

Shepherd of Israel  
Psalm 80

*Psalm 80:3 (NKJV)* Restore us, O God; Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!

Three times the Psalmist says, “Restore us, O God; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved.” This reminds us of the words that God gave to Aaron for blessing the people. This same blessing is still used. The words of this blessing are:

*Numbers 6:24–26 (NKJV)* <sup>24</sup>“The Lord bless you and keep you; <sup>25</sup>the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup>the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.

When Moses spent time in the presence of God on the Mountain, his face shone so that people could not bear to look at it. God’s face shining on us indicates His presence and His favor. The blessing the priests were instructed to give asked God to be with His people and to show them grace.

In Psalm 80, the repeated use of. “Restore us, O God,” shows that Israel was going through rough times. For many years, they had ignored God’s prophets, rejected His ways, served idols. Because of their sinfulness, they suffered the consequences.

This is a song set to the tune of “The Lilies.” Four Psalms are sung to this tune. Apparently, the melody was well known. Putting something in music is one way to make sure it is repeated many times and memorized. Most of us know the words to “Jingle Bells,” “Jesus Loves Me,” and “The Star-Spangled Banner” without having purposed to memorize them. Although we do not know the tune, we need the lessons this song teaches.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray and turned to our own way. And we have suffered the consequences. Like Israel, we need God to restore us, cause His face to shine on us, and save us.

The first lesson we learn from this song is that we must address ourselves to God. We cannot ignore God or the wrong we have done. So, the first thing we must do to be restored is turn to our heavenly Father.

The Psalmist turns to God by saying, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel." The Lord as our Shepherd is a great comfort. The most beloved Psalm is Psalm 23 that starts with "The Lord is my Shepherd. Remembering the care with which the Father has brought us this far is an excellent place to start.

The Psalmist speaks for the nation. Joseph is used to represent the whole of the descendants of Jacob. After King Solomon's reign, the nation was divided by civil war and was never reunited. During this divided kingdom, there was a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. Ephraim is a reference to the northern kingdom called Israel. Benjamin is part of the southern kingdom where Jerusalem is. The southern kingdom is known as "Judah." Manasseh was partly on the eastern side of the Jordan river and represents the tribes on that side of the river. Each of these references serves as a reminder that we are God's people, even though divided. The nation was a miraculous work of God. For the Psalmist, it was the nation. For us, we are part of the Church, the body of Christ. When we call upon the Lord, we call upon the One who is building His Church.

Acknowledging that God is the God of all Israel, the Psalmist also recognizes the holiness of God. The One enthroned between the cherubim could not be approached. The Tabernacle and Temple were built with a massive, thick curtain blocking off all access to the Ark of the Covenant where the cherubim were located.

The Lord, our God, is holy. He dwells in unapproachable light. God is the God of Israel, and He is holy.

Our iniquities separate us from God. He is holy and just and will not leave the wicked unpunished. When we call upon the Lord, we must recognize that we have sinned against Him.

This is the second lesson in the Psalm. God is angry.

What! How can you say such a thing?

Look at the Psalm.

*Psalm 80:4–6 (NKJV)* <sup>4</sup>O Lord God of hosts, how long will You be angry against the prayer of Your people? <sup>5</sup>You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in great measure. <sup>6</sup>You have made us a strife to our neighbors, and our enemies laugh among themselves.

Verse 4 says that God was angry even with the prayers of His people!

God's displeasure with prayers comes up too often in Scripture. Isaiah says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear."

God's anger is not appeased by words.

Seeking restoration, the Psalmist recounts the history of Israel using a grapevine as a metaphor. He speaks of how God rescued Israel out of Egypt and established her in the promised land. God made her prosperous, and then in His anger, destroyed her. In verse 14, the Psalmist says:

*Psalm 80:14 (NKJV)* Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; look down from heaven and see, and visit this vine...

What would God see if He returned? The Psalmist describes the vine in verse 16.

*Psalm 80:16 (NKJV)* It is burned with fire, it is cut down; they perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.

The suffering of Israel was horrendous. The destruction of the northern kingdom was complete, and there was only a tiny remnant remaining of Judah.

In 586 BC, the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and deported the surviving Israelites. Seventy years later, a remnant returned, led by Nehemiah. From that day until 1947, the nation of Israel was persecuted.

Look at Psalm 80, verse 17.

*Psalm 80:17 (NKJV)* Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.

Who is the Son of Man?

We are introduced to Him in Daniel 7:13-14

*Daniel 7:13–14 (NKJV)* <sup>13</sup>“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. <sup>14</sup>Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the One which shall not be destroyed.

The Son of Man is the Messiah, the One the Israelites were waiting for. They were looking for a deliverer, and those who, like Simeon, were righteous understood that Psalm 80 was asking God for the Messiah.

Isaiah 9 speaks of this promised Messiah.

*Isaiah 9:1–2 (NKJV)* <sup>1</sup>Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, as when at first He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward more heavily oppressed her, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. <sup>2</sup>The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.

*Isaiah 9:6–7 (NKJV)* <sup>6</sup>For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup>Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, He was greeted by Shepherds and laid in a feeding trough. Isaiah tells us:

*Isaiah 53:3 (NKJV)* He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Why this welcome for the One who is to deliver us? We see the answer in Isaiah 53:10.

*Isaiah 53:10 (NKJV)* Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin...

God made His Son an offering for sin.

Remember, I said that God is angry and that words cannot appease His wrath? Consider this verse:

*1 John 2:1-2 (NKJV)* <sup>1</sup>...And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup>And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

What does it mean that He is the “propitiation” for our sins? Propitiation is the satisfying or appeasing of wrath. The first step in the restoration was accomplished when God made the Son of Man’s soul an offering for sin.

Jesus’ first coming was as a baby, born in a working man’s family unrecognized and unaccepted. But He was born a descendant of David, a lawful heir to David’s throne.

We, along with Israel and all of creation, still wait in hope for God to completely restore what has been lost because of sin.

Jesus will come again. However, this time He will come with power and great glory. He will come as King, and the government of the whole earth will be on His shoulders as promised.

Christmas is about hope. The promised Messiah came, but we still hope for His work in completely restoring us. Jesus is the promised Messiah, and we wait in hope for His return.

If you have not called upon Him to restore you, He is still angry. He invites you to come and ask for salvation from the One who came as a baby. He will not reject any who come. But for those who refuse His wonderful gift, John 3:36 reminds us that the wrath of God remains on him.

*John 3:36 (NKJV)* He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.