

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The psalmist complains of the cruelty of his enemies and the desolations of Jerusalem, and prays against them, Psalm 79:1-7. He prays for the pardon and restoration of his people, and promises gratitude and obedience, Psalm 79:8-13.

The title, A Psalm of Asaph, must be understood as either applying to a person of the name of Asaph who lived under the captivity; or else to the family of Asaph; or to a band of singers still bearing the name of that Asaph who flourished in the days of David; for most undoubtedly the Psalm was composed during the Babylonish captivity, when the city of Jerusalem lay in heaps, the temple was defiled, and the people were in a state of captivity. David could not be its author. Some think it was composed by Jeremiah; and it is certain that the sixth and seventh verses are exactly the same with Jeremiah 10:25: "Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name: for they have eaten up Jacob, and devoured him, and consumed him; and have made his habitation desolate."

Verse 1

The heathen are come into thine inheritance - Thou didst cast them out, and take thy people in; they have cast us out, and now taken possession of the land that belongs to thee. They have defiled the temple, and reduced Jerusalem to a heap of ruins; and made a general slaughter of thy people.

Verse 2

The dead bodies of thy servants - It appears that in the destruction of Jerusalem the Chaldeans did not bury the bodies of the slain, but left them to be devoured by birds and beasts of prey. This was the grossest inhumanity.

Verse 3

There was none to bury them - The Chaldeans would not; and the Jews who were not slain were carried into captivity.

Verse 4

We are become a reproach to our neighbors - The Idumeans, Philistines, Phoenicians, Ammonites, and Moabites, all gloried in the subjugation of this people; and their insults to them were mixed with blasphemies against God.

Verse 5

How long, Lord? - Wilt thou continue thine anger against us, and suffer us to be insulted, and thyself blasphemed?

Verse 6

Pour out thy wrath - Bad as we are, we are yet less wicked than they. We, it is true, have been unfaithful; but they never knew thy name, and are totally abandoned to idolatry.

Verse 7

Laid waste his dwelling-place - The Chaldee understands this of the temple. This, by way of eminence, was Jacob's place. I have already remarked that these two verses are almost similar to Jeremiah 10:25, which has led many to believe that Jeremiah was the author of this Psalm.

Verse 8

Remember not against us former iniquities - Visit us not for the sins of our forefathers.

Speedily prevent us - Let them go before us, and turn us out of the path of destruction; for there is no help for us but in thee.

We are brought very low - Literally, "We are greatly thinned." Few of us remain.

Verse 9

Purge away our sins - צָרָה (copper), be propitiated, or receive an atonement (פָּדָה פָּדָה פָּדָה (al chattotheynu)) on account of our sins.

Verse 10

Where is their God? - Show where thou art by rising up for our redemption, and the infliction of deserved punishment upon our enemies.

Verse 11

The sighing of the prisoner - The poor captive Israelites in Babylon, who sigh and cry because of their bondage.

Those that are appointed to die - בְּנֵי מוֹתָם (beney themuthah), "sons of death." Either those who were condemned to death because of their crimes, or condemned to be destroyed by their oppressors. Both these senses apply to the Israelites: they were sons of death, i.e., worthy of death because of their sins against God; they were condemned to death or utter destruction, by their Babylonish enemies.

Verse 12

Sevenfold into their bosom - That is, Let them get in this world what they deserve for the cruelties they have inflicted on us. Let them suffer in captivity, who now have us in bondage. Probably this is a prediction.

Verse 13

We thy people - Whom thou hast chosen from among all the people of the earth.

And sheep of thy pasture - Of whom thou thyself art the Shepherd. Let us not be destroyed by those who are thy enemies; and we, in all our generations, will give thanks unto thee for ever.