

## Psalms 78

This evening - we're continuing our overview of the Old Testament book titled Psalms.

With this as our focus - let's open our Bibles to Psalms chapter 78 - and as we make our way to the 78th Psalm...

...I should take a moment to point out that - this is the sixth - of 11 consecutive songs - written by a seer named Asaph.

And it's here in this Psalm where we find Asaph - singing the praises...

...of the God Who saved the children of Israel - from the bondage of Egypt.

Not only that - but - this song also includes an honest assessment - of the way that the children of Israel...

...consistently failed to keep their covenant with the God - Who saved them from their slavery.

And as we make our way through this song of contemplation...

...it's my hope that we might all learn a lesson - from the multitude of mistakes...

...made by the sinful sheep - who were always prone to wander away from the good Shepherd.

With this as our focus - let's turn our attention to the lyrics that we find here in the 78th Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 1 - where Asaph writes...

Psa 78:1      A Contemplation of Asaph.  
Give ear, O my people, to my law;  
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

Psa 78:2 I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter dark sayings of old,  
Psa 78:3 Which we have heard and known,  
And our fathers have told us.  
Psa 78:4 We will not hide them from their children,  
Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,  
And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.  
Psa 78:5 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;  
Psa 78:6 That the generation to come might know them,  
The children who would be born,  
That they may arise and declare them to their children,  
Psa 78:7 That they may set their hope in God,  
And not forget the works of God,  
But keep His commandments;  
Psa 78:8 And may not be like their fathers,  
A stubborn and rebellious generation,  
A generation that did not set its heart aright,  
And whose spirit was not faithful to God.

Here in the beginning of this Psalm - we find Asaph - describing this song as a contemplation...

...which is to say that - this song is a didactic poem - intended for instruction.

Not only that - but it's there in verse 2 - where he referred to this Psalm as a parable - and dark sayings of old.

In other words - the lyrics of this song include both - wise sayings that contain spiritual lessons...

...as well as puzzling mysteries from the past.

We should also notice that Asaph was challenging the children of Israel to remember that...

...they had a responsibility to raise up the next generation...

...by sharing the same stories - that their fathers had passed down to them.

This included the spiritual stories about the glorious deeds of the LORD - as well as the testimonies about His power and His mighty wonders.

Not only that - but - Asaph also reminded them that it was their righteousness responsibility...

...to raise up their children - according to the testimony of Jacob...

...and according to the Law that the Lord appointed for Israel.

At the same time - Asaph also encouraged them to make sure that their children understood...

...that is was their responsibility to pass the same instructions - to their children.

And in this way - every generation would have hope in the God of Israel.

In similar fashion - Paul encouraged every Christian father - to raise up their children - according to the word of God.

It's in Ephesians 6 - verse 4 - where he declared...

Eph 6:4 ...fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Parents - please understand that it's your responsibility - to teach your children - the truth of God's word.

And while our youth program is here to assist in this endeavor...

...parents should make sure that their children are spending time studying the scriptures - every day...

...so that they can become believers - who walk by faith with the Lord.

Sadly - it didn't take long for the children of Israel - to turn their backs on the Lord.

Let's consider how Asaph explained it - here in the 78th Psalm - look with me beginning there at verse 9 - where we learn that...

Psa 78:9 The children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows,  
Turned back in the day of battle.

Psa 78:10 They did not keep the covenant of God;  
They refused to walk in His law,

Psa 78:11 And forgot His works  
And His wonders that He had shown them.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - referring to the rebellion of those who belonged to the tribe of Ephraim.

And while it's true that Ephraim was actually the Grandson of Israel - from Joseph...

...it's also true that Joseph received a double portion of the inheritance...

...which was divided between his sons - Ephraim and Manasseh.

It's also interesting to note that - the tribe of Ephraim was so large and influential...

...that the prophets often used "Ephraim" to represent the entire Northern Kingdom of Israel.

And that seems to be the case - here in our text tonight.

Now - we can't be certain about the specific situation that Asaph was referring to.

But what we can say for sure is that - it didn't take long for the largest tribe in Northern Israel...

...to break their covenant - with the God Who brought them out of Egypt.

And it's for this reason that Asaph took the time to remind them...

