

Psalm 80

To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim-Eduth, A Psalm of Asaph.

Psalm 80: This psalm is concerned in its entirety with Israel, the northern kingdom.

It seems to refer to the fall of Samaria, the capital, in 722 B.C., and constitutes a prayer that the LORD would restore His people.

The mention of “Joseph” (verse 1), and “Ephraim”, and “Manasseh” (verse 2), makes it clear that Israel is in view rather than Judah.

“Benjamin” however is also mentioned (verse 2), because this tribe was often linked with the 10 northern tribes.

At other times, nevertheless, it is associated with Judah in the south.

The psalm is in essence a prayer for a fallen kingdom to be restored.

This fact is revealed by both the opening (verses 1-3), and closing (verse 19), petitions and by two rounds of lament (verses 4-6, 12-13), petition (verses 7, 14-17), and motivation (verses 8-11, 18).

The motivation cited for God’s intervention are instructive: because He has acted on their behalf in the past (verses 8-11), and because they promise loyalty for the future (verse 18).

The change in the divine name reveals an increasing urgency on the psalmist’s part for God’s intervention: “O God” (verse 3), “O God of Hosts” (verse 7), “O LORD God of hosts” (verse 19).

The words “hosts” are a military term meaning “armies” and refers to God’s sovereignty over all powers, earthly and heavenly.

Verses 1-19: This psalm was probably written from Jerusalem in astonishment at the captivity of the 10 northern tribes in 722 B.C.

The psalmist recognized that God’s people had removed themselves through apostasy from the blessings of the Mosaic Covenant.

So he begs God to act and to restore His people into covenant blessings (verses 3, 7, 14, and 19).

- I. Prayer for Divine Restoration (80:1-3).
- II. Despair over God’s Anger (80:4-7).

III. Description of God's Vine (80:8-16a).

IV. Prayer for Divine Restoration (80:16b-19).

Title: "El Shoshannim". The name of a tune (see note on Psalm 45: Title).

Verses 1-7: He that dwelleth upon the mercy-seat, is the good Shepherd of his people.

But we can neither expect the comfort of his love, nor the protection of his arm, unless we partake of his converting grace.

If he is really angry at the prayers of his people, it is because, although they pray, their ends are not right, or there is some secret sin indulged in them, or he will try their patience and perseverance in prayer.

When God is displeased with his people, we must expect to see them in tears, and their enemies in triumph.

There is no salvation but from God's favor; there is no conversion to God but by his own grace.

Psalm 80:1 "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest [between] the cherubims, shine forth."

"Dwellest between the cherubims": A reference to the Ark of the covenant, a symbol for God's presence.

The images of two cherubim sat on top of the Ark, facing each other (compare Exodus 37:1-9).

The Great Shepherd of the Christians, of course is Jesus. They are spiritual Israel.

From a prophetic point of view then, this is to our LORD.

We also see in this the Presence of Almighty God who was over the mercy seat in the tabernacle and in the temple.

Certainly, the physical house of Israel had been led like a flock.

The presence of God led them out across the wilderness to the Promised Land.

We also know that Jesus is the Light of the world.

Wherever there is a presence of God, there is a Light, or Fire, or Clouds.

This above then, is a request for the Light of God to shine forth even brighter than in the past.

Some expositors believe this is speaking of the ten tribes who were headed up by Manasseh being led by the Great Shepherd. Manasseh was Joseph's son.

Psalm 80:2 "Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come [and] save us."

Which Christ did in the public ministry of the word, speaking as one having authority, and not as the Scribes and Pharisees.

And in the performance of miracles, openly, and in the sight of all.

And in his sufferings and death for the salvation of his people; in which he appeared to be the mighty God, travelling in the greatness of his strength, and mighty to save.

These tribes design all Israel, before whom the above things were done.

And the allusion is to these three tribes marching immediately after the Kohathites, who carried the Ark on their shoulders in journeying (Num. 2:17).

Which is called the LORD's strength, and the Ark of his strength (Psalm 78:61).

"And come and save us": Come from heaven to earth, not by change of place, but by assumption of nature.

This was promised and expected, and is here prayed for.

Christ is now come in the flesh, which to deny is antichristian.

And his end in coming was to save his people from their sins, from the curse and condemnation of the law, and wrath to come.

And as he came on this errand, he is become the author of eternal salvation, in working out which he has shown his great strength.

Ephraim and Manasseh were sons of Joseph.

The Psalmist here realizes that there was a special anointing on Joseph.

God had protected him through all his troubles, and the blessings had passed to his sons.

