

Joel 2:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?

Analysis

"Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?" This verse describes priestly intercession at a specific location—between the porch (temple entrance) and the altar (where sacrifices were offered), the most sacred space in the temple complex (2 Chronicles 4:9, Matthew 23:35). Priests standing there functioned as mediators between God and people. Their prayer "Spare thy people" uses the Hebrew *chuws* (have compassion, pity)—pleading for mercy. The concern isn't merely national survival but God's reputation: "give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them." If God's people fall to pagans, unbelievers will mock God, saying "Where is their God?" This argument appeals to God's glory and honor. The Reformed understanding of God's jealousy for His name affirms that God acts to vindicate His glory (Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22, 39:25; Isaiah 48:11).

Historical Context

Priestly intercession was central to Israel's worship. The high priest entered the Most Holy Place annually on the Day of Atonement to make atonement for the

nation (Leviticus 16). This passage describes extraordinary corporate prayer in crisis. The argument that pagan victory would dishonor God's name reflects ancient Near Eastern theology—victories proved which gods were stronger. God's concern for His reputation drove intervention on Israel's behalf repeatedly (Exodus 32:11-14, Numbers 14:13-19, Psalm 79:9-10, 115:1-2). Ultimately, God vindicated His name through Christ, whose resurrection demonstrated God's power and faithfulness.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does priestly intercession in the Old Testament point toward Christ's ongoing intercession for believers (Hebrews 7:25)?
2. What does it mean to pray based on God's glory and reputation rather than merely personal needs?
3. How should concern for God's honor among unbelievers shape Christian life and witness?

Interlinear Text

מִשְׁרָתִים בֵּין הַאֲוָלָם וְלִפְנֵי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְיַבְפּוּ לְמִשְׁרָתִים בְּנֵי יִם הַמִּשְׁרָתִים בְּנֵי יִם הַמִּשְׁרָתִים בְּנֵי יִם הַמִּשְׁרָתִים בְּנֵי יִם

H996 between the porch H197 and the altar H4196 weep H1058 Let the priests H3548 the ministers H8334

אָל בְּעֵמִים יְהִי הָאָמֵר וְיַהְיֵה כָּל וְיַבְפּוּ לְמִשְׁרָתִים בְּנֵי יִם הַמִּשְׁרָתִים בְּנֵי יִם הַמִּשְׁרָתִים בְּנֵי יִם

O LORD and let them say H3068 Spare H2347 O LORD H3068 among the people H408 H5971

גַּוְעַם בְּנֵי כָּל לְמִשְׁרָתִים בְּנֵי כָּל לְמִשְׁרָתִים בְּנֵי כָּל לְמִשְׁרָתִים בְּנֵי כָּל

and give not thine heritage H5414 to reproach H2781 should rule over H4910 that the heathen H1471

אֱלֹהִים: בְּעֵמִים יְהִי הָאָמֵר וְיַבְפּוּ לְפָה

and let them say H4100 among the people H5971 H346 Where is their God H430

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 115:2 (References God): Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?

Psalms 79:10 (References God): Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed.

Ezekiel 8:16 (Sacrifice): And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east.

Exodus 34:9 (References Lord): And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiffnecked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.

Matthew 23:35 (Sacrifice): That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

Amos 7:2 (References God): And it came to pass, that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord GOD, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small.

Joel 1:9 (Sacrifice): The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests, the LORD'S ministers, mourn.

1 Kings 6:3 (Parallel theme): And the porch before the temple of the house, twenty cubits was the length thereof, according to the breadth of the house; and ten cubits was the breadth thereof before the house.

Hosea 14:2 (References Lord): Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.

Isaiah 37:20 (References God): Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even thou only.