...about the wonderful works of the Lord.

With this as our focus - let's consider how Asaph put it - here in the 78th Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 12 - where he declared...

Psa 78:12    Marvelous things He did in the sight of their fathers,  
In the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.

Psa 78:13    He divided the sea and caused them to pass through;  
And He made the waters stand up like a heap.

Psa 78:14    In the daytime also He led them with the cloud,  
And all the night with a light of fire.

Psa 78:15    He split the rocks in the wilderness,  
And gave them drink in abundance like the depths.

Psa 78:16    He also brought streams out of the rock,  
And caused waters to run down like rivers.

Psa 78:17    But they sinned even more against Him  
By rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness.

Psa 78:18    And they tested God in their heart  
By asking for the food of their fancy.

Psa 78:19    Yes, they spoke against God:  
They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?"

Psa 78:20    Behold, He struck the rock,  
So that the waters gushed out,  
And the streams overflowed.

Can He give bread also?  
Can He provide meat for His people?"

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - reminding the children of Israel...

...about the miracles that their fathers experienced - after the Lord freed them from their Egyptian captivity.

This included the parting of the Red Sea - which provided them with safe passage - as they fled from the Egyptian army.

This also included the pillar of cloud that led them by day - and the pillar fire that kept them warm at night.

Not only that - but - the Lord also provided them with Manna for food...

...as well as the water that He produced from the Rock that followed them in the Wilderness.

And according to Paul - that Rock was actually a preincarnate manifestation of our Messiah.

It's in 1st Corinthians chapter 10 - beginning at verse 1 - where Paul declared...

1Co 10:1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea,  
1Co 10:2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,  
1Co 10:3 all ate the same spiritual food,  
1Co 10:4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

Now - I don't know if Asaph fully grasped that the Rock was Christ.

We also know that the Manna was a symbolic shadow of our Savior's body.

And it's sad to say that the Children of Israel sinned against the Lord - while they were in the wilderness...

...by grumbling and complaining - about the perfect provision of the Lord.

Let's consider how Asaph explained their sin - here in the 78th Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 21 - where he declared...

Psa 78:21 Therefore the LORD heard this and was furious;

So a fire was kindled against Jacob,  
And anger also came up against Israel,  
Psa 78:22 Because they did not believe in God,  
And did not trust in His salvation.  
Psa 78:23 Yet He had commanded the clouds above,  
And opened the doors of heaven,  
Psa 78:24 Had rained down manna on them to eat,  
And given them of the bread of heaven.  
Psa 78:25 Men ate angels' food;  
He sent them food to the full.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - reminding his audience - about the way that the Israelites - invoked the anger of God.

Rather than rejoicing in the manna that came down from heaven...

...they complained about the pastry cakes that the Lord provided.

And being that the manna was a symbolic shadow of our Savior's incarnation...

...they were actually complaining about the salvation of the Lord.

With that being the case - we should learn a lesson about the carnal corruption - caused by complaining.

I'll remind you that - those who complained in the wilderness - ended up being destroyed by the destroyer.

And it's for this reason that Paul encouraged every Christian - to avoid making the same mistake.

It's in Philippians chapter 2 - beginning at verse 14 - where Paul declared....

Phl 2:14 Do all things without complaining and disputing,

Phl 2:15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,  
Phl 2:16 holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Now - listen - I know how easy it is - to start complaining about the things that aren't working out the way we want them to.

And so - it's important for us to remember that - we might be complaining....

...about the very thing that the Lord is using - to bless us.

And it's for this reason that Paul encouraged us to do all things without complaining.

With this as the goal - let's consider how the complaints of the Israelites resulted in the wrath of God.

Let's pick up our study of the 78th Psalm - beginning there at verse 26 - where Asaph tells us about the day when the Lord...

Psa 78:26 ...caused an east wind to blow in the heavens;  
And by His power He brought in the south wind.

Psa 78:27 He also rained meat on them like the dust,  
Feathered fowl like the sand of the seas;

Psa 78:28 And He let them fall in the midst of their camp,  
All around their dwellings.

Psa 78:29 So they ate and were well filled,  
For He gave them their own desire.