Benjamin is mentioned, because Joseph and Benjamin were the only two sons of Rachel whom Jacob loved more than the others.

Even near kinsman sometimes break up and go their separate ways.

The Psalmist is crying out for help from God.

The Psalmist felt if perhaps, his name meant very little to God, he would use some names that would get God's attention.

Christians are well aware, the way to get the Father to hear your prayer is to ask in the name of Jesus.

There is something about that name.

Psalm 80:3 "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

From our captivity, as the Targum, into our own land.

Or return us backsliding sinners to thyself by repentance.

Turn us, and we shall be turned; for the prayer shows it was not in their power, but must be effected by the grace of God.

Or restore our souls, which have been wandering, and them to their former flourishing and comfortable condition.

"And cause thy face to shine": Grant thy gracious presence, lift up the light of thy countenance.

Favor with the manifestations of thyself, the enjoyment of thee, and communion with thee through Christ.

Indulge us with the discoveries of thy love, the joys of salvation, the comforts of the Spirit, and larger measures of grace (see note on Psalm 67:1; compare 80:7, 19).

"And we shall be saved": Be in a very happy and comfortable condition (see Psalm 4:6).

The psalmist is very well aware that the only possible hope for any one is God.

I have said this before, but it bears saying again.

Noah was saved in the flood, Daniel was saved in the lion's den, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were saved in the fire.

None of these people of God were saved from their problem.

They were saved in the problem.

These people the psalmist is begging for here, may be in captivity, but God can deal with them in captivity possibly even better than He could when they were having no problems.

It is not so important the circumstance you find yourself in, as it is how you handle the circumstance.

God is never unaware of our problem. In fact, He is in it with us, like there was the fourth figure in the fire, one like unto the Son of God.

To learn more about this, read Daniel chapter 3.

We know that God will turn, again, and shine His face upon anyone who loves and follows God.

Psalm 80:4 "O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?"

Aben Ezra and Kimchi observe, that the word "Elohe" is here understood, and the words to be read, "O LORD God, the God of hosts"; of the armies above and below, against whom there is no standing, nor any before him when he is angry (see note on Psalm 59:5; compare 80:7, 14).

"How long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?" Literally, how long wilt thou smoke? (compare Psalm 74:1).

"Against the prayer" means "in spite of the prayer," or "notwithstanding the prayer."

Ordinarily, God forgives, and ceases from his anger as soon as the afflicted one makes earnest prayer to him.

But this is not always so. A time comes when his wrath cannot be appeased, when "there is no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:16).

Evil has been persisted in too long.

Sin causes separation from God.

This was not just a sin that they had committed, but a grievous sin.

This is still speaking of the mixing of false gods in with their real God.

God's anger had been kindled hotter, because of what they had done.

It seemed their prayers were getting nowhere.

Just keep on praying, God will hear and forgive.

Psalm 80:5 "Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure."

With tears instead of bread, having nothing to eat.

Or their bread is mingled with their tears, "dipped" therein, as the Targum.

Such was their constant grief, and the occasion of it, that they could not cease from tears while they were eating their meals, and so ate them with them.

"And givest them tears to drink": So abundant were their tears that they might constitute their very drink.

"In great measure": Or rather by measure; that is abundantly.

The word here rendered "great measure" means properly a third, and is usually applied to a measure for grain.

A third part of another measure, as the third part of an Ephah (see notes at Isa. 40:12).

Then the word is used for any measure, perhaps because this was the most common measure in use.

The idea seems to be, not so much that God gave tears to them in great measure, but that he measured them out to them, as one measures drink to others.

That is, the cup, or cask, or bottle in which their drink was served to them was as if filled with tears only.

The Israelites had been an openly rebellious people.

God had forgiven them over and over.

There is a limit to how many times He will forgive them.

This seems, it could be that time.

They are not only praying, but they are crying with the prayers.

Their tears are in everything, because they do not cease to pray and cry to God.

Psalm 80:6 "Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbors: and our enemies laugh among themselves."

Either obliges us to contend with them for our defense and safety.

Or having given us into their hands, they strive and contend one with another about dividing the spoil.

"And our enemies laugh among themselves": At us, and because there is no help for us in God, as they imagine.

Or at God himself, as Kimchi, saying he cannot save us.

Can't you just hear the taunts of the ungodly neighbors saying, I thought you said you had a God that cared for you, where is He now?

If you are His, why is He not answering your prayer?

Psalm 80:7 "Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

The same with (Psalm 80:3), only instead of God there, here it is "the God of hosts".

The repetition of these words shows what was uppermost on the minds of God's people.

What they were longing for, and most desirous of, namely, the light of God's countenance.

