

END OF PSALM 79

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.*
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 79

A prayer for the church in tribulation, commemorating God's former favors.

1. Give ear, O thou that rulest Israel: thou that leadest Joseph like a sheep. Thou that sittest upon the Cherubim, shine forth
2. Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasses. Stir up thy might, and come to save us.
3. Convert us, O God: and show us thy face, and we shall be saved.
4. O Lord God of Hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy servant?
5. How long wilt thou feed us with the bread of tears: and give us for our drink tears in measure?
6. Thou hast made us to be a contradiction to our neighbors: and our enemies have scoffed at us.
7. O God of Hosts, convert us: and show thy face, and we shall be saved.
8. Thou hast brought a vineyard out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the Gentiles, and planted it.
9. Thou wast the guide of its journey in its sight: thou planted the roots thereof, and it filled the land.
10. The shadow of it covered the hills: and the branches thereof the cedars of God.
11. It stretched forth its branches unto the sea, and its boughs unto the river.
12. Why hast thou broken down the hedge thereof: so that all they who pass by the way do pluck it?

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13. The boar out of the wood hath laid it waste: and a singular wild beast hath devoured it.
14. Turn again, O God of Hosts; look down from heaven, and see, and visit this vineyard.
15. And perfect the same which thy right hand hath planted: and upon the son of man whom thou hast confirmed for thyself.
16. Things set on fire and dug down shall perish at the rebuke of thy countenance.
17. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand; and upon the son of man whom thou hast confirmed for thyself.
18. And we depart not from thee, thou shalt quicken us: and we will call upon thy name.
19. O Lord God of Hosts, convert us: and show thy face and we shall be saved.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 79

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "Give ear, O thou that rulest Israel; thou that leadest Joseph like a sheep. Thou that sittest upon the Cherubim, shine forth." The Prophet commences this Psalm with a prayer to God, that he may hear him, in cast a favorable eye on his people. "Give ear, O thou that rulest Israel; O God, who art the ruler and the guide of the people of Israel, hear the prayer I pour forth for your own people. He then repeats the first part of the prayer, leaving the second part to be understood; "thou that leadest Joseph like a sheet;" O God, who leadest the descendants of Joseph as shepherd would his flock, hear the prayer which I pour forth for your people, who are called Israel and Joseph. The reason for his mentioning Israel and Joseph is, that the name Israel comprehended all the tribes, and the name Joseph does the same. We can easily understand why Israel includes all the tribes, for they will all descended from Israel; and the reason why Joseph also comprehends all the tribes is, because he fed the whole of them, and ruled over them in Egypt, and his two sons, Ephraim and Manasses, became the heads of two distinct tribes, the only instance of the like. Each of the sons of Israel became the head of a separate tribe, with the exception of Joseph, who got the privilege of founding two tribes; and, upon the death of Solomon, when his kingdom was divided into the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Juda, the first who reigned as king over the ten tribes of Israel was Jeroboam, of the tribe of Ephraim, the son of Joseph. "Thou that sittest upon the Cherubim shine forth." Having asked God to hear the prayers of his people favorably, he now begs that he may turn his eyes on them, and regard them with a look of complacency. God is said to look from one when he is pleased with him, and to turn away his eyes, or to cover them with a cloud, when he is displeased. "Thou that sittest upon the Cherubin;" O God, who sittest in heaven, above the angels of the first rank, called Cherubim, and

17. "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand; and upon the Son of Man whom thou hast confirmed for thyself." Certain of the coming of the Messiah, he prays all manner of blessings on him. "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand;" may your hand be extended to protect at all times, and in all places, the man of your right hand, the man who was formed by your right hand alone, without any cooperation on the part of man; for that Christ was so formed is certain, as we read in Luke 1, "the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee;" and the same Christ was placed over the Church, not by the choice of man, but by the decree of God. "But I am appointed king by him over Sion his holy mountain."

18. "And we depart not from thee, thou shalt quicken us; and we will call upon thy name." While Christ is our ruler, "we depart not from thee;" because Christ's kingdom will last forever, and the gates of hell will not prevail against his Church. "Thou shalt quicken us" with the life of grace here on earth, and of glory hereafter in heaven; "and we will call upon thy name;" offering our tribute of invocation, praise, and thanks forever.

19. "O Lord God of Hosts, convert us: and show thy face, and we shall be saved." See verse seven.