Psa 78:30 They were not deprived of their craving;  
But while their food was still in their mouths,

Psa 78:31 The wrath of God came against them,  
And slew the stoutest of them,

And struck down the choice men of Israel.

Psa 78:32 In spite of this they still sinned,  
And did not believe in His wondrous works.

Psa 78:33 Therefore their days He consumed in futility,  
And their years in fear.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - describing the day - when the Lord punished those who complained about His provisions.

And it's sad to say that those who survived this day of wrath...

...continued to reject the salvation of the Lord.

And it's for this reason that they were forced to wander - for forty years...

...until the bodies of the unbelievers were scattered in the wilderness.

And as a result - their days were consumed in futility - and their years in fear.

From this - we can see that - those who fail to walk by faith - - will waste away - as they live in fear.

And it's for this reason that I encourage every Christian to walk by faith...

...because those who don't - are just wandering through the wilderness...

...as they flee from everything that fills their hearts with fear.

We should also consider how the believer who fails to stand fast in the faith - will find themselves stuck in a cycle of rebellion - rebuke - and repentance.

Let's consider how Asaph explained it - here in the 78th Psalm - look with me - beginning there at verse 34 - where the Psalmist declared...

Psa 78:34 When He slew them, then they sought Him;  
And they returned and sought earnestly for God.

Psa 78:35 Then they remembered that God was their rock,  
And the Most High God their Redeemer.

Psa 78:36 Nevertheless they flattered Him with their mouth,  
And they lied to Him with their tongue;

Psa 78:37 For their heart was not steadfast with Him,  
Nor were they faithful in His covenant.

Psa 78:38 But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity,  
And did not destroy them.

Yes, many a time He turned His anger away,  
And did not stir up all His wrath;

Psa 78:39 For He remembered that they were but flesh,  
A breath that passes away and does not come again.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - describing the vicious cycle that the children of Israel experienced...

...as their rebellion resulted in the righteous rebuke of the Lord.

And then - the rebuke of the Lord would bring them to repentance - as they returned to the Lord.

But then - it was only a matter of time until their return resulted in another rebellion...

...followed by rebuke - repentance - and restoration - which resulted in another rebellion...

...followed by rebuke - repentance - and restoration.

Sadly - this is the same story of many who claim to be Christians.

They walk with the Lord for a season - - but then - they become backslidden believers...

...who end up in this viscous cycle of rebellion - rebuke - repentance - and restoration.

Rebellion - rebuke - repentance - and restoration.

If this sounds like your story - then I'm happy to tell you that...

...the Lord is full of compassion - and He's ready to forgive the iniquity - of those who trust in Him.

At the same time - it's also important to realize that - the Lord has promised to punish His children...

...with the loving correction that we need.

And so - how much of your life do you want to spend receiving a spiritual spanking.

How much time do you want to spend in the corner of correction?

With this question in mind - I should take a moment to point out that - the Lord knows how to correct those who are living in sin.

Let's consider how Asaph put it - here in the 78th Psalm - look with me - beginning there at verse 40 - where he declared...

Psa 78:40 How often they provoked Him in the wilderness,  
And grieved Him in the desert!

Psa 78:41 Yes, again and again they tempted God,  
And limited the Holy One of Israel.

Psa 78:42 They did not remember His power:  
The day when He redeemed them from the enemy,

Psa 78:43 When He worked His signs in Egypt,  
And His wonders in the field of Zoan;

Psa 78:44 Turned their rivers into blood,  
And their streams, that they could not drink.

Psa 78:45 He sent swarms of flies among them, which devoured them,  
And frogs, which destroyed them.

Psa 78:46 He also gave their crops to the caterpillar,  
And their labor to the locust.

Psa 78:47 He destroyed their vines with hail,  
And their sycamore trees with frost.

Psa 78:48 He also gave up their cattle to the hail,  
And their flocks to fiery lightning.

Psa 78:49 He cast on them the fierceness of His anger,  
Wrath, indignation, and trouble,  
By sending angels of destruction among them.

Psa 78:50 He made a path for His anger;  
He did not spare their soul from death,

But gave their life over to the plague,  
Psa 78:51 And destroyed all the firstborn in Egypt,  
The first of their strength in the tents of Ham.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - reminding the Children of Israel...

