

PSALM 78

God's Guidance of His People in Spite of Their Unfaithfulness.

INTRODUCTION.

- A. From Roy H. Enoch (8-2-95).
- B. A contemplation of Asaph.
- C. "Warnings Based on the History of Israel's Rebellions"
- D. The main focus of this psalm seems to be the apostasies of Israel. Coffman quotes from Maclaren for a summary of these apostasies; "The history of Israel has been one long succession of miracles of mercy met by equally continuous ingratitude which has ever been punished by national calamities."
- E. The purpose of the psalm is given in the first eight verses: The current generation is warned to not follow the unfaithfulness of their ancestors and their children are to be instructed and warned from these examples.
- F. Coffman warns of two errors commonly found in commentaries on this psalm:
 1. The tendency to date the psalm in the divided kingdom.
 2. The premise that this psalm uses "old traditions" as its basis rather than the Scriptures. Regarding the date, it was written by Asaph, who was a contemporary of David, and the historical review stops at the time of David. Regarding the basis of the events described, it follows the account in the writings of Moses so closely, that one would suspect that he had the books of the law before him as he wrote. One commentator "proves" that it was not from Scripture by pointing out that only six of the plagues in Egypt are cited. That is an large number for such a brief review to point out Israel's ingratitude for God's blessings and unfaithfulness to God's laws.
- G. I will follow Coffman's headings for the sections of the Psalm:
 - I. The Purpose of the Psalm (78:1-8).
 - II. Ephraim, a Typical Example of Infidelity (78:9-11).
 - III. A Catalogue of God's Gracious Dealings w/Israel from the Times of the Exodus (78: 12-31).
 - IV. God's Judgments and Israel's Shallow Repentance (78:32-39).
 - V. Israel's Rebellion in the Wilderness so Quickly After God's Mighty Deeds in Egypt (78:40-55).
 - VI. Continued Wickedness of Israel in Canaan (78:56-64).
 - VII. God's Answer to the Situation (78:65-72).

THE TEXT.

- 78:1** Listen, O my people, to my instruction;
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
- 2** I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings of old,
- 3** Which we have heard and known,
And our fathers have told us.
- 4** We will not conceal them from their children,
But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,
And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done.
- 5** For He established a testimony in Jacob
And appointed a law in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers
That they should teach them to their children,
- 6** That the generation to come might know, *even* the children *yet* to be born,
That they may arise and tell *them* to their children,
- 7** That they should put their confidence in God
And not forget the works of God,
But keep His commandments,
- 8** And not be like their fathers,

A stubborn and rebellious generation,
A generation that did not prepare its heart
And whose spirit was not faithful to God.
9 The sons of Ephraim were archers equipped with bows,
Yet they turned back in the day of battle.
10 They did not keep the covenant of God
And refused to walk in His law;
11 They forgot His deeds
And His miracles that He had shown them.
12 He wrought wonders before their fathers
In the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.
13 He divided the sea and caused them to pass through,
And He made the waters stand up like a heap.
14 Then He led them with the cloud by day
And all the night with a light of fire.
15 He split the rocks in the wilderness
And gave *them* abundant drink like the ocean depths.
16 He brought forth streams also from the rock
And caused waters to run down like rivers.
17 Yet they still continued to sin against Him,
To rebel against the Most High in the desert.
18 And in their heart they put God to the test
By asking food according to their desire.
19 Then they spoke against God;
They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?"
20 "Behold, He struck the rock so that waters gushed out,
And streams were overflowing;
Can He give bread also?
Will He provide meat for His people?"
21 Therefore the LORD heard and was full of wrath;
And a fire was kindled against Jacob
And anger also mounted against Israel,
22 Because they did not believe in God
And did not trust in His salvation.
23 Yet He commanded the clouds above
And opened the doors of heaven;
24 He rained down manna upon them to eat
And gave them food from heaven.
25 Man did eat the bread of angels;
He sent them food in abundance.
26 He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens
And by His power He directed the south wind.
27 When He rained meat upon them like the dust,
Even winged fowl like the sand of the seas,
28 Then He let *them* fall in the midst of their camp,
Round about their dwellings.
29 So they ate and were well filled,
And their desire He gave to them.
30 Before they had satisfied their desire,
While their food was in their mouths,
31 The anger of God rose against them
And killed some of their stoutest ones,
And subdued the choice men of Israel.
32 In spite of all this they still sinned
And did not believe in His wonderful works.
33 So He brought their days to an end in futility
And their years in sudden terror.