14. "Turn again, O God of Hosts; look down from heaven, and see, and visit this vineyard." He now, by way of a prayer, foretells the coming of Christ, who made up the breaches in the hedge, and gave the vineyard to be managed by other hands, as we read in Matthew 21, "he will bring those evil men to an evil end, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen;" which he and once explains more clearly in the following verses, where he says, "the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and shall be given to a nation, bringing forth the fruits thereof." For the Church of the Old Testament, which was at one time God's vineyard, was never thoroughly destroyed, but it was reformed. The apostles, the first fruits of the Church, belonged to Israel, and so did the many thousands who were converted by the preaching of Peter; and St. Paul, Romans 11, clearly proves the Gentiles to be "the branches ingrafted into the good olive tree;" that is, the Church originally formed of the Jews. He therefore says, "God of hosts," who hast many thousands of angels, nay, even all created things, serving thee, and art, therefore, all-powerful, "turn again," in your mercy, to your vineyard, your people, for whom you have so long entertained a just and deserved hatred; "look down from heaven and see;" when you shall have retired far from your vineyard, deign, at least, to look down from your throne in heaven, "and see" how disfigured your vineyard has been by the wild boar; "and visit this vineyard;" come and make a personal inspection of this vineyard. When he did so, Zachariah said, "he hath visited and wrought the redemption of his people;" and Christ himself, when he wept over Jerusalem, and foretold its destruction, attributed it to, "because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation."

15. "And perfect the same which thy right hand hath planted in upon the Son of Man whom thou hast confirmed for thyself." He now foretells the coming of the Messiah more clearly. "And perfect the same which thy right hand hath planted." Finish the work you began. Reform the Church of the Old Testament, now nearly defunct, and give a better one in its stead; as it was you that originally founded it, and planted it as a vineyard, not the perish, but to yield fruit; "and upon the Son of man;" look down also upon the Son of Man, who is thy Son also, the Messiah, "whom thou hast confirmed for thyself," as the principal husbandman in charge of your vineyard, as the head and guide of your Church. All agree that this passage refers literally to Christ, because, after the Babylonian captivity, the Jewish people never recovered their former position, and, therefore, the vineyard was never made perfect, as regards them; and it was only under Christ, as its savior and its Lord, that it could have been said to have been made perfect.

16. "Things set on fire and dug down shall perish at the rebuke of thy countenance." He now explains the effects likely to follow from the coming of the Messiah, namely, that the vineyard of the Lord, though burned down and rooted up, shall flourish and grow up again; for one rebuke from him will stop the devastation of the vineyard; just as when he rebuked the storm there was an immediate calm; and, when he commanded death and disease, they immediately disappeared, and were succeeded by life and health.

as a type thereof you have in your sanctuary, the mercy seat resting on the images of the Cherubim for your throne, and where the Ark is, as it were, the footstool of your feet, attend to us.

2. "Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasses. Stir up thy might, and come to save us." Show thy face and look with pity on us, the people of Israel. Why the three tribes just named should stand for the whole people of Israel, the reason seems to be that which we have assigned in the preceding verse, for Ephraim and Manassas, to whom he unites Benjamin here, because he was uterine brother to Joseph; and when the tribes were marshaled in array of battle Ephraim, Manassas, and Benjamin always went together. The Prophet had also, possibly, in view the fact of these three tribes being in possession of the principal parts of the land of promise. Ephraim held Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel; Benjamin had Jerusalem, the capital of the kingdom of Juda; and Manassas had the country beyond the Jordan. The reason for his placing Benjamin between the brothers, seems to be for distinction sake, he having been their uncle. "Stir up thy might and come to save us." He tells now, more plainly, why he asked God to direct his care and his eyes towards them, that he may save them. "Stir up thy might," your power which looks as if it were buried, when you so allowed us to be harassed by our unjust persecutors; "come," therefore, with your most powerful help "to save us."

3. "Convert us, O God: and show us thy face, and we shall be saved." The reason why God often does not look upon us is, because we turn away from him, and turn to creatures; but as we cannot turn to him without his aid, the Prophet asks for both for God's people. "Convert us, O God," inspire us with your love, that we may turn away from the things of this world, and turn back to you: "and show us thy face; turn your face to us, at the same time, that thus united to you by the bonds of holy charity, "we will be saved" from all the enemies that assail us, for when you turn your face away, we languish and perish; when you look upon us, we revive and recover.

4. "O Lord God of Hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy servant?" The Prophet, seeing that God's anger towards his sinning people was very great, and that he was not likely to be heard, renews his prayer with greater force, saying, Lord God of armies, who art terrible, (for such is the force of the Hebrew,) how long will you be angry, even with me who am praying to you.

5. "How long wilt thou feed us with the bread of tears: and give us for our drink tears in measure?" How long will you leave us in such affliction, that we can do nothing but shed tears in abundance, which will thus seem to be the only meat and drink we have to support us?

