

Psalms 79:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord.

Analysis

And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord. This concluding imprecatory prayer requests comprehensive justice. "Render...sevenfold" (hashev shiv'atayim, שׁבַעֲתַיִם) uses intensified language—not merely equivalent punishment but multiplied return. "Sevenfold" represents completeness in Hebrew numerology (Genesis 4:15, Leviticus 26:28, Proverbs 6:31), suggesting thorough, exhaustive justice. "Into their bosom" (el-chuqam, אֶל-חַקָּם) means directly into their lap or embrace—inescapable, personal reception of deserved consequences.

The crucial phrase "their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee" (cherpotam asher cherefu-kha, חֶרְפָּתָם אֲשֶׁר חֶרְפָּוּךְ) clarifies the true offense: the neighbors haven't merely insulted Israel but insulted Yahweh Himself. By mocking Israel's weakness, they mock Israel's God. This transforms the prayer from personal vengeance to theological vindication. The ultimate crime isn't violence against people but blasphemy against God. This echoes 2 Kings 19:22 where Sennacherib's mockery of Jerusalem is defined as reproaching the Holy One of Israel.

The direct address "O Lord" (אָדָן, Adonai) emphasizes sovereignty—You are Master, and these nations have insulted their rightful sovereign. The prayer concludes by resting the case before divine judgment: act consistently with Your character as covenant Lord who defends Your name and avenges Your people's

innocent blood. The imprecatory conclusion asserts faith that God will indeed execute justice, even if delayed.

Historical Context

Sevenfold vengeance appears in Genesis 4:15 (God's protection of Cain) and Leviticus 26:28 (covenant curses for disobedience). The concept reflects ancient Near Eastern justice principles of proportional punishment, intensified for particularly heinous crimes. The nations' reproach of Yahweh through Israel's humiliation invited divine response. Later prophetic literature (Jeremiah 50-51; Isaiah 13, 47) pronounces extensive judgment against Babylon, fulfilling prayers like Psalm 79:12. The principle continues into Revelation 18:6: "Reward [Babylon] even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double."

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How should Christians today understand imprecatory psalms in light of Jesus's teaching to love enemies?
2. What is the proper relationship between praying for justice and exercising personal forgiveness toward those who wrong us?
3. How does recognizing that crimes against God's people are ultimately crimes against God Himself affect how we pray about persecution?

Interlinear Text

חִיקָם	אֶל	שֶׁבֶתִים	לְשִׁכְנָה	יְכוֹדָה	וְשִׁבְבָּה
And render	unto our neighbours	sevenfold	H413	into their bosom	
H7725	H7934	H7659		H2436	
their reproach	חִרְפָּה	וְאֶשְׁר	חִרְפָּה	וְאֶשְׁר	אָדָנִים
H2781	H834	H2778	wherewith they have reproached	thee O Lord	H136

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 32:18 (References Lord): Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name,

Genesis 4:15 (References Lord): And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

Leviticus 26:21 (Parallel theme): And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins.

Leviticus 26:28 (Parallel theme): Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.

Proverbs 6:31 (Parallel theme): But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house.

Luke 6:38 (Parallel theme): Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.