



## PSALM 78, PART 2

### A Jewish History Lesson

This is Holly with Presence Point and thank you for joining me for our *Psalms for Shepherds* series. Today we're again in *Psalm 78* and here's a spoiler alert for you. This psalm is going to hit home. And it's going to be a little longer than most in the *Psalms for Shepherds* series. Why? Well, because moving beyond Asaph's challenge to pass the Israelite's experiences on to future generations to a history lesson.

Let's consider the purpose. It was not just so they could get an A on the "Final Exam of History 101," but based on his introductory verses, it seems to be, he wanted to assure that those listening did not repeat the mistakes of those that had come before him. Remember this was a verbal culture and psalms like this one is how information was communicated. So, the purpose of this psalm? First, to demonstrate Who God is, how deeply He loved His people, and what God would do because of that love, for those who love and serve Him.

Second, to remind them just how stubborn the human heart is. Our God was remarkably faithful to His chosen people, yet, they were not satisfied, they rebelled, and they wanted more (or different) than what He had provided.

Third, one of the purposes of this history lesson was to remind the Israelites of the consequences related to stubborn, rebellious behavior against the Almighty. "Yet they sinned, therefore or so," there were significant negative consequences.

And, lastly, Asaph seemed to be reminding the Israelites of God's unbelievable, preposterous compassion and forgiveness. 'Yet they sinned, therefore or so,' there were like consequences, and God's love never changed and His forgiveness was secure.'

Please join me in what I'll call a "narrated version" of verses 9 through 57 of *Psalm 78* and listen for where this psalm's purpose may go beyond the Israelites of thousands of years ago to us today.

<sup>9</sup> The warriors of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned their backs and fled on the day of battle. [this verse and the following three verses refer to the northern kingdom of Israel. When the ten tribes broke away from Judah and Benjamin, they informally adopted the name of their strongest and largest tribe, Ephraim. They were willful and militant and created problems for both Joshua ([Joshua 17:14–18](#)) and Gideon ([Judges 8:1–3](#)). It's

going to be really important to keep this in mind for our next *Psalms for Shepherds* because there is a huge consequence here.]

<sup>10</sup> They did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his instructions. [As we move into the next verse, note that Asaph is switching his focus from the tribe of Ephraim to the sins of the whole nation of Israel before Solomon's death. The Jews forgot what the Lord did for them in Egypt when He sent the plagues to Egypt and delivered the Jewish people at the exodus. The people saw one miracle after another as the Lord exposed the futility of the Egyptian gods and goddesses ([Exodus. 12:12](#); [Numbers 33:4](#)), but the memory soon faded.]

<sup>11</sup> They forgot what he had done—  
the great wonders he had shown them,  
<sup>12</sup> the miracles he did for their ancestors  
on the plain of Zoan in the land of Egypt.

<sup>13</sup> For he divided the sea and led them through,  
making the water stand up like walls!

<sup>14</sup> In the daytime he led them by a cloud,  
and all night by a pillar of fire.

<sup>15</sup> He split open the rocks in the wilderness  
to give them water, as from a gushing spring.

<sup>16</sup> He made streams pour from the rock,  
making the waters flow down like a river!

<sup>17</sup> Yet [How did the Israelites respond?] they kept on sinning against him,  
rebellious against the Most High in the desert.

<sup>18</sup> They stubbornly tested God in their hearts,  
demanding the foods they craved.

<sup>19</sup> They even spoke against God himself, saying,  
"God can't give us food in the wilderness.

<sup>20</sup> Yes, he can strike a rock so water gushes out,  
but he can't give his people bread and meat."

<sup>21</sup> [Therefore], when the Lord heard them, he was furious.  
The fire of his wrath burned against Jacob.

Yes, his anger rose against Israel,

<sup>22</sup> for they did not believe God  
or trust him to care for them.

<sup>23</sup> [Yet] he [still] commanded the skies to open;  
he opened the doors of heaven.

<sup>24</sup> He rained down manna for them to eat;  
he gave them bread from heaven.

<sup>25</sup> They ate the food of angels!  
God gave them all they could hold.

<sup>26</sup> He released the east wind in the heavens  
and guided the south wind by his mighty power.  
<sup>27</sup> He rained down meat as thick as dust—  
birds as plentiful as the sand on the seashore!  
<sup>28</sup> He caused the birds to fall within their camp  
and all around their tents.  
<sup>29</sup> [So] The people ate their fill.  
He gave them what they craved.  
<sup>30</sup> [But] before they satisfied their craving,  
while the meat was yet in their mouths,  
<sup>31</sup> [There were consequences] the anger of God rose against them,  
and he killed their strongest men.  
He struck down the finest of Israel's young men.  
<sup>32</sup> But in spite of this, the people kept sinning.  
Despite his wonders, they refused to trust him.  
<sup>33</sup> So [there were consequences] he ended their lives in failure,  
their years in terror.  
<sup>34</sup> When God began killing them,  
they finally sought him.  
They repented and took God seriously.  
<sup>35</sup> Then they remembered that God was their rock,  
that God Most High<sup>[b]</sup> was their redeemer.  
<sup>36</sup> But all they gave him was lip service;  
they lied to him with their tongues.  
<sup>37</sup> Their hearts were not loyal to him.  
They did not keep his covenant.  
<sup>38</sup> Yet he was merciful and forgave their sins  
and did not destroy them all.  
Many times he held back his anger  
and did not unleash his fury!  
<sup>39</sup> For he remembered that they were merely mortal,  
gone like a breath of wind that never returns.  
<sup>40</sup> Oh, how often they rebelled against him in the wilderness  
and grieved his heart in that dry wasteland.  
<sup>41</sup> Again and again they tested God's patience  
and provoked the Holy One of Israel.  
<sup>42</sup> They did not remember his power  
and how he rescued them from their enemies.  
<sup>43</sup> They did not remember his miraculous signs in Egypt,  
his wonders on the plain of Zoan.