6. "Thou hast made us to be a contradiction to our neighbors: and our enemies have scoffed at us." He tells why they are overwhelmed with so much grief, and shed so many tears, because they are beset and trampled on by all their neighbors, and scoffed at and insulted was so subdued. "Thou hast made us to be a contradiction to our neighbors;" when you took your protection from us, you encouraged all our neighbors to rise up against us and to "contradict us," not only by words of mouth, but by open assaults and violence. "And our enemies have scoffed at us;" they conquered and subdued us, and then insulted and scoffed at us.

7. "O God of Hosts, convert us: and show thy face and we shall be saved." This verse is the same as the third, and it is repeated again in the end of the Psalm, with this difference, that we have the words "of hosts;" that is, of armies here, and we have "Lord God," in the last verse, instead of "God" here. Such repetition indicates the principal objective of the Psalm. And as nothing more valuable can be asked of God than "to turn us to him, and turn himself to us," such grace is the source of all good. The addition of one word in the first, and two in the second repetition, expresses the increase and the earnestness of his prayer as he advances in it.

8. "Thou hast brought a vineyard out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the Gentiles, and planted it." In order to succeed in his prayers, he falls back upon God's favors to the Jews, whom he had delivered from the bondage of Egypt, and introduced into the lands of the Chanaanians, making use of the figure of the wine, as was afterwards adopted by Isaias and Ezekiel, and even by the Savior himself. The application is most appropriate, for many reasons; but mainly because the vine will either produce fine and well flavored fruit, and then it is most valued by its owner, and tended with the greatest care, or it will be barren and unproductive, in which case it will be thrown into the fire. Such will be the case with everyone of us; if we shall have the fruit of good works to produce, we shall inherit the kingdom of heaven, if we lack them we shall be sent into hellfire. "Thou hast brought a vineyard out of Egypt;" you brought your people like a vine from the barren land of Egypt, and planted them in the rich land of Palestine. And as that beautiful land was previously occupied by wild and useless vines, "you cast them out," and "planted" your own vine in their stead.

9. "Thou wast the guide of its journey in its sight: thou planted the roots thereof, and it filled the land." That we may understand clearly what the Prophet says here about this vine, meaning man, he uses indiscriminately plain and figurative language. "Thou wast the guide of its journey in its sight;" when you were bringing that vine of yours from Egypt to Palestine, and the vine, as being endowed with reason, was on its journey, you were its guide, preceding it by day as a pillar of cloud, and by night as a pillar of fire. God was, in a moral sense also, the guide of his vineyard of his people on their journey to the land of promise, when he gave them the law. "Thou planted the roots thereof, and tilled the land;" you establish your people and the land of promise, and so propagated them, that the whole country became replete with inhabitants.

10. "The shadow of it covered the hills: and the branches thereof the cedars of God."

11. "It stretched forth its branches unto the sea, and its boughs unto the river." He now describes the increase and propagation of the people of Israel as to length and breath; that is, as to the glory and numbers, mixing up much high flown language with his metaphors. "The shadow of it covered the hills." This vine grew to such an enormous height, that it rose above the mountains and overshadowed them, nay, even to such a height did it rise, that its branches rose higher than the cedars of Libanus, the highest trees in the world, and standing on one of its highest mountains. Such height was typical of the power and glory of the kingdom of Israel, that it exceeded the power and glory of many kingdoms. For Israel subdued the Amorrhians, in the time of Moses, and under Joshua they conquered thirty-one kings, and under David they subdued the Philistines, the Idumeans, and the Moabites. He now describes the propagation of the kingdom, saying, "it stretched forth its branches unto the sea, and its boughs unto the river." Israel was so extended and propagated as to fill the land of promise, from the west to the Mediterranean, and from the east to the great river Euphrates; and thus was God's promise, Deuteronomy 11, fulfilled. "From the great river Euphrates, unto the western sea, shall be your borders."

12. "Why hast thou broken down the hedge thereof: so that all they who pass by the way do pluck it?" Having described the greatness and the excellence of the Jewish people, under the figure of a vine, helping up the same idea, he now deplores the miserable state of the people, by reason of God's anger. "Why hast thou broken down the fence thereof?" Why have you withdrawn your protection, which was like a fence round about it? "So that all they who pass by the way do pluck it?" Why do you allow all the enemies of your people to conquer her and plunder her, as people do a vineyard when the fences are all leveled? More than once were the Israelites persecuted and plundered by the Philistines, and the Medianites, when God, provoked by their sins, was pleased to abandon them.

13. "The boar out of the wood hath laid it waste: and a singular wild beast hath devoured it." Following up the metaphor of the vine, he now deplores, in particular, the severe capacity inflicted on them by the kings of the Assyrians, whether it was Salmanasar, who carried away ten whole tribes captives, or Nabuchodonosor, who carried off the remaining two tribes captives, and dethroned the king; and this latter king he calls "the boar out of the wood," and "a singular wild beast," who not only leveled the fences, but thoroughly rooted out the vine.