



**Still God's Sheep Despite It All**  
October 3, 2021 AM

- I. **GENRE: Penitential Lament for the Nation**
  - A. There's no debate that Ps 79 is a lament written for the whole nation after its most staggering defeat—the fall of Jerusalem.
    1. This lament is corporate, not just for the individual. Note the many uses of “we” and “us” (4, 8, 9, 13).
    2. This psalm explicitly confesses sin (9) and implicitly admits it, too (5).
  - B. The psalm ends with a vow of thanks (13), a common feature in laments. The vow anticipates a time when sacrificial worship would be restored.
  
3. **SETTING & USAGE**
  - A. **AUTHOR: An Asaphite**
    1. Pss 73-83 (as well as Ps 50) are all ascribed to “Asaph,” the chief musician of the sanctuary appointed by David. Asaph’s descendants were active when worship was restored in 536 BC. Ezra 3:10.
    2. As with a number of pss in this collection, the term “Asaph” apparently refers to those of his clan. Asaph lived 400 years before the events of this psalm.
  - B. **BACKGROUND: The Fall of Jerusalem.**
    1. Vv. 1-3 describe the destruction of Jerusalem and defiling of the Temple.
    2. While the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem 3 times over a 20-year period beginning in 605 BC, this psalm probably focuses on the ultimate overthrow on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Ab, 586 B.C. See 2 Kings 24-25.

<b>PSALM 79</b> <small>© M. Scott Bashor 2021</small>				
<b>HEADINGS</b>	<b>PURPOSE:</b> In the aftermath of Babylon's overthrow of Jerusalem's, this psalm laments the holy city's destruction, pleading for God's forgiveness & restoration, and for judgment on her godless enemies.			
<b>Psalm Type</b> Psalm for Instruments  <b>Author</b> Asaph (or an Asaphite)	<b>OPENING LAMENT:</b> <b>THE FALL OF JERUSALEM</b> vv. 1-4  <b>Opening Address to "God"</b> v. 1a  <b>Recounting the Aftermath of the Invasion</b> v. 1a-3  The Sacred City Destroyed v. 1abc  The Many Casualties Unburied vv. 2-3  <b>Admitting the Disgrace of Defeat</b> v. 4	<b>PETITIONARY PRAYERS:</b> <b>JUDGMENT ON ENEMIES AND FORGIVENESS FOR SINS</b> vv. 5-12		
	<b>Prayers for Judgment on the Invaders</b> vv. 5-7  Opening Lament: Too Much Divine Anger v. 5  Imprecatory Prayer to Redirect Divine Wrath vv. 6-7  <i>The Nations are Willfully Ignorant of God</i> v. 6  <i>The Nations Singfully Destroyed God's People</i> v. 7	<b>Prayers for Forgiveness of Israel's Sins</b> vv. 8-9  Prayer for Release from Previous Sins v. 8a  Plea for Divine Compassion in Their Lowly Estate v. 8bc  Plea for Help & Forgiveness for the Sake of God's Reputation v. 9a	<b>Prayers for Judgment on the Invaders</b> vv. 10-12  Opening Lament: Too Much International Shame v. 10a  Imprecatory Prayer for Divine Vengeance v. 10b-12  <i>Plea for Vengeance of Those Slain</i> v. 10b  <i>Plea to Help Imprisoned Survivors</i> v. 11  <i>Plea to Return Complete Judgment on the Godless Enemies</i> v. 12	<b>CLOSING VOW:</b> <b>A PLEDGE OF THANKS</b> v. 13  <b>Confession of Trust in God as Shepherd</b> v. 13a  <b>Pledge to Offer Endless Thanks for Deliverance</b> v. 13b

**Type:** Penitential Lament for the Nation  
**Author:** A 6<sup>th</sup> century BC "Asaph" or an Asaphite  
**Date:** After the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

- Ps 74 was also written in the aftermath of this event. Ps 74 focuses more on the Temple's desecration while Ps 79 focuses more on the affect of the people of Jerusalem.

### C. PLACEMENT

- Part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> book of the Pss (73-89), most of which are not by David.
- Pss 77-90 all make references to shepherding (77:20; 78:70; 79:13; 80:1).
- Ps 78 closes by mentioning David's preparations to build the temple in Zion (78:67-70) while Ps 79 opens by mourning the destruction of Zion and the Temple.
- M. Wilcock, "In [Ps] 78 David has come to the throne, and his rule as shepherd king promises an end to centuries of folly & evil. In [Ps] 79 four more centuries have gone by, and the Davidic monarchy has itself come to an end, mired in the selfsame folly & evil it was supposed to remedy."

### III. NOTES:

- Style:** The poem shifts unpredictably between longer verses (1, 8, 10, 13) and shorter verses (2-7, 9, 10-11). This artistic imbalance reflects the emotional imbalance of the Jerusalemites who have survived the invasion.
- Pronouns:** The poem shifts between talking about "they/them" (as in 1-3) before focusing on "us/we" (as in 4). But the crisis is not just about *us versus them*, but also about "*You versus us*" (5). God was sovereignly behind the invasion of the evil Babylonians.
- Scriptures:** Psalm 79 is loaded with phrases found in other parts of the OT. In many cases this shows the psalmists absorption of Scripture.
  - v. 1, see Jer 26:18; Mic 3:12
  - v. 4, see Ps 44:14
  - v. 5, see Pss 6:3; 13:1; 89:46
  - vv. 6-7, see Jer. 10:25 (direct quotation)

- v. 8, see Pss 116:6; 142:6
- v. 9, see Pss 23:3; 25:11; 31:3; 54:1; 106:8; 109:21; 143:11
- v. 10, see Pss 115:2; 42:3; Joel 2:17
- v. 11, see Ps 102:20; 1 Sam. 26:16
- v. 12, see Pss 89:51-52; 44:13; Gen. 4:24; Lev. 26:18

### D. Awkwardness:

- We are perhaps bothered by the psalmist's bold cries and his recounting of events that God clearly knew about already.
- But the purposes of prayer are not only about "getting things done," but to commune and relate to God by unburdening our hearts.

### IV. STRUCTURE: Several overlapping, asymmetrical movements.

- Many outlines have been proposed. Discerning the psalm's structure is difficult because of the emotional and repetitive nature of the prayer.
  - Vv. 1-4 are laments only while vv. 5-12 are mostly requests.
  - Vv. 5 and 10 ask questions, lamenting why things must be the way they are. Each question begins a set of prayers asking for judgment.
  - V. 13 stands separate from all else as a concluding vow of thanks.
- The outline proposed here sees 5 segments. Segments 2-4 contain all the requests in the poem and thus can be linked together.
  - Opening Lament, 1-4
  - Prayers for Judgment, 5-7
  - Prayers for Forgiveness, 8-9
  - Prayers for Judgment, 10-12
  - Promise of a Thank Offering, 13