

PSALM 78 AND 79

3. Why is Saul and Solomon omitted?
4. How is "patriotic sentiment" appealed to? For what purpose?
5. Ephraim is both rebuked and complimented at the same time—explain.
6. This psalm teaches "that the action of God is conditioned on the conduct of men; that the divine promises were not, and are not, inalienable gifts to either Israel or the church, but that His blessings are granted to those who willingly cooperate with God in His moral government of the world". (Scroggie) Give examples of this truth and discuss.
7. Notice the words describing Israel's reaction to God's law: (1) stubborn, (2) rebellious, (3) forgetful, (4) not steadfast, (5) rebelled, (6) tempted, (7) spoke against. Give the seven responses of God to these seven attitudes of Israel.
8. Discuss this provocative thought: "There is an immorality of forgetfulness".

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DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Invasion, Desecration, Demolition, Massacre and Derision call forth Lamentation, Expostulation, Petition and Pleading; and the Hope of Deliverance evokes a Promise of Perpetual Praise.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-4, Lamentation; Stanza II., vers. 5-8, Expostulation and Petition; Stanza III., vers. 9-12, Pleading; Stanza IV., ver. 13, Promise of Perpetual Praise.

(Lm.) Psalm—By Asaph.

- 1 O God! nations¹ have entered into thine inheritance, have made unclean thy holy temple;² have made Jerusalem heaps of ruins:³
- 2 have given the dead bodies of thy servants⁴ as food to the bird of the heavens,

1. Or: "Gentiles."

2. Cp. 74:4-8, Lam. 1:10.

3. Mi. 3:12, Jer. 26:18.

4. Deu. 28:26, Jer. 7:33, 16:4, 19:7, 34:20.

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- the flesh of thy men of kindness⁵ to the wild beast of the earth;
- 3 have poured out their blood like water round about Jerusalem with none to bury.⁶
 - 4 We have become a reproach to our neighbors, a mockery and derision to them who are round about us.⁷
 - 5 How long Jehovah wilt thou be angry utterly? how long shall thy jealousy burn like fire?
 - 6 Pour out thy wrath on the nations that have not known thee, and on the kingdoms which on thy name have not called;⁸
 - 7 For they have⁹ devoured Jacob, and his homestead¹⁰ have laid waste.
 - 8 Do not remember against us the iniquity of former times!¹¹ haste thee! let thine acts of compassion come to meet us; for we have been brought very low.
 - 9 Help us O God of our salvation, on account of the honour¹² of thy name and rescue us and put a propitiatory covering over¹³ our sins, for the sake of thy name.
 - 10 Why should the nations¹⁴ say—"Where is their God?" let the avenging of the blood of thy servants which hath been poured out be made known among the nations before our eyes.¹⁵
 - 11 Let the groaning of the prisoner come in before thee,

5. Heb. *hasidim*. "In the age of the Macabees (B.C. 168 and following years) the term was adopted as the title of the patriotic party in Israel, who were faithful to the national religion, and resisted the attempts that were made to overthrow it—see 1 Macc. 2:12, 7:13, 2 Macc. 14:6 (where '*Hasidaeans*' is the Heb. *hasidim*, the plural of this word. It is possible that 'godly' is already used in this sense in Ps. 149:1, 5, 9, if not in 116:18 as well"—Dr.

6. Jer. 14:16, 16:4.

7. Ps. 44:13, 137:7.

8. Cp. Jer. 10:25.

9. M.T. ml.: "he hath." But some cod. (w. Aram., Sep., Syr., Vul.): "they have." Cp. Jer. 10:25—Gn.

10. So Dr.; "cp. Jer. 10:25."

11. So O.G. But Dr.: "(our) forefathers."

12. Or: "glory."

13. (Simply) "cover"—Per.; "expiate"—Del.; "pardon"—Carter; "atone for"—Leeser; "purge away"—Kp.; "cancel"—Dr., cp. 65:3 (note).

14. Or: "the Gentiles," cp. ver. 1.

15. Deu. 32:43.

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according to the greatness of thine arm set thou free¹⁶ the sons of death.¹⁷

- 12 And return to our neighbors—sevenfold into their bosom—their reproach wherewith they have reproached thee
Sovereign Lord!
- 13 So we, thy people and the flock of thy shepherding¹⁸ will give thanks¹⁹ unto thee to the ages,
to generation after generation will tell of thy praise.

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

(CMm.) For "Lilies of Testimony" = the Feast of Weeks.

