

Day 353 - TUESDAY: January 30th

Psalms 77, 78 & 79

Psalms 77:1-20 NKJV

To the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun. A Psalm of Asaph. I cried out to God with my voice—To God with my voice; And He gave ear to me. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; My soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, The years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart, And my spirit makes diligent search. Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favorable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Selah And I said, "This is my anguish; But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds. Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; Who is so great a God as our God? You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples. You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, The sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah The waters saw You, O God; The waters saw You, they were afraid; The depths also trembled. The clouds poured out water; The skies sent out a sound; Your arrows also flashed about. The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; The lightnings lit up the world; The earth trembled and

shook. Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters,
And Your footsteps were not known. You led Your people like a
flock By the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Psalms 78:1-72 NKJV

A Contemplation Of Asaph. Give ear, O my people, to my law;
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth
in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, Which we have heard
and known, And our fathers have told us. 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. 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; That the
generation to come might know them, The children who would be
born, That they may arise and declare them to their children, That
they may set their hope in God, And not forget the works of God,
But keep His commandments; 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. The
children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, Turned back
in the day of battle. They did not keep the covenant of God; They
refused to walk in His law, And forgot His works And His wonders
that He had shown them. Marvelous things He did in the sight of
their fathers, In the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. He divided
the sea and caused them to pass through; And He made the
waters stand up like a heap. In the daytime also He led them with
the cloud, And all the night with a light of fire. He split the rocks in
the wilderness, And gave them drink in abundance like the
depths. He also brought streams out of the rock, And caused
waters to run down like rivers. But they sinned even more against
Him By rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness. And
they tested God in their heart By asking for the food of their fancy.
Yes, they spoke against God: They said, "Can God prepare a

table in the wilderness? 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?" Therefore the LORD heard this and was furious; So a fire was kindled against Jacob, And anger also came up against Israel, Because they did not believe in God, And did not trust in His salvation. Yet He had commanded the clouds above, And opened the doors of heaven, Had rained down manna on them to eat, And given them of the bread of heaven. Men ate angels' food; He sent them food to the full. He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens; And by His power He brought in the south wind. He also rained meat on them like the dust, Feathered fowl like the sand of the seas; And He let them fall in the midst of their camp, All around their dwellings. So they ate and were well filled, For He gave them their own desire. They were not deprived of their craving; But while their food was still in their mouths, The wrath of God came against them, And slew the stoutest of them, And struck down the choice men of Israel. In spite of this they still sinned, And did not believe in His wondrous works. Therefore their days He consumed in futility, And their years in fear. When He slew them, then they sought Him; And they returned and sought earnestly for God. Then they remembered that God was their rock, And the Most High God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they flattered Him with their mouth, And they lied to Him with their tongue; For their heart was not steadfast with Him, Nor were they faithful in His covenant. 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; For He remembered that they were but flesh, A breath that passes away and does not come again. How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, And grieved Him in the desert! Yes, again and again they tempted God, And limited the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember His power: The day when He redeemed them from the enemy, When He worked His signs in Egypt, And His wonders in the field of Zoan; Turned their rivers into blood, And their streams, that they could not drink.

He sent swarms of flies among them, which devoured them, And frogs, which destroyed them. He also gave their crops to the caterpillar, And their labor to the locust. He destroyed their vines with hail, And their sycamore trees with frost. He also gave up their cattle to the hail, And their flocks to fiery lightning. He cast on them the fierceness of His anger, Wrath, indignation, and trouble, By sending angels of destruction among them. He made a path for His anger; He did not spare their soul from death, But gave their life over to the plague, And destroyed all the firstborn in Egypt, The first of their strength in the tents of Ham. But He made His own people go forth like sheep, And guided them in the wilderness like a flock; And He led them on safely, so that they did not fear; But the sea overwhelmed their enemies. And He brought them to His holy border, This mountain which His right hand had acquired. He also drove out the nations before them, Allotted them an inheritance by survey, And made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents. Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God, And did not keep His testimonies, But turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers; They were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, And moved Him to jealousy with their carved images. When God heard this, He was furious, And greatly abhorred Israel, So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, The tent He had placed among men, And delivered His strength into captivity, And His glory into the enemy's hand. He also gave His people over to the sword, And was furious with His inheritance. The fire consumed their young men, And their maidens were not given in marriage. Their priests fell by the sword, And their widows made no lamentation. Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, Like a mighty man who shouts because of wine. And He beat back His enemies; He put them to a perpetual reproach. Moreover He rejected the tent of Joseph, And did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, But chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved. And He built His sanctuary like the heights, Like the earth which He has established forever. He also chose David His

servant, And took him from the sheepfolds; From following the ewes that had young He brought him, To shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.

