to be trodden down for the space of forty and two months, the exact time of the reign of antichrist, (~~cf~~ Revelation 11:2).

Ver. 2. *The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven,* etc.] For such there were, both at the time of the Babylonish captivity, and in the times of Antiochus, who were good men, and served the Lord, and yet suffered in the common calamity. Nicanor, a general of Demetrius, in the time of the Maccabees, seems to have been guilty of such a fact as this, since, when he was slain, his tongue was given in pieces to the fowls, and the reward of his madness was hung up before the temple, as in the Apocrypha:

“And when he had cut out the tongue of that ungodly Nicanor, he commanded that they should give it by pieces unto the fowls, and hang up the reward of his madness before the temple.” (2 Maccabees 15:33)

the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth; this clause and the following verse are applied to a case in the times of the Maccabees, when sixty men of the Assideans were slain, religious, devout, and holy men, so called from the very word here translated “saints”;

“Now the Assideans were the first among the children of Israel that sought peace of them.” (1 Maccabees 7:13)

“The flesh of thy saints have they cast out, and their blood have they shed round about Jerusalem, and there was none to bury them.” (1 Maccabees 7:17)

Ver. 3. *Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem,* etc.] Without any concern of mind, or remorse of conscience; without any fear of God or man; as if it had been so much water only; and this they shed in great abundance: from the Apocrypha:

“And when he had taken all away, he went into his own land, having made a great massacre, and spoken very proudly.” (1 Maccabees 1:24)

“And spake peaceable words unto them, but all was deceit: for when they had given him credence, he fell suddenly upon the city,

and smote it very sore, and destroyed much people of Israel.” (1 Maccabees 1:30)

“Thus they shed innocent blood on every side of the sanctuary, and defiled it:” (1 Maccabees 1:37)

“So they rose up against them in battle on the sabbath, and they slew them, with their wives and children and their cattle, to the number of a thousand people.” (1 Maccabees 2:38)

in like manner the blood of the saints has been shed by the antichristian beast of Rome, for which he and his followers will be righteously retaliated, (^{<6176>}Revelation 17:6 18:24 16:6)

and there was none to bury them: either the number of the slain was so great, that there were not left enough to bury the dead, or they that did remain were not suffered to do it; this will be the case of the two witnesses, when slain, (^{<6117>}Revelation 11:7-9).

Ver. 4. *We are become a reproach to our neighbours*, etc.] That is, those that remained; so the Jews were to the Edomites, especially at the time of the Babylonish captivity, (^{<4907>}Psalm 137:7),

a scorn and derision to them that are round about us; as the Christians in all ages have been to the men of the world, and especially will be insulted and triumphed over when the witnesses are slain, (^{<6110>}Revelation 11:10).

Ver. 5. *How long, Lord, wilt thou be angry? for ever?* etc.] That is, how long wilt thou be angry? shall it be for ever? (see ^{<3804>}Psalm 85:4,5), for though what was done, or to be done, as before related, was or will be done by the enemies of the Lord’s people, yet by his permission, and as a token of his anger and displeasure against them: at least it might be so understood, both by them and by their enemies; and hence this expostulation,

shall thy jealousy burn like fire? so jealousy does; its coals are coals of fire, (^{<2186>}Song of Solomon 8:6), there were, at the times referred to, such among the people, who did evil things, and provoked the Lord to jealousy and wrath: see the Apocrypha:

“And there was very great wrath upon Israel.” (1 Maccabees 1:64)

“When this was done, and they had made a common supplication, they besought the merciful Lord to be reconciled with his servants for ever.” (2 Maccabees 8:29)

Ver. 6. *Pour out thy wrath upon the Heathen that have not known thee,* etc.] Who had poured out the blood of the saints like water, and therefore it was a righteous thing with God to pour out the cup of wrath in his hands, and cause them to drink the dregs of it: these words, though they are in the form of an imprecation, yet regard not private revenge, but public justice, and the honour of God; and, besides, may be considered as a prophecy of what would be, and particularly of God’s pouring out the vials of his wrath on the antichristian states; who, though they profess Christianity, are no other than Heathens, and have no spiritual and serious knowledge of Christ:

and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name; but upon their idols of gold, silver, brass, and stone, on the Virgin Mary, angels, and saints departed; for these, besides the kingdoms of Babylon, Syria, and Rome Pagan, are the kingdoms of the ten kings, that gave their kingdoms to the beast, and committed fornication, i.e. idolatry, with the whore of Rome; (see ^{<6670>}Revelation 17:2,12-14), these words are referred to in (^{<2405>}Jeremiah 10:25) and also the following.

