

*** The Heights Baptist Church * Series: The Psalms ***
*** Topic: A Psalm of Lament * Psalm 79 * 5/25/25 ***

MAIN POINT

God's people should seek His glory at all times, even in the midst of deep hardship.

INTRODUCTION

What are some of the things about The Heights Baptist Church that drew you to this church?

Of course, several answers could be given. Among them might be the Bible based preaching, teaching, time of worship. Also, the various ministries such as the children's ministries, and the caring people.

In today's lesson, we will be looking at Psalm 79, which was written by Asaph, a gifted musician appointed by David to lead worship at the Tabernacle.

UNDERSTANDING

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 79

"A PSALM OF ASAPH"

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 CHRONICLES 6:31-33, 39

What do these verses tell us about who Asaph was?

King David had assigned a number of Levites as worship leaders in the tabernacle, and Asaph was one of these worship leaders.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 CHRONICLES 16:1-14

What do these verses tell us about what Asaph's duties were?

Both Asaph and David were skilled musicians. David appointed Asaph as the chief musician who was to minister before the ark of the LORD in the tabernacle., to extol, thank, and praise the LORD.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 2 CHRONICLES 29:30

What does this verse add to our understanding of Asaph?

Asaph is called a "seer". This is defined in Strong's Bible Dictionary as "a beholder in vision", and also as a "prophet".

A PSALM OF LAMENT

Note to study leader: Psalm 50 and Psalms 73-83 are introduced as Psalms "of Asaph". because his name appears in the introduction at the beginning of those psalms

Note to study leader: In Pastor Randy Hahn's introduction to the Psalms on March 16th, 2025, he listed seven kinds of Psalms. Today we will be looking at Psalm 79, which can be classified as "A Psalm of Lament". Pastor Hahn's sermon notes from March 16th describe these Psalms as "psalms for when life is not so good. We are upset with ourselves, with others, or even with God."

Note to study leader: As part of our preparation for reading this Psalm, we will briefly review the history of Israel. Then, we'll review the account of Jerusalem's fall to Babylon from the book of 2 Kings.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OLD TESTAMENT ISRAEL AFTER THE TIME OF DAVID TO THE RETURN FROM EXILE (Dates are approximate)

- 1000 BC: David is the king of Israel.
- 930 BC: Israel splits into two kingdoms (Israel and Judah) after the death of Solomon.
- 722 BC: The northern kingdom of Israel is conquered and disbursed by Assyria.
- 605 BC: Daniel and many others are taken captive into Babylon.
- 586 BC: The southern kingdom of Judah is conquered by Babylon.
This included Babylon burning Jerusalem and destroying the temple built under Solomon.
- 538 BC: Cyrus the Great issues a decree that Israel can return to Israel.
- 536 BC: Israel is back in the promised land, where the temple will be rebuilt under Ezra, and the walls rebuilt under Nehemiah.

Note to study leader: Based on the description in Psalm 79 of the temple being defiled and Jerusalem being reduced to rubble, it appears this Psalm is a lament about the Babylonian invasion in 586 BC.

Note to study leader: The description in this Psalm is really amazing, especially in light of the fact Asaph lived at the time of David, which was 400 years before the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon. It is such a vivid description that some think this Psalm was written later by someone else, but as we've seen, the Bible describes Asaph as a prophet, and we also have previously looked at Psalm 22, which vividly described the crucifixion of Christ, even though it was written by David a thousand years earlier.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 2 KINGS 25:1-11: THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

What major events are described here about the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem?

After a siege, the walls were broken through. Wicked king Zedekiah was captured, his sons were killed before his eyes, his eyes were put out, and they took him to Babylon. The Babylonians set fire to the temple and broke down Jerusalem's walls. Many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were killed during this invasion, and those who surrendered were taken into exile.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 79:1-5 A LAMENT FOR JERUSALEM

What descriptive terms did Asaph use to communicate the devastation the people of Israel had faced?

Asaph used language that described a gruesome scene in Jerusalem. Not only were many of God's people struck down, but many of them were also left in a state that their bodies could not even be buried properly. This literally happened, as most of the survivors were taken into exile.

How did the destruction of the temple represent more than damage to other buildings in the city?

This is the temple of the LORD, built under Solomon. This was considered the LORD's house, and it was here where Judah worshiped God. It must have been devastating to see it being destroyed while being exiled from the promised land promised to a pagan nation.

What do Asaph's words communicate about how the people viewed this catastrophe?

The promised land has been invaded and the temple defiled. God's chosen people ("your servants"). Are dead and denied a proper burial. They are objects of contempt, scorn, and derision to the surrounding nations. Asaph realizes this is a direct result of God's righteous anger with His people (verse 5).

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 79:6-13 A CRY FOR HELP FROM GOD

Asaph acknowledged that they were suffering because of their own sins against God. What were the key elements of his prayer in these verses?

- He prayed God would relent on His anger against His people and redirect His wrath against their oppressors (verses 6-7).
- He prayed God would forgive their sin and have mercy on them (verses 8-9). It was because of their sin, and the sins of their fathers, that this calamity had come.
- That this difficult time would end quickly (verse 8).
- That God would avenge their blood on their enemies (verses 10-12). The request to pay them back seven times for what they had done. This is a request to pay them back to the fullest measure.

On what basis did Asaph make these requests to God?