...about the way that the Lord rebuked the Egyptians - when they refused to repent of their wicked ways.

And just to be clear - Asaph recapped the 10 plagues that the Lord sent upon the land of Egypt...

...each of which were designed to reveal that the God of Israel is greater than the false gods of Egypt...

...which were nothing more than demons - masquerading as gods.

I like the way that Moses explained it in Numbers chapter 33 - it's verse 4 where we learn that...

Num 33:4 ...the LORD had executed judgments on their gods

And just to be clear - Moses wasn't calling the gods of Egypt - lesser gods who were part of a divine counsel.

No - instead - the gods of Egypt were nothing more than idols - manipulated by demons.

Here's how the Lord explained it - in Ezekiel chapter 30 - it's verse 13 - where Ezekiel declared...

Eze 30:13 "This is what the Lord GOD says:  
I will destroy the worthless idols  
and put an end to the false gods in Memphis.  
There will no longer be  
a prince from the land of Egypt.  
And I will instill fear in that land.

According to the Lord - the gods of Egypt were nothing more than worthless idols — which were eel - or - false gods.

And it's for this reason that the Lord revealed His almighty power...

...through the 10 plagues that targeted 10 idols of Egypt.

And listen - the Lord not only free the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt - but He also paved the way for them to acquire the land of their inheritance.

Let's consider how Asaph put it - here in the 78th Psalm - look with me - beginning there at verse 52 - where he declared...

Psa 78:52 But He made His own people go forth like sheep,  
And guided them in the wilderness like a flock;

Psa 78:53 And He led them on safely, so that they did not fear;  
But the sea overwhelmed their enemies.

Psa 78:54 And He brought them to His holy border,  
This mountain which His right hand had acquired.

Psa 78:55 He also drove out the nations before them,  
Allotted them an inheritance by survey,  
And made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph reminding the children of Israel...

...about the way in which the Lord enabled them to acquire the inheritance of land...

...that the Lord promised to give to the descendants of Abraham - Isaac - and Jacob.

This not only included the way that the Lord freed them from the bondage of Egypt...

...but - He continued to pave the way for them to inherit the land of promise...

...as He drove out the nations who were already dwelling in the land.

And in this way - the Lord enabled the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents - there in the promised land.

Sadly - the people of God provoked the Lord - as they rebelled against His commandments.

Let's consider how Asaph put it here in the 78th Psalm - look with me - beginning there at verse 56 - where he declared...

Psa 78:56 Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God,  
And did not keep His testimonies,

Psa 78:57 But turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers;  
They were turned aside like a deceitful bow.

Psa 78:58 For they provoked Him to anger with their high places,  
And moved Him to jealousy with their carved images.

Psa 78:59 When God heard this, He was furious,  
And greatly abhorred Israel,

Psa 78:60 So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh,  
The tent He had placed among men,

Psa 78:61 And delivered His strength into captivity,  
And His glory into the enemy's hand.

Psa 78:62 He also gave His people over to the sword,  
And was furious with His inheritance.

Psa 78:63 The fire consumed their young men,  
And their maidens were not given in marriage.

Psa 78:64 Their priests fell by the sword,  
And their widows made no lamentation.

Rather than worshipping the One - Who brought them into the land of promise...

...the children of Israel started worshipping the false gods of the pagan nations - on the high places of Israel.

In this way - they people provoked the true and living God.

And it's for this reason that He allowed their enemies to conquer them.

With all of this in mind - we can see how the nation of Israel has continued to ride this carousel...

...that results in Rebellion - rebuke - repentance - and restoration.

The Lord restored their liberty - by bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

And within no time - they rebelled - then they were rebuked - which led to their repentance...

...and then they were restored - as the Lord led them into the land of promise.

Then - after living in the land of promised - the people rebelled against God - by worshipping carved images.

After that - they were rebuked with the sword of their enemies - until they repented - and returned to God.

Then - they were restored - as the Lord established them in the land of promise...

...according to the leadership of King David.

Let's consider how Asaph explained it - here in the 78th Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 65 - where we learn that...