Ver. 7. *For they have devoured Jacob,* etc.] The posterity of Jacob, the people of the Jews, typical of the church of God, made havoc of by the Romish antichrist: and laid waste his dwelling place; both Jerusalem and the temple, which was done both by the Chaldeans and the Romans, and also in the times of Antiochus; see the Apocrypha:

“38 Insomuch that the inhabitants of Jerusalem fled because of them: whereupon the city was made an habitation of strangers, and became strange to those that were born in her; and her own children left her. 39 Her sanctuary was laid waste like a wilderness, her feasts were turned into mourning, her sabbaths into reproach her honour into contempt.” (1 Maccabees 1)

“4 In his acts he was like a lion, and like a lion’s whelp roaring for his prey. 5 For He pursued the wicked, and sought them out, and burnt up those that vexed his people.” (1 Maccabees 3)

which were types of the Gospel church made desolate by the Papists: the word ^{f1149} used signifies a sheepecote, the dwelling place of those sheep that are troubled by the beast of Rome.

Ver. 8. *O remember not against us former iniquities*, etc.] Or, “our ancient iniquities”, as the Septuagint; the most ancient sin of all is that of our first parents, in which we are involved, and by which we are made sinners; and for which judgment comes upon all men; and from thence flows the corruption of nature, or that original sin of our nature in which we are all conceived and born, and so are transgressors from the womb; or iniquities of former times, of our youth, as Kimchi, sins done of old, committed long ago, in the youthful age, (see ^{<1927>}Psalm 25:7), or the sins of former persons, of our fathers, as Aben Ezra, which the Lord visits sometimes upon the children: some think reference is had to the sin of their forefathers in making and worshipping the golden calf; the Jews ^{f1150} have a saying, that there is no punishment happens to Israel, but there is an ounce in it for the sin of the calf; their meaning is, that this is always remembered and visited, according to (^{<1928>}Exodus 32:34), the phrase may take in all the sins of former persons, their ancestors, and of former times, from age to age, they had continued in, which had brought ruin upon them; and all their own sins, of nature and of youth, all past ones, to the present time: and it is desired that God would not “remember these against them”; that is, that he would not chastise or punish them for them, but that he would pardon them; for forgiveness of sin is sometimes expressed by a non-remembrance of it, (^{<2465>}Isaiah 43:25 ^{<2463>}Jeremiah 31:34), or that he would not “remember unto” ^{f1151} them; that is, put them in mind of them, lay them home and heavy upon their consciences, charge them with the guilt of them, and demand satisfaction for them; which is causing them to possess the sins of their youth, or former ones, (^{<1812>}Job 13:26),

let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us; the mercy of God is rich, plenteous, and abundant; many are the acts, and manifold the instances of it; and there is a heart of compassion, and a tenderness expressed in it; and which is free, and comes before the merits of men, goes before them, and is not caused by them; and the phrase denotes the early and timely application of it, the case being desperate, and requiring haste, and the danger such that nothing but mercy could prevent; and indeed it is mercy that prevents both our temporal and eternal ruin. The reason given for this request is,

for we are brought very low; sin brings men into a low estate, and only the grace and mercy of God can raise them up, and that exalts to an high estate; or are become very “weak”^{f1152} and helpless; sin strips men of their strength, leaves them without any, and incapable of helping themselves out of that estate into which it has brought them: or are quite “exhausted”^{f1153} and dried up, no good thing in them, no comfort left them; but are poor, and wretched, and miserable.

Ver. 9. *Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name*, etc.]