- Their oppressors do not acknowledge God (verse 6).
- On the basis of God's mercy (verse 8).
- Since the people are in desperate need (verse 8)
- For God's name's sake, and to glorify His name, rather than having His name be mocked (vs 9-10).
- So that God's people would praise Him forever (verse 13).

None of these reasons are based the people's righteousness. What lessons can we learn from this?

Never forget that the only reason we can come into God's presence is because of God's mercy, through the finished work of Christ on the cross. We aren't better than other people, we are just forgiven.

Our purpose as humans is to glorify God. (Isaiah 43:7, Ephesians 1:11-12). Asaph asked God to restore them for the sake of His glory. We might believe that our greatest interest is asking God to restore us for the sake of our own wellbeing, but the reality is that as God is glorified, our joy in is maximized.

In verse 13, Asaph pledged that the people would proclaim the greatness of God from generation to generation. What lessons can we learn from this?

Asaph proclaimed that the people would worship the Lord faithfully for generations to come. "The next generation matters now." The power of the gospel has the ability to reverse even the most devastating generational sin patterns in our families. The reality is that Israel would not worship God perfectly after their return from exile, and nor have we. But Jesus has come so that we might receive grace and the power of His Spirit to seek God's glory in all of our lives on an ongoing basis. This verse is likely prophetic of the coming millennial reign of Christ, where it will see its ultimate fulfillment (Micah 4:1-5).

APPLICATION

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ 2 SAMUEL 12:13-14 AND 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-2

In Psalm 79, we see that Judah's sin resulted in the pagans attempting to mock God ["Where is their God?" (verse 10)]. 1 Timothy 3:12 tells us that one of the qualifications for an elder in the church is that they live their lives in a manner that is "above reproach". After David sinned with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan said, "By this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme" (NKJV). Are there any areas of my life where I'm not reflecting Christ to non-Christian friends, neighbors, co-workers and acquaintances in a positive manner?

Are there difficulties in my life right now where I need to pour out my heart to God, and call for His help, for His name's sake, and since we are in desperate need?

PRAYER

Thank God that He is worthy of all glory and honor, even in times of great difficulty. Pray for God to deliver us from evil for His name's sake, and because we are in desperate need. Pray that our lives would bring glory to Him. Ask Him for growing faith that realizes true joy comes from glorifying God, rather than from our temporary circumstances. Thank God that the trials we face in this life are temporary, and that one day, we will be with Him in the New Jerusalem, glorifying Him forever.

COMMENTARY

Psalm 79

79:1. Bemoaning the complete devastation of the holy city Jerusalem, Asaph laments its defeat at the hands of a fierce foreign oppressor. The nations have invaded your inheritance, Israel's homeland, the place God uniquely possessed. In so doing, they have defiled your holy temple in Jerusalem, the city where God's glory has been most prominently displayed through the ages. The walls and buildings of the city, which was witness to the glory of God, were reduced... to rubble under this rampage.

79:2-3. In this foreign invasion, many of God's people were killed and their dead bodies fed to the birds, This was a devastating defeat that didn't allow proper burial. Their flesh had been eaten by the wild beasts, and their blood poured out like water. This loss of human life was enormous.

79:4. As a result, Israel suffered embarrassing reproach in the eyes of their surrounding neighbors, the adjoining nations in the region. God's people were objects of scorn and derision to all who saw them. This national disaster was cause for great lamenting for Asaph and the people.

79:5. In response, Asaph pled with God to relent and restore Israel to her former strength and stature. This would require that God, first, release her from her former sins. How long must they endure this painful chastening for their iniquities? Rightly so, God has been angry with them. The jealousy of a holy God has burned like fire against them. Yet Asaph wondered how much longer this would continue.

79:6-7. Asaph petitioned God, pour out your wrath upon these pagan nations just as they have poured out the blood of your people. They had devoured and destroyed Israel, the homeland of Jacob. This was a fervent request for divine vengeance to defeat and crush Israel's enemies.

79:8. Israel had already suffered much because of the sins of the fathers of past generations. So, Asaph prayed that God would not continue to hold these previous sins of Israel's ancestors against them. In desperate need, he pled that God's mercy would come quickly before it was too late and all of God's chosen people were completely annihilated.

79:9. Appealing to God's highest motive, Asaph asked God to answer these requests for restoration based upon the glory of his own name. Help us and deliver us from the oppression of these invading nations. Forgive our sins, he pled, asking for divine forgiveness for the treacherous failings of Israel. The foundation of this request was the glory of God's name, that is, that his greatness should be proclaimed. If God were to deliver Israel and reverse his judgment, God's mercy would vividly display God's glory.

79:10. Burdened for the honor of God's name, Asaph prayed, Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" If God should not forgive them and restore them soon, this would defame God's name and honor. Asaph pled, make known among the nations that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants. That is, reveal yourself to be a God of wrath who visits his enemies.

79:11. Asaph interceded for the survivors of Jerusalem's destruction, for those fellow Jews held captive in Babylonian exile as prisoners... condemned to die: May the groans of the prisoners come before you. He besought God that he would hear their prayers for relief and release them from their oppressors. By the strength of your arm, he asked, preserve them from death.

79:12. Asaph repeated his earlier request for divine vengeance (vv. 6,10). Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the reproach they have hurled at you, O LORD. Their assault upon God's people in Jerusalem had, in reality, been an attack upon God himself. "Seven times" indicates fullest measure.

79:13. Upon God's destruction of Israel's enemies, his people will praise him forever, thus, bringing glory to God. This praise would be so fervent that it would endure forever.