We see the psalmist actually trying to put the responsibility for change on the LORD.

Isn't that really what happened when Jesus came and became our substitute on the cross?

We were not worthy to be saved, but He saved us anyway.

God of hosts could mean God of your armies.

Verses 8-16: The church is represented as a vine and a vineyard.

The root of this vine is Christ, the branches are believers.

The church is like a vine, needing support, but spreading and fruitful.

If a vine does not bring forth fruit, the tree is worthless.

And is not planted in a well-cultivated garden, with every means of being fruitful in works of righteousness.

But the useless leaves of profession, and the empty boughs of notions and forms, abound far more than real piety.

It was wasted and ruined.

There was a good reason for this change in God's way toward them.

And it is well or ill with us, according as we are under God's smiles or frowns.

When we consider the state of the purest part of the visible church, we cannot wonder that it is visited with sharp corrections.

They request that God would help the vine.

LORD, it is formed by thyself, and for thyself, therefore it may, with humble confidence, be committed to thyself.

Verses 8-12: Israel is like a "vine" that God has cared for like a gardener (Isa. 5:1-7; Ezek. 15:1-8; John chapter 15).

Israel's task was to give shade to other nations, to offer those nations the benefits of God's rule.

But due to Israel's disobedience.

God has "broken down her hedges" and removed His wall of protection around Israel, leaving her vulnerable to attack.

Psalm 80:8 "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it."

“Vine out of Egypt”: The vine is a metaphor for Israel, whom God delivered out of Egypt and nurtured into a powerful nation (compare Isa. 5:1-7; 27:2-6; Matt. 21:33-40).

We know that God Himself brought Israel (vine), out of Egypt with the mighty Right Hand of God.

Canaan was occupied by heathen people, and the LORD drove them out and planted Israel instead.

Israel is the vine that God planted in the Promised Land.

In Egypt, the vine could not prosper, because it was denied the necessary things to produce fruit.

The law was given to these Israelites on the way to the Promised Land, and they had the opportunity to produce much fruit for God. They failed.

This vine was the same as the natural branch on the tree.

Jesus is the true vine, as we see in the following verse.

John 15:5 "I am the vine, ye [are] the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

The trouble with the physical house of Israel is they did not abide with God.

Psalm 80:9 "Thou preparedst [room] before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land."

By sending the hornet before the Israelites, and driving the Canaanites out of the land (Exodus 23:28).

And so the Targum, "thou didst remove from before thee the Canaanites."

Which made way and room for them.

And thus, the LORD prepared room for his interest, church, and people, in the Gentile world, in the first times of Christianity.

By sending the Gospel into all parts of it, and making it successful, and still there is room (Luke 14:22).

"And didst cause it to take deep root": Which denotes the settlement of the people of Israel in Canaan, in church and state, as a body ecclesiastic and politic.

So believers, being rooted in Christ, are grounded, settled, and established in him, and in a Gospel church state, and so become fruitful (see Col. 2:7).

"And it filled the land": With people, who, in the days of Solomon, were as the sand of the sea (1 Kings 4:20).

And so the Gentile world was filled with Christian converts in the first times of the Gospel.

And the interest and church of Christ will fill the whole world another day (Isa. 11:9).

This also is speaking of Joshua defeating and removing the heathen from the land.

Soon the inheritance was divided, and the children of Israel began to live in the land.

Psalm 80:10 "The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof [were like] the goodly cedars."

That is, it made a shade, by its luxuriant foliage, on the hills in every part of the land.

It seemed to cover all the hills.

"And the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars": Margin, as in Hebrew, cedars of God.

That is, lofty, majestic cedars (see notes at Psalm 65:9).

The reference here is to the cedars of Lebanon, among the most majestic objects known to the Hebrews.

This was indeed, a land of milk and honey.

It was fertile land and grew giant trees.

The family of God moved in, and the land prospered.

Psalm 80:11 "She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river."

The Mediterranean, or midland sea, which was the border of the land of Canaan to the west.

"And her branches unto the river": The river Euphrates, which was its border to the east (see Deut. 11:24).

This, in the spiritual sense of it, will have its accomplishment in the church of Christ, when he shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth (Psalm 72:8).

The Targum is, "she sent out her disciples to the great sea, and to the river Euphrates her babes;" or sucklings.

This land is on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea, and there were many boats and shipping.

It seemed nature had cooperated with God, and they now had a warm water port for their shipping.

Psalm 80:12 "Why hast thou [then] broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?"

After having done all this for her, which signifies the LORD's removing his presence, power, and protection, from Israel.