PARAPHRASE

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O God, Your land has been conquered by the heathen nations. Your Temple is defiled and Jerusalem is a heap of ruins.

2 The bodies of Your people lie exposed—food for birds and animals.

3 The enemy has butchered the entire population of Jerusalem; blood has flowed like water; no one is left even to bury them.

4 The nations all around us scoff. They heap contempt on us.

5 O Jehovah, how long will You be angry with us? Forever? Will Your jealousy burn till every hope is gone?

6 Pour out Your wrath upon the godless nations, not on us! And on kingdoms that refuse to pray, that will not call upon Your name!

7 For they have destroyed Your people Israel, invading every home.

8 Oh, do not hold us guilty for our former sins! Let Your tenderhearted mercies meet our needs, for we are brought low to the dust.

9 Help us, God of our salvation! Help us for the honor of Your name! Oh, save us and forgive our sins.

10 Why should the heathen nations be allowed to scoff,

16. So it shd. be (w. Aram., Syr.). Cp. 105:20, 146:7.—Gn. M.T.: "leave remaining." "Reprieve"—Dr.

17. Cp. 102:20 (2 Sam. 12:5).

18. As in 74:1; cp. 77:20, 78:52, 70. "The favourite Asaphic way of looking at Israel as a flock"—Del.

19. Cp. 6:5 n.

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"Where is their God?" Publicly avenge this slaughter of Your people!

11 Listen to the sighing of the prisoners and those condemned to die. Demonstrate the greatness of Your power by saving them.

12 O Lord, take sevenfold vengeance on these nations scorning You.

13 Then we Your people the sheep of Your pasture, will thank You forever and forever, praising Your greatness from generation to generation.

EXPOSITION

If this psalm now appears as it was first composed, its date must be assigned to the time of the Maccabees; since the time of the Chaldean invasion under Nebuchadnezzar does not suit all its leading features, whereas the persecutions and profanations of Antiochus Epiphanes, against which the Maccabean resistance was directed, serve to supply in counterpart the finishing-touches to this picture of Israel's troubles. Such a late time of origin does, indeed, leave little space for translation into the Septuagint; but, as the date usually assigned to the execution of this Greek Bible does not necessarily apply to all the sacred books, and some of them, including the Psalms, may well have been added at a somewhat later time, candour must admit the practical possibility of a Maccabean origin of this psalm consistently with its appearance, in the Septuagint where it now stands, in close conformity with its Hebrew original. The alternative theory—that it was originally composed soon after the Chaldean invasion and subsequently freely adapted to the later time—is not wildly improbable, as the known free action of the Sopherim on the Sacred Text sufficiently shews; but, on the other hand, the unity and symmetry of the psalm as we have it, make strongly for one spirit working at one time in its production. In either case, an extract or two from the first book of Maccabees will be acceptable to the general reader. "And there came forth out of [‘them the servants of Alexander the Great, who bare rule in his place’] a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of Antiochus the king, who had been a hostage in Rome, and he reigned in the hundred and thirty and seventh year of the kingdom of [the Greeks, *circa* B.C. 176] . . . And Antiochus, after that he had smitten Egypt, returned in the hundred and forty and third year [*circa* B.C. 170] and went up against Israel and Jerusalem with a great

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multitude, and entered presumptuously into the sanctuary, and took the golden altar, and the candlestick of the light, and all that pertained thereto, and the table of the shew-bread, and the cups to pour withal, and the bowls, and the golden censers, and the veil, and the crowns, and the adorning of gold which was on the face of the temple, and he scaled it all off. And he took the silver and the gold and the precious vessels; and he took the hidden treasures which he found. And when he had taken all, he went away into his own land, and he made a great slaughter and spake very presumptuously . . . And the land was moved for the inhabitants thereof, and all the house of Jacob was clothed with shame . . . And after two full years the king sent a chief collector of tribute unto the cities of Judah, and he came unto Jerusalem with a great multitude. And he spake words of peace unto them in subtilty, and they gave him credence; and he fell upon the city suddenly, and smote it very sore, and destroyed much people out of Israel. And he took the spoils of the city, and set it on fire, and pulled down the houses thereof and the walls thereof on every side . . . And they shed innocent blood on every side of the sanctuary, and defiled the sanctuary. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem fled because of them . . . And on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the hundred and forty and fifth year [circa B.C. 168], they builded an abomination of desolation upon the altar, and in the cities of Judah on every side they builded idol altars. And at the doors of the houses and in the streets they burnt incense. And they rent in pieces the books of the law which they found, and set them on fire . . . On the five and twentieth day of the month they sacrificed on the idol altar, which was upon the altar of God" (1 Mac. 1:10, 20-24, 29-31, 37, 38, 54-56) . . . "And Jerusalem was without inhabitant as a wilderness, there was none of her offspring that went in or went out; and the sanctuary was trodden down, and the sons of strangers were in the citadel, the Gentiles lodged therein; and joy was taken away from Jacob, and the pipe and the harp ceased" (3:45).

