

# Psalms 79:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps.

## Analysis

**O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps.** This communal lament opens with a description of devastating invasion. Like Psalm 74, it likely responds to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, though the language is applicable to any catastrophic violation of the holy city.

"The heathen are come into thine inheritance" (ba'u goyim benachalatekha, בָּאוּ גוֹיִם בְּנַחֲלָתְךָ) frames the invasion theologically. Goyim (nations, Gentiles) have entered God's nachalah (inheritance, possession). The land was not merely Israel's property but God's inheritance given to Israel. Foreign invasion violated divine ownership.

"Thy holy temple have they defiled" (tim'u et-heykhal qodshekha, טִמְּאוּ אֶת־הַיְכָל, קֹדֶשְׁךָ) intensifies the outrage. Tame means to defile, make unclean, pollute—the opposite of the holiness that should characterize God's dwelling. The temple was qodesh (holy, set apart); now it has been profaned by those who neither knew nor honored Yahweh.

"They have laid Jerusalem on heaps" (samu et-Yerushalayim le'iyim, שָׂמוּ אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַיִם לַעֲיִיִם) describes physical devastation. Iyim means ruins, heaps of rubble. The city of David, the joy of the whole earth (Psalm 48:2), has become a pile of stones. The threefold description—invasion, defilement, destruction—captures the comprehensiveness of the catastrophe.

## Historical Context

---

The Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE was the greatest catastrophe in Israel's history before the Roman destruction in 70 CE. Nebuchadnezzar's armies besieged the city, broke through its walls, captured King Zedekiah, killed his sons, blinded him, and carried him to Babylon in chains. The temple—Solomon's magnificent structure that had stood for nearly 400 years—was stripped of its treasures and burned. The city walls were torn down, and the population was killed, scattered, or deported.

This destruction raised profound theological questions. God had promised David an eternal throne (2 Samuel 7:16). He had chosen Jerusalem as His dwelling place (Psalm 132:13-14). The temple was where His name dwelt (1 Kings 8:29). How could these promises stand if the city and temple lay in ruins?

The prophets had warned that covenant unfaithfulness would bring judgment (Jeremiah 7:1-15). Ezekiel had seen the glory of the LORD depart from the temple (Ezekiel 10-11). Yet even in judgment, hope remained. Jeremiah promised return after seventy years (Jeremiah 29:10). The exile was discipline, not final rejection.

## Related Passages

---

**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

## Study Questions

---

1. What does framing the invasion as violation of God's 'inheritance' reveal about the nature of the land?
2. How does the defilement of the temple represent spiritual as well as physical devastation?

3. What theological questions does the destruction of God's chosen city and temple raise about His promises?
4. How did Israel process this catastrophe theologically, and what can we learn from their approach?

## Interlinear Text

---

אֱלֹהֵי יִם	בָּאוּ	גוֹיֵם	בְּנִחְלָתְךָ	טָמְאוּ	אֶת
O God	are come	the heathen	into thine inheritance	have they defiled	H853
H430	H935	H1471	H5159	H2930	
לְהִיבֶנֶת	קִדְשְׁךָ	שָׂמוּ	אֶת	יְרוּשָׁלַם	לְעֵימָם:
temple	thy holy	they have laid	H853	Jerusalem	on heaps
H1964	H6944	H7760		H3389	H5856

## Additional Cross-References

---

**2 Chronicles 36:19** (References God): And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof.

**Micah 3:12** (References Jerusalem): Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.

**Jeremiah 26:18** (References Jerusalem): Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.

**Lamentations 1:10** (Temple): The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things: for she hath seen that the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command that they should not enter into thy congregation.