Psa 78:65 ...the Lord awoke as from sleep,  
Like a mighty man who shouts because of wine.

Psa 78:66 And He beat back His enemies;  
He put them to a perpetual reproach.

Psa 78:67 Moreover He rejected the tent of Joseph,  
And did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,

Psa 78:68 But chose the tribe of Judah,  
Mount Zion which He loved.

Psa 78:69 And He built His sanctuary like the heights,  
Like the earth which He has established forever.

Psa 78:70 He also chose David His servant,  
And took him from the sheepfolds;

Psa 78:71 From following the ewes that had young He brought him,  
To shepherd Jacob His people,  
And Israel His inheritance.

Psa 78:72 So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart,  
And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.

Here in the final verses of this Psalm - we find Asaph - reminding the children of Israel...

...about way that the Lord raised up David - from the tribe of Judah - to lead the people - like a shepherd leads his sheep.

And with this as the goal - we shouldn't be surprised to learn that...

...David spent his youth - tending the sheep of his father - Jesse.

Sadly - this didn't stop the children of Israel - from continuing to make their rounds - on the carousel of carnal repercussions.

It wasn't long after King David's son ascended to the throne of Israel...

...when the nation of Israel was completely given over to their idolatries.

And it's for this reason that the Lord divided the kingdom in two.

And then - about 200 years later - the Northern tribes of Israel were conquered by the Assyrians...

...and then - about 135 years later - the Southern kingdom was conquered by the Babylonians.

This was followed by 70 more years of captivity - which resulted in the repentance of the people...

...and the restoration of Israel to the land of promise.

The same cycle was repeated again - as the children of Israel rebelled against the Lord back in the first century - by rejecting their Messiah.

And by 70 AD - the Romans sacked the city of Jerusalem - and the Temple was destroyed.

By the middle of the second century AD - the children of Israel were dispersed into the Gentile nations.

The Jews who ended up in Europe - became known as the Ashkenazis.

Those who settled in Mediterranean region - became known as the Sephardic Jews.

And the Jews who settled in other regions of the Middle East - became known as the Mizrahi Jews.

And after 2000 years of exile - which included the holocaust for the Jews living in Europe...

...the Lord has restored the people to the land of promise.

With all of this in mind - we can see how the history of Israel - is that of Rebellion - rebuke - repentance - and restoration.

And while we can rejoice in knowing that the Lord is always ready to restore the repentant...

...it's sad to say that many Christians have followed this same repetitive cycle....

...that includes Rebellion - rebuke - repentance - and restoration.

If this sounds like your situation - then - I encourage you to remember that...

...the Lord knows how to destroy the idols that we put in His place.

And He knows how to chasten us - so that we come to a place of repentance.

The only question that we should ask is this - - how long do we want to suffer the spanking?

At the same time - I also encourage every Christian to realize that - the Lord might call upon us - to help restore a backslidden believer.

Let's consider how Paul put it - in Galatians chapter 6 - it's beginning at verse 1 - where he declared...

Gal 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

Gal 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Christian - listen - there will be times when the Lord will call us to help a backslidden believer...

...so that they might be restored - in a spirit of gentleness.

And so - much like Asaph - there will be times when we should who remind a rebellious believers...

...about the wonderful works that the Lord has done.

If you see another believer - who is overtaken in their trespasses and sins...

...then - you might take the time to remind them that the Lord is a gracious God...

...Who is slow to anger - and quick to forgive.

In this way - we will help them to remember the kindness of the Lord...

...which leads us to repentance.

With all of this in mind - I wanna conclude this study - by reminding you that that...

...the the Lord is a gracious and merciful God - Who is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness - and He relents from doing harm.

And while we can rejoice in knowing that He's always ready to forgive the repentant...

...I also encourage you to realize that - life is better - when we walk by faith...

...with the One Who was sent to Shepherd our souls.

Remember - the Lord Jesus is the good Shepherd - Who is able to lead His sheep - according to the will of God.

And so - rather than going round and round - in the cycle of Rebellion - rebuke - repentance - and restoration...

...let's simple stay close to our good Shepherd Jesus - so that we can stay on the narrow path of His righteousness.

And in this way - we will enjoy the blessings that belong to those who trust in Jesus.