34 When He killed them, then they sought Him,
And returned and searched diligently for God;
35 And they remembered that God was their rock,
And the Most High God their Redeemer.
36 But they deceived Him with their mouth
And lied to Him with their tongue.
37 For their heart was not steadfast toward Him,
Nor were they faithful in His covenant.
38 But He, being compassionate, forgave *their* iniquity and did not destroy *them*;
And often He restrained His anger
And did not arouse all His wrath.
39 Thus He remembered that they were but flesh,
A wind that passes and does not return.
40 How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness
And grieved Him in the desert!
41 Again and again they tempted God,
And pained the Holy One of Israel.
42 They did not remember His power,
The day when He redeemed them from the adversary,
43 When He performed His signs in Egypt
And His marvels in the field of Zoan,
44 And turned their rivers to blood,
And their streams, they could not drink.
45 He sent among them swarms of flies which devoured them,
And frogs which destroyed them.
46 He gave also their crops to the grasshopper
And the product of their labor to the locust.
47 He destroyed their vines with hailstones
And their sycamore trees with frost.
48 He gave over their cattle also to the hailstones
And their herds to bolts of lightning.
49 He sent upon them His burning anger,
Fury and indignation and trouble,
A band of destroying angels.
50 He leveled a path for His anger;
He did not spare their soul from death,
But gave over their life to the plague,
51 And smote all the firstborn in Egypt,
The first *issue* of their virility in the tents of Ham.
52 But He led forth His own people like sheep
And guided them in the wilderness like a flock;
53 He led them safely, so that they did not fear;
But the sea engulfed their enemies.
54 So He brought them to His holy land,
To this hill country which His right hand had gained.
55 He also drove out the nations before them
And apportioned them for an inheritance by measurement,
And made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents.
56 Yet they tempted and rebelled against the Most High God
And did not keep His testimonies,
57 But turned back and acted treacherously like their fathers;
They turned aside like a treacherous bow.
58 For they provoked Him with their high places
And aroused His jealousy with their graven images.

59 When God heard, He was filled with wrath
And greatly abhorred Israel;

- 60 So that He abandoned the dwelling place at Shiloh,
The tent which He had pitched among men,
61 And gave up His strength to captivity
And His glory into the hand of the adversary.
62 He also delivered His people to the sword,
And was filled with wrath at His inheritance.
63 Fire devoured His young men,
And His virgins had no wedding songs.
64 His priests fell by the sword,
And His widows could not weep.
65 Then the Lord awoke as *if from* sleep,
Like a warrior overcome by wine.
66 He drove His adversaries backward;
He put on them an everlasting reproach.
67 He also rejected the tent of Joseph,
And did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,
68 But chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion which He loved.
69 And He built His sanctuary like the heights,
Like the earth which He has founded forever.
70 He also chose David His servant
And took him from the sheepfolds;
71 From the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him
To shepherd Jacob His people,
And Israel His inheritance.
72 So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart,
And guided them with his skillful hands.

COMMENTS.

A. The Purpose of the Psalm (78:1-8).

[v1] "Give ear...to My law..." This is reference to the five books of Moses, which are called the "Torah" or simply "the law."

[v2] "I will open my mouth in a parable..." This is quoted by Jesus in Mt. 13:34-35. This gives us Jesus' word that Asaph was an inspired prophet.

[v5,6] "For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children;" Some commentators claim that the mention of both Jacob and Israel indicate a divided kingdom. It no more indicates a divided kingdom than a divided law by saying "testimony in Jacob" and "a law in Israel." It is just an example of a synonymous parallelism. Moses used both terms in a song before the nation entered Canaan.