Which was the hedge he set about them, and by which they were secured and defended from their enemies.

But these being gone, they became an easy prey to them (see Job 1:10).

The hedge about the church and people of God are the angels that encamp about them.

Salvation, which is as walls and bulwarks to them; and the LORD himself, who is a wall of fire around them.

Which may be said to be broken down when he withdraws his presence, and does not exert his power in the protection of them.

But suffers them to be exposed to the persecutions of men.

"So that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?"

The hedge being broken down, all passengers and travelers plucked the fruit of the vine as they passed along, there being nothing to keep them off from it.

This may denote the plunder of the Israelites by their enemies, when left of God, they fell into their hands.

And the havoc persecutors make of the church of Christ, and their spoiling them of their goods and substance, when they are permitted to do it.

When Israel began on this journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, God had been the hedge around them and helped them against their enemies.

He had stood between the Red Sea and the Israelites, while the Israelites crossed unharmed.

He had been with them in battle and the enemy had run away, knowing that Israel was protected by their God.

Now it appears that the protection of God is gone.

Their enemy can have free run on them.

Now that Israel's God is not protecting her, all of the people around her are taking whatever they want from her.

Psalms 80:13 "The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it."

As Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, who carried the ten tribes' captive.

The title of this psalm in the Septuagint version is a psalm for the Assyrian.

Vitrinas, on (Isa. 24:2), interprets this of Antiochus Epiphanes, to whose times he thinks the psalm refers.

But the Jews of the fourth beast in (Dan. 7:7), which designs the Roman Empire.

The wild boar is alluded to, which lives in woods and forests, and wastes, fields, and vineyards.

"And the wild beast of the field doth devour it": As Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who carried the two tribes' captive, and who for a while lived among and lived as the beasts of the field.

Both these, in their turns, wasted and devoured the people of Israel (see Jer. 50:17).

Jarchi interprets this of Esau or Edom, that is, Rome; and says the whole of the paragraph respects the Roman captivity.

That is, their present one.

But rather the words describe the persecutors of the Christian church in general, comparable to wild boars and wild beasts for their fierceness and cruelty.

And perhaps, in particular, Rome Pagan may be pointed at by the one, and Rome Papal by the other.

Though the latter is signified by two beasts, one that rose out of the sea, and the other out of the earth.

Which have made dreadful havoc of the church of Christ, his vine, and have shed the blood of the saints in great abundance (see Rev. 12:3).

Unless we should rather by the one understand the pope, and by the other the Turk, as the Jews interpret them of Esau and of Ishmael.

This is just saying, the supernatural protection from wild beasts that they had before, is also gone.

God is angry with them, and has removed His protection.

Psalm 80:14 "Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine;"

Again, come and visit thy people; come back again to thy forsaken land.

This is language founded on the idea that God had withdrawn from the land, or had forsaken it.

That he had left his people without a protector, and had left them exposed to the ravages of fierce foreign enemies.

It is language which will describe what seems often to occur when the church is apparently forsaken.

When there are no cheering tokens of the divine presence.

And when the people of God, discouraged, seem themselves to be forsaken by him (compare Jeremiah 14:8).

"Look down from heaven": The habitation of God.

As if he did not now see his desolate vineyard, or regard it.

The idea is that if he would look upon it, he would pity it, and would come to its relief.

"And behold, and visit this vine": It is a visitation of mercy and not of wrath that is asked.

The coming of one who is able to save, and without whose coming there could be no deliverance.

This is just another plea to God to not forget His people.

It is no need to ask God to look, because His eye is always on His people.

Psalm 80:15 "And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch [that] thou madest strong for thyself."

And the branch, literally, the son. That is, the offspring or shoots of the vine.

Not merely the original plant, the parent stock, but all the branches which had sprung from it and which had spread themselves over the land.

"That thou madest strong for thyself": Thou didst cause it to grow so vigorously for thine own use or honor.

On that account, we now call on thee to defend what is thine own.

"And the branch that thou madest strong for thyself": Meaning the same thing, and the same people whom he confirmed in the land of Canaan, and made strong for his service and glory.

The word translated "branch" signifies a son, as Israel was, to the Lord, son and firstborn.

Let us look at this prophetically and see the church which the Right Hand of God (Jesus), planted.

This could even be saying, Father look down and save the church, because of Your Son's great establishment of it.

Do not see our sin, see your precious Son's blood.

Jesus established the church for us, we did not do it.

Psalm 80:16 "[It is] burned with fire, [it is] cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance."

That is, the vine of Israel, and the branch before spoken of, alluding to a vine, and its branches.