Psalms 79:1-13 NKJV

A Psalm of Asaph. O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance; Your holy temple they have defiled; They have laid Jerusalem in heaps. The dead bodies of Your servants—They have given as food for the birds of the heavens, The flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth. Their blood they have shed like water all around Jerusalem, And there was no one to bury them. We have become a reproach to our neighbors, A scorn and derision to those who are around us. How long, LORD? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire? Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You, And on the kingdoms that do not call on Your name. For they have devoured Jacob, And laid waste his dwelling place. Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us! Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us, For we have been brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, For the glory of Your name; And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, For Your name's sake! Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Let there be known among the nations in our sight The avenging of the blood of Your servants which has been shed. Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You; According to the greatness of Your power Preserve those who are appointed to die; And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom Their reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord. So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture, Will give You thanks forever; We will show

forth Your praise to all generations.

Daily Deep Dive:

Psalm 77:

The UCG reading program states: “The middle phrase in the superscription of Psalm 77, which may be part of the postscript of Psalm 76, says "To Jeduthun"—the last of three occurrences of this designation in the psalms (see also the titles of Psalms 39 and 62). As mentioned regarding the previous occurrences, Jeduthun was one of David's three music directors, apparently synonymous with Ethan, who was over the Merarite performers (i.e., of the Levitical sub-tribe of Merari), as Asaph led the Gershonite choir and Heman led the Kohathite performers (compare 1 Chronicles 6:16, 1 Chronicles 6:33, 1 Chronicles 6:39, 1 Chronicles 6:43-44; 1 Chronicles 15:17-19; 1 Chronicles 16:41-42; 1 Chronicles 25:1, 1 Chronicles 25:6; 2 Chronicles 5:12; 2 Chronicles 35:15).

In great duress over some unnamed circumstance, Asaph has poured out his heart to God, knowing God has heard him (verse 1). He speaks in verse 2 of "the day of my trouble." While seemingly personal, this may, like some of the other psalms in this section, reflect a time of *national* tragedy—particularly considering the focus of the end of the psalm on God's past intervention for Israel.

Asaph has lifted his outspread hands to God in prayer through the night as he just can't get comfortable or go to sleep (verses 2, 4a). Thinking about God is only troubling to him (verse 3) because he doesn't understand why God is permitting or causing what is happening. He doesn't know what to say (verse 4b).

In verses 5-6, Asaph is trying to put the present situation into perspective by thinking on the past. Yet this engenders the question of why God is not showing mercy as He has before. In its note on verses 7-9, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states: "The formulation of questions has a therapeutic effect.... These questions go from the present situation of rejection (v. 7) to the cause: the Lord's 'anger' (v. 9). In asking these questions and in expressing his doubts, the heart of the psalmist comes to rest; for he knows the God of Abraham...will remain faithful to 'his promise.'"

Though in turmoil, Asaph determines to recall and meditate on God's mighty intervention of times past (verses 10-13). If the added italicized "is" in verse 13 (NKJV) is dropped, as it could be, the clause here, starting with the end of the previous verse could read, "...and talk of Your deeds—Your way, O God—in the sanctuary." The next line reflects what he would say: "Who is so great a God as our God?"

Through the remainder of the psalm, Asaph thinks about God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt in the days of Moses and Aaron (verses 14-20). Asaph's mind is moved as he meditates.

"Unconsciously he has jumped from (a) talking about God, to (b) talking to God. Then he finds himself in prayer (c) confessing God's greatness, and finally (d) he seizes on the fact that of course...he belongs to that people whom God has already redeemed" (George Knight, *Psalms*, comments on verses 12-15). Asaph concludes the psalm with declarations of God's sovereignty over the "waters"—a symbol of chaotic, threatening forces. The waters here are viewed as the thunderclouds of storm (verses 17-18) and the mighty sea, which God divided to lead his people through (verses 16, 19-20). "Lost in contemplation of the

greatness of God, the poet seems thoroughly distracted from his pain. He does not mention it again, not daring to compare it to the greatness of the Almighty" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 20). God is in control, and His aim is to deliver His people—as He surely will, in the proper time as He determines." [END]

Psalm 78:

The UCG reading program states: "Like Psalm 74, Psalm 78 is a *maskil*—an instructional psalm or "contemplation" (NKJV)—of Asaph. In this closing psalm of the first cluster of Book III, the second-longest psalm in the Bible, Asaph reflects on God's faithfulness despite Israel's history of rebellion against Him—and on God's decision to dwell with Judah rather than with Israel at large. Where the KJV and NKJV have "my law" in verse 1, the NIV has "my teaching," as the Hebrew word *torah* means instruction—principles to understand and live by, thus a law for life (compare Proverbs 1:8; Proverbs 3:1; Proverbs 4:2).

In Psalm 78:2, "the terms *parable* and *dark sayings* or riddles indicate sayings with 'deeper meanings' or 'teachings with a point' (Proverbs 1:6)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Psalm 78:1-2). The apostle Matthew quoted Psalm 78:2 as a prophecy of Jesus' use of parables (Matthew 13:34-35)—using stories to teach lessons. In Psalm 78 the story is that of Israel's history—a pattern followed by Christ's disciple Stephen in his message of Acts 7.

The general instruction here is not new, Asaph explains, as it was to have been passed down from one generation to the next so that succeeding generations would come to know God's laws and learn from the mistakes of past generations who failed to follow these laws (Psalm 78:3-8). Asaph is participating in this passage of instruction on a broad scale through the composition and performance of his psalm for the national audience.