The structure of the psalm, according to Del., followed above, is interesting; as revealing three stanzas of nine lines each, closed by a stimple tristich.

The course of thought running through the whole is natural and easy to follow.

The first stanza is filled with lamentation, which takes the obvious course of describing, step by step, Israel's deep humilia-

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tion; the invasion of the *land*, the defiling of the *temple*, the demolition of *city*, the massacre of *inhabitants*—especially of the *godly*, the contemptuous treatment of the *slain*, the disregard of the heavy responsibility of shedding *blood*. This last might have seemed the fitting climax; but, as in Ps. 40 there was to be added "Many shall see, &c." though in a totally different strain to that found here; so here there fell to be added a couplet describing the effect of Jerusalem's humiliation upon the onlooking neighbouring nationalities, as to the renewed reference to whom in ver. 12, Delitzsch well says: "That the prayer comes back in ver. 12 to the neighboring peoples, is explained by the fact that these, seeing they might the soonest have attained to the knowledge of the God of Israel as the one true and living God, bear the greatest guilt on account of their reviling of Him."

Naturally, a stanza follows, taken up with expostulation (*How long?* ver. 5), and petitions (*Pour out—Do not remember—Haste thee*, vers. 6-8), sustained, no doubt, by *reasons*, expressed and implied; among which may be singled out the prayer against heathen nations, for the purpose of interposing the caution to be careful not to exaggerate these imprecations, seeing that the simplicity of poetically expressed Eastern thought clearly allows us to understand *positives* as amounting to *comparatives*: "If thy wrath must be outpoured, let it be rather on the nations," &c.

But these reasoned petitions, are, in the third stanza, followed by yet more urgent pleadings; which may usefully remind us how much of this element is to be found in the prayers of the faithful throughout the Holy Scriptures; as witness, especially, the prayers of Abraham (Gen. 18), (Daniel 9) and the writer of Ps. 119; and though, at first sight, it might appear to have been discountenanced by our Lord (Mt. 6:7-13), yet both his own teaching (Lu. 11:8, 18:1) and example (Jn. 17, Mk. 14:22-39) caution us to bear in mind that all repetition need not be "vain." Indeed it may safely be said: That he who has not learned to plead in prayer, has not yet learned to pray at all—especially by way of intercession (1 Tim. 2:1-8). It will not be lost labour, if the devout reader look through this third stanza afresh, in order to note in how many directions there is an outgoing of sympathy to his suffering brethren, on the part of the psalmist, prompting to a holy boldness in drawing near to his God.

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you accept the late date for the composition of this psalm—i.e., during the period of the Maccabees?
2. We *must* associate this psalm with a desecration and destruction of the Temple—which one? Discuss the reasons for your choice.
3. War has not changed. We could use the description given here to describe a thousand wars. Who has won by wars?
4. The writer of the psalm feels that jealousy is the cause for the calamity. Discuss.
5. Are we to assume that God acts on nations—tribes and families as well as individuals? i.e. the sins of nations—tribes and families accumulate over a period of time until God brings punishment? If not this, what?
6. The personal pronoun appears very prominently: (a) *your* land, (b) *your* Temple, (c) *your* people, (d) *your* name—why? Did it help?
7. There is both strength and weakness in the promises of the afflicted. Discuss.

PSALM 80

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Prayer for the Flock and Vine of Israel.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, By Three Significant Titles, Jehovah is besought to interpose for Salvation, before Three Significantly Selected Tribes. Stanza II., vers. 4-7, Remonstrance with God for the length of His Manifestation of Displeasure. Stanza III., vers. 8-11, The Vine—Transplanted out of Egypt and Prosperous in Canaan. Stanza IV., vers. 12-15, The Vine—Endangered and Damaged: Prayer that it be Inspected and Protected. Stanza V., vers. 16-18, In order that the Destruction of the Vine may be Averted, Representation and Restoration are Besought.

(Lm.) By Asaph—Psalm.

- 1 Shepherd of Israel oh give ear!
leader of Joseph as a flock,
throned on the cherubim oh shine forth!