Deut. 33:10,28 says, "...He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children..." One of the most satanic attitudes I have heard from parents is that "we are going to let our children make up their own minds about religion." Parents are not only commanded to instruct their children in God's word, but "train" or "nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

[v7] "...but keep His commandments..." This indicates that it is God's law that is referred to here rather than just traditions.

B. Ephraim, A Typical Example of Infidelity (78:9-11).

[v9] "...Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle." Some interpret this as cowardice, we have no record of it. It may be referring to their unfaithfulness to God mentioned in the next two verses.

- C. A Catalogue of God's Gracious Dealings with Israel from the Times of the Exodus (78:12-31).
[v12] "Marvelous things...land of Egypt...the field of Zoan." Zoan was the capital of Egypt at the time of the captivity and was in the Nile delta.
[v13] "He divided the sea and caused them to pass through...made the waters stand up as a heap." Some say that they crossed a marshy flat at low tide, but that is not what the Scriptures say.
[v15] "He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink..." Water was a necessity and in short supply in desert country, especially for two to three million people with flocks and herds.
[v17] "But they sinned even more against Him..." This is one of the key statements that recurred throughout their journey in the wilderness and after they were settled in Canaan.
[v24,25] "Had rained down manna...given them bread from heaven...men ate angels' food..." God provided abundantly, yet they still complained for meat.
[v27] "He also rained meat upon them like the dust..." Yet God was angry w/them for their complaining, lack of faith and lack of gratitude.
[v31] "The wrath of God came against them and slew the stoutest of them..." He punished them for their cravings and demands.
- D. God's Judgments and Israel's Shallow Repentance (78:32-40).
[v36,37] "...they flattered Him w/their mouth and they lied to Him w/their tongue; for their heart was not steadfast with Him..." Their false repentance reflected their attitude over the centuries. It was more from the pressure of the punishments than from a change of heart.
[v39,40] "...He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity...for He remembered that they were but flesh..." We can never be appreciative enough for God's mercy and long-suffering. But we have a tendency to take advantage of His love and try His patience.
- E. Israel's Rebellion in the Wilderness So Quickly After God's Mighty Deeds in Egypt (78:41-56).
[v40,41] "How often they provoked Him in the wilderness.... Yes, again and again they tempted God..." The focus is how could they be so weak in faith after all that He had just done for them in Egypt.
[v42,43] "They did not remember His power...when He worked His signs in Egypt..." He then reviews six or seven of the plagues that God had brought against the gods of the Egyptians.
[v49] "...by sending angels of destruction among them." This indicates that the plagues of Egypt were carried out by angels of God. The KJV has here, "by sending evil angels among them." In the King James, the word "evil" is often used to refer to disaster, misfortune, or destruction rather than moral evil.
- F. Continued Wickedness of Israel in Canaan (78:57-63).
[v57] "...the were turned aside like a deceitful bow." A bow that is warped will throw the arrow off target. This metaphor describes a basic defect in Israel w/their unfaithfulness.
[v59] "When God heard this..." This is another anthropomorphism, where God is given the characteristics of man. God did not have to "hear" about what they were doing, He knew their hearts.
[v60-62] "...He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh...and delivered His strength into captivity... gave His people over to the sword..." This was when Israel was worshiping idols and Eli's sons were committing sin and he did not restrain them. God allowed the Philistines capture the ark of the covenant and kill 30,000 men including Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli (1Sam. 4).
[v63] "The fire consumed their young men, and their maidens were not given in marriage." So many of the young men were killed, that many of the young women did not find husbands.
- G. God's Answer to the Situation (78:64-72).
 The wickedness of Ephraim's leaders and those tribes around the tabernacle at Shiloh threatened God's entire "Chosen People." So God established Judah as the tribe of leadership and David's descendants to lead the nation.

[v65] “Then the Lord awaked...” This is another anthropomorphism, because God does not sleep and neglect things like men do.

[v67,68] “...He rejected...Joseph and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which He loved.” Here is the change from the tabernacle being at Shiloh and taken to Jerusalem.

[v70] “He also chose David His servant...” There may be more here than the selecting of David for the ruling of fleshly Israel: It may also be referring to “The Son of David” who would Shepherd the Lord’s flock.