Which, when become unprofitable, are cut down or cut off, and cast into the fire (see John 15:6).

So Jerusalem and the temple were burnt with fire by Nebuchadnezzar, and afterwards by Vespasian.

"They perish at the rebuke of thy countenance": That is, the Israelites, signified by the vine, whose destruction was owing to the wrath of God upon them for their sins.

He frowned upon them, and rebuked them in his hot displeasure, and to that their ruin was owing.

Others were only instruments in his hands.

Some understand this as a wish or spoken curse, let them that cut down the vine, and burn it with fire, perish at the rebuke of thy countenance (see Psalm 68:1), so the Targum.

We see the destruction of God's people.

They will perish, unless God intervenes.

Unless God looks down from heaven and has mercy, they are gone.

Verses 17-19: The Messiah, the Protector and Savior of the church, is the Man of God's right hand; he is the Arm of the LORD, for all power is given to him.

In him is our strength, by which we are enabled to persevere to the end.

The vine, therefore, cannot be ruined, nor can any fruitful branch perish.

But the unfruitful will be cut off and cast into the fire.

The end of our redemption is that we should serve Him who hath redeemed us, and not go back to our old sins.

Psalm 80:17 "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man [whom] thou madest strong for thyself."

"Son of man": In this context, this phrase is primarily a reference to Israel.

In a secondary sense, the “son of man” may allude to the Davidic dynasty and even extend to the Messiah, since He is so frequently called by that title in the New Testament.

This has to be prophetically speaking of the Messiah, the Christ.

The Right Hand is strong, because He is God the Son.

We know that man alone could not save himself, or anyone else.

God sent the Savior, Jesus Christ to redeem us.

Psalm 80:18 "So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name."

From thy fear, as the Targum; or from thy service, as Kimchi.

Doing as above would encourage them to stand before the LORD, and worship him.

Which they could not do, if he marked their sins, and demanded satisfaction from them for them.

But if he looked to his Son and their surety, and took it from him, this would encourage their faith and hope, and give them boldness in his presence, and attach them to his service.

"Quicken us, and we will call upon thy name": The people of God are sometimes dead and lifeless in their frames, and in the exercise of grace and discharge of duty, and have need of the quickening influences of the Spirit and grace of God.

And which are necessary to a fervent calling upon the name of the LORD in prayer, and without which none will stir up themselves so to do.

Kimchi interprets this of quickening, or of raising to life, from the death of the captivity.

And so Abarbanal, who thinks also that it respects the resurrection of the dead in the times of the Messiah.

Romans 10:13 "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Romans 8:11 "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."

Jesus Christ, their Messiah, is the quickening spirit they and we need to help us.

In Him is Life, and the Life is the Light of men.

Psalm 80:19 "Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

The psalm is closed by the refrain in its third and most perfect form.

First we had, "Turn us again, O God" (verse 3).

Then, "Turn us again, O God of hosts" (verse 7).

Now, "Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts".

The appeal to God continually increasing in intensity.

Having made his third appeal by the covenant Name, the psalmist seems to feel that he has done all that he can, and desists.

This is said again, to give impact to the statement.

Man is his own worst enemy.

We cannot save ourselves.

God had to send a Savior to save us from sin and death, but also, to save us from our own blundering mistakes.

2 Corinthians 4:6 "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to [give] the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Psalm 80 Questions

1. What special name is God called in verse 1?
2. How had He led Joseph?
3. Thou that dwellest between the _____.
4. Who is the Great Shepherd of the Christians?
5. What presence was over the mercy seat?
6. Who really led the children of Israel across the wilderness?
7. What are three things that depict God in our presence?
8. Whose son was Manasseh?
9. Why do you suppose the psalmist mentions Ephraim, Manasseh, and Joseph in his prayer?
10. How can a Christian get God's attention to his prayer?
11. The only possible hope for anyone is _____.

12. Who were the three men saved in the fire?
13. Who was saved in the flood?
14. Who was saved in the lions' den?
15. What is more important than the circumstance you find yourself in?
16. Where can you find the message about the fourth man in the fire?
17. _____ causes separation from God.
18. What was meant by the bread of tears?
19. In verse 6, who is laughing at their calamity?
20. Verse 7 says he is putting the responsibility for his salvation on God, relate that to the Christian.
21. Who is the vine in verse 8?
22. Why could the vine not prosper in Egypt?
23. What is verse 9 speaking of?
24. The Promised Land is on the edge of what great sea?
25. What had been the hedge around Israel?
26. Who planted the vineyard in verse 15?
27. Who is verse 17 speaking of?
28. Who is the quickening Spirit?