<sup>44</sup> [So] he turned their rivers into blood,  
so no one could drink from the streams.  
<sup>45</sup> He sent vast swarms of flies to consume them  
and hordes of frogs to ruin them.  
<sup>46</sup> He gave their crops to caterpillars;  
their harvest was consumed by locusts.  
<sup>47</sup> He destroyed their grapevines with hail  
and shattered their sycamore-figs with sleet.  
<sup>48</sup> He abandoned their cattle to the hail,  
their livestock to bolts of lightning.  
<sup>49</sup> He loosed on them his fierce anger—  
all his fury, rage, and hostility.  
He dispatched against them  
a band of destroying angels.  
<sup>50</sup> He turned his anger against them [the Egyptians];  
he did not spare the [their] lives  
but ravaged them with the plague.  
<sup>51</sup> He killed the oldest son in each Egyptian family,  
the flower of youth throughout the land of Egypt.  
<sup>52</sup> But he led his own people like a flock of sheep,  
guiding them safely through the wilderness.  
<sup>53</sup> He kept them safe so they were not afraid;  
the sea covered their enemies.

[Beginning in the next verse, verse 54, Asaph is describing how the Lord brought the Israelites to the border of the promised land ([Deuteronomy. 1:1, 2](#)). There, Moses reviewed their history and taught them God's law as he prepared the new generation to enter the land and conquer the enemy. They were a new generation, making a new beginning, with a new leader, Joshua, and a new opportunity to trust God. Under Joshua's able leadership, they conquered the land and claimed their inheritance, and for two generations obeyed the Lord. But the third generation repeated the sins of their ancestors and forgot what the Lord had said and done.]

<sup>54</sup> He brought them to the border of his holy land,  
to this land of hills he had won for them.  
<sup>55</sup> He drove out the nations before them;  
he gave them their inheritance by lot.  
He settled the tribes of Israel into their homes.  
<sup>56</sup> But they kept testing and rebelling against God Most High.  
They did not obey his laws.  
<sup>57</sup> They turned back and were as faithless as their parents.  
They were as undependable as a crooked bow.  
<sup>58</sup> They angered God by building shrines to other gods;  
they made him jealous with their idols.

<sup>59</sup> When God heard them, he was very angry,  
and he completely rejected Israel.

<sup>60</sup> Then he abandoned his dwelling at Shiloh,  
the Tabernacle where he had lived among the people. [God removed His presence from them  
because of their rebellion.]

<sup>61</sup> He allowed the Ark of his might to be captured;  
he surrendered his glory into enemy hands.

<sup>62</sup> He gave his people over to be butchered by the sword,  
because he was so angry with his own people—his special possession.

<sup>63</sup> Their young men were killed by fire;  
their young women died before singing their wedding songs.

<sup>64</sup> Their priests were slaughtered,  
and their widows could not mourn their deaths.

<sup>65</sup> Then the Lord rose up as though waking from sleep,  
like a warrior aroused from a drunken stupor.

<sup>66</sup> He routed his enemies  
and sent them to eternal shame.

These 57 verses from *Psalms 78* are indeed a Jewish history lesson. But they are not for the Jewish people alone. They are also for us. Couldn't any of us re-write these verses as our own history lesson? Couldn't you replace what Asaph listed that God did for the Jews with what He has done for you? I know I could! Let's try it: God did \_\_\_\_\_ for me (you fill in the blank). And then you can easily replace what follows with your own responses, and so can I. Yet I sinned. But I wasn't satisfied. Yet I thought I knew better. But I rebelled. You fill in the blank, yet I \_\_\_\_\_. And, then, we too can also continue the course of these verses: Therefore, I experienced \_\_\_\_\_. Again, fill in the blank with the negative consequences of your rebellious actions. Praise God, we can also finish Asaph's line of thought. And, when I repented, when I returned to Him, when I realized the foolishness of my ways He was patiently waiting and I experienced forgiveness.

Dear shepherd leader, not one jot or tittle of God's Word is without purpose. Even a history lesson from Asaph the priest of the ancient temple is there for us today. I pray that as you've listened to this retelling of the nation of Israel's experience, that you, as I have done, would focus on where you are today in what is your own future history lesson.

Where are you in the areas of life where you shepherd? Are you in the yet's and the but's of rebellion and sin, or the therefore's (the negative consequences of your action) or the and's (resting in the forgiveness of the Father). Please remember that where you are will absolutely affect how you influence and impact those you lead. I know that it has and does for me. Thank you for joining me this week. May you live deeply into your calling as shepherd in the lives of those you influence.