Help us out of the troubles in which we are; enable us to bear them with patience, and without murmuring, while it is thy pleasure to continue them; assist us against our powerful enemies, and strengthen us to do our duty; afford us more grace, and fresh supplies of it in our time of need: the arguments enforcing these petitions are, because God is “the God of salvation”, to whom it belongs, of whom it is, and of him only to be expected; he is the sole author and giver of it; and because to help and save is for the glory of his name, which is great in the salvation of his people:

and deliver us; out of the hands of all our enemies, and out of all our afflictions, and out of this low estate in which we are:

and purge away our sins for thy name’s sake; which were the cause of all calamities and distress, and which can only be purged away by the blood and sacrifice of Christ, (~~300B~~ Hebrews 1:3 9:14), the word signifies to “expiate”^{f1154} sin, or atone for it; which was the work and business of Christ our High Priest, who has made reconciliation for sin, finished, made an end of it, and put it away by the oblation of himself, for the sake of which God is propitious; and so the words may be rendered, “be propitious to our sins”^{f1155}; or merciful to our unrighteousnesses, for the sake of Christ the great propitiation; or through the propitiatory sacrifice to be offered up by him; or, in other words, “cover our sins”^{f1156}; which is also the sense of the phrase, that they may be seen no more; pardon and forgive them for Christ’s sake; (see ~~493B~~ Psalm 32:1).

Ver. 10. *Wherefore should the Heathen say, where is their God?* etc.]

They boast of, and put their confidence in, and expect salvation from? he does not appear for them, he is not with them; he has forsaken them, and will not help them; than which nothing can be more afflicting and distressing to the Lord’s people; (see ~~494B~~ Psalm 42:3),

let him be known among the Heathen in our sight; in his holiness and justice, as a God of power, and to whom vengeance belongs; let him be known by his judgments executed upon the Heathen, openly and publicly in our sight, and in the view of the whole world; (see ^{<1016>}Psalm 9:16), so it follows,

by the revenging of the blood of thy servants, which is shed; as in (^{<1018>}Psalm 79:3), which blood God will revenge according to the request of his people, and give them blood to drink by way of retaliation; by which means his vindictive justice will be known, and it will be seen where the God of his people is, that he is with them, and maintains their cause; (see ^{<1019>}Revelation 6:9 16:6,7 19:2). The words may be rendered in connection with the preceding clause thus; “let it be known among the Heathen in our sight, even the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed”; though Kimchi supplies the words as we do, “by a revenging”, etc.

Ver. 11. *Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee*, etc.] Such as were so in a literal or spiritual sense; and the sighs and groans of such are not hid from the Lord; they come up into his ears as did the sighing and groaning of the children of Israel when in Egypt, (^{<1023>}Exodus 2:23,24),

according to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die; not by the Lord, as all men are, but by men; who are under a sentence of condemnation, who are ready to die, being appointed to destruction, (^{<1026>}Proverbs 31:6,8), or are in danger of death, as Jarchi observes; the phrase is used in Talmudic writings; whose lives are exposed to danger, who are killed all the day long, and are accounted as sheep for the slaughter, (^{<1042>}Psalm 44:22), these it is desired the Lord would keep from dying, or cause them to remain in life; or not suffer their lives to be taken away from them, which he was able to do through “the greatness of his power”; though these words according to the accents belong to the preceding clause. The Targum, and so Jarchi, and other Jewish writers, render the words, “loose thou those”, etc. mention being made before of prisoners, or of persons bound.

Ver. 12. *And render unto our neighbours seven fold into their bosom*, ec.] Not seven fold for one, as the Targum paraphrases it, or a seven fold punishment for one sin; but that he would recompense their sins, or punish for them, and take vengeance on them, largely, abundantly, though not beyond measure, or exceeding the rules of justice; (see ^{<1045>}Genesis 4:15 ^{<1068>}Luke 6:38),

the reproach with which they have reproached thee, O Lord; by denying his being, or calling in question his perfections of power, truth, and goodness, to help his people; speaking ill of his providence, despising his word and ordinances, and even reproaching his people in reproaching him, (¹³⁸⁸Psalm 89:50,51), and this is what a righteous recompence is desired for; (see ²¹⁶⁴Lamentations 3:64).

Ver. 13. *So we thy people, and sheep of thy pasture*, etc.] Who were the people of God, not by creation and providence only, as all men are, being his creatures, and provided for by him; but by special choice, and by covenant grace: and “the sheep of his pasture”; whom he feeds as a shepherd does his flock, provides good pasture for them, and leads them into it:

will give thee thanks for ever, we will show forth thy praise to all generations: the above petitions being answered and fulfilled; the work of praise is acceptable unto God, what he is well pleased with, being glorified thereby; and is what becomes his people to do, and which they are formed for, and that for evermore, as long as they live in this world, and to all eternity in another; and who will and do take care that the wonders of divine grace and providence be transmitted and told to their posterity in succeeding ages, that so thanks may be given him, and his praise shown forth in one generation after another.