

LESSON 10

PSALMS 79—81

PSALM 79: IN THE MIDST OF RUBBLE

The writer of this psalm is undoubtedly looking at the worst tragedy he has ever known. In his heart, he can say with Job, “For what I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me” (Job 3:25). Before him, in a mangled mess of rubble and ruins, is everything that he holds dear. His spirit is bursting with anguish. The emotions of grief, hopelessness, puzzlement, and frustration clamor for dominance. Driven by an overwhelming desire that has filled his mind, he has found a quiet place and has claimed for himself an uninterrupted period of time with God. In his prayer, he empties before God his heartbreak, his bewildering questions, and his deepest longings.

He has been brought to this low level of sorrow by a great national catastrophe, probably the destruction of Jerusalem in 586(7) B.C. He was apparently an eyewitness to the disaster. As a survivor, he has been left in the city. His friends, relatives and countrymen have been deported to Babylon (like the singers of Ps. 137). His words are almost a twin to Psalm 74, in which another writer expresses his deep personal and national grief over this calamity.

In this lament, God is asked to pardon His people, to intervene in their behalf, and to heal their city and land. The psalmist is not in despair, but he is overwhelmed with his trial. He has not withdrawn into atheism; he has, however, been plunged by his experience into confusion. He cannot understand why God would allow His city and His temple to be destroyed. He has not lost his faith, but he is greatly troubled by what he sees.

1. Where are the definitive characteristics of this lament psalm?
2. What does the speaker ask of God?
3. Why is it important to know when this psalm was written?
4. How can we find God’s “tender mercies” (v. 8) during our troubles?

PSALM 80:
“RESTORE US, LORD!”

Closely connected with the psalm that has preceded it, this prayer is a supplication for deliverance. It appears to be a prayer for the northern kingdom and may have been prayed during the captivity that began in 721(2) B.C. The common designations for the southern kingdom—such as Judah, Jerusalem, and Zion—are not found within it. However, it is possible that someone in southern Israel, a prophetic soul whose heart bled for the reuniting of the two kingdoms under God’s approval, wrote it and prayed it about the northern kingdom.

A refrain runs throughout the psalm, occurring four times with slight variations, dividing it into four stanzas of unequal length. Verses 3, 7, 14, and 19 are like a mini chorus that precedes or follows each group of verses. The key word in these verses might be translated either “restore us,” “turn us,” or “bring us back [from captivity].” An exception appears in verse 14, where a different verb form calls upon God Himself to turn. The same verbal root is used in the word “restored” of 23:3 and the word “converted” of 51:13.

5. What is the psalmist requesting when he asks for God’s face to shine on His people again?
6. How do we ask God to restore us today?
7. What does the psalmist say God has done for Israel before?
8. Describe the imagery used by this writer.
9. What significance do these images have?

PSALM 81:
WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

This touching psalm revolves around one of the feasts of Israel. Verse 3 may indicate that it was used on the occasion of one of the three annual religious festivals in Israel, perhaps the Feast of Tabernacles. The mention in verse 5 of Joseph, whose two sons became heads of northern tribes, may point to north Israel as the place of writing, and to a time of writing that would be during the period when the kingdom of Israel had become a separate kingdom from Judah (931–722 B.C.).

The psalm can be divided into two parts, with the major break coming in verse 5. The first part is made up of exhortations to praise God, while the second part begins with the “I” at the end of verse 5. The second part pictures God as the

speaker. God's prophetic revelation is given in the first person, revealing that He is the spokesman; and the vehicle of His delivery is the second portion, the final eleven verses, of the psalm.

10. In which verse does the psalm change tone?
11. What blessings had God already given His people?
12. Are there any other blessings God would have given?
13. What is thought to be the intent of this psalm?
14. What can we do to be blessed by God?