Yet what may be new, the more subtle point of the psalm, as we will see, concerns the shift of the center of God's worship and of civil rule from the northern tribes to Judah. This is first hinted at in verses 9-11. The tribe of Ephraim son of Joseph here, as the leading tribe in Israel, was representative of the nation of Israel in general, particularly the northern tribes. Indeed, the mention of Ephraim in verse 9 with respect to a battle may be specific. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states: "From the description of God's judgment on Israel, on Shiloh ([the site of His tabernacle through the period of the judges] located in the mountains of Ephraim), and, particularly, on Ephraim (vv. 56-64, 67), the psalmist may be thinking of the Philistine incursion and victory at Ebenezer, which resulted in the loss of the ark and the destruction of Shiloh (1 Samuel 4:1-11)" (note on Psalm 78:9).

The loss at Shiloh, due to Israel's refusal to obey God, was a momentous development, as the psalm later points out. Yet it followed a pattern of Israel's rebellion since the nation's deliverance from Egypt, which is recounted in the psalm. (Zoan in verses 12 and 43 was an Egyptian city in the Nile Delta.) Despite God's awesome deliverance (verses 12-16), the Israelites rebelled in the wilderness, trying God's patience (verses 17-18). Though He had divided the Red Sea, they didn't believe He would provide food and drink for them in the desert. They thought they would starve because of His "deliverance" (see Exodus 16). And when He did provide, they were later unsatisfied with what He gave them (see verses 18-22)—even though He gave them manna, the "bread of heaven...angel's food" (verse 24), which Jesus later explained was symbolic of Himself given for others to partake of in a spiritual sense (see John 6). So God gave them what they craved—sending birds in abundance to provide them

with meat—but He struck them with a plague for their voracious lust and outrageous ingratitude (Psalm 78:26-31). The full account of this episode is found in Numbers 11.

"In spite of this," says Psalm 76:32, the Israelites continued to sin against God, not believing "in His wonderful works" (Psalm 78:32). How is this possible when they saw the supernatural intervention with their own eyes? Perhaps some did not trust what they had seen—or they willfully forgot. Yet on a wide scale this probably means that the people did not retain confidence in these things as proof of God's care for them or an indication that He would judge evil the next time as He had before. This too is a form of forgetfulness. In Hebrews 3:12-13, Christians are warned against following the Israelites' example in developing an "evil heart of unbelief...hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Because they didn't believe Him, God caused the Israelites to spend the rest of their days "in futility" and "fear" rather than entering the Promised Land (Psalm 78:33). For 40 years they wandered, seeking God then forgetting Him and becoming unfaithful (verses 34-42). Yet in His compassion, God averted His wrath on many occasions, remembering "that they were but flesh" (verses 38-39). God is still the same merciful God, for which we can be ever thankful (compare Malachi 3:6).

Again, at the root of the Israelites' unfaithfulness was their failure to remember—in the way they should have—God's power as exercised to deliver them from their enemies (Psalm 78:42).

Asaph, expressing what parents should have been teaching their children, again recounts God's striking of Egypt to free His people and His driving out of the Canaanites to give His people the Promised Land (verses 43-55). Having come to "His holy border" in verse 54, "this mountain" in the same verse is evidently the

whole land of Israel (as mountains often represent nations in Scripture).

Even in the Promised Land, the people "turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers" (verse 57). A major reason is probably that succeeding generations failed to pass on what God did for the nation—and to pass on God's laws. Verses 58-59 show that the Israelites sank into syncretistic and idolatrous practices, which infuriated God.

We come, then, to verse 60. Because of their pattern of unfaithfulness, God forsakes the tabernacle at Shiloh, allowing the enemy Philistines to capture, for a period of time, "His strength...and His glory" (verse 61)—referring to the Ark of the Covenant (compare 1 Samuel 4:22). Many Israelites were killed in the battle, including the high priest Eli's wicked sons Hophni and Phinehas (see Psalm 78:62-64; 1 Samuel 4).

In Psalm 78:65-66, God is portrayed as afterward rousing Himself and, with a great shout, beating back His enemies, putting them to a "perpetual reproach." Asaph is speaking of events leading up to the time he wrote this, essentially describing God leading Israel to defeat its enemies in the time of King David, creating an ongoing period of Israelite peace and triumph under Solomon. As part of this process, Asaph says that God "rejected the tent of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved, and He built His sanctuary like the heights" (verses 67-69). Thus, the center of worship is moved from the tabernacle of Shiloh in the territory of Ephraim to the temple of Jerusalem in the land of Judah. Focus is also placed on God choosing David, of Judah, as king over all Israel (verses 70-71). David's demeanor and care-giving knowledge as an actual shepherd of sheep was valuable training

for shepherding God's people on behalf of God Himself, the great Shepherd (see Psalm 23).

Yet there may be much more to this psalm. After all, Psalm 78:2 is prophetic of Christ's parables. His parables mostly concerned His servants and the Kingdom of God. Might there be a Kingdom parable here in Psalm 78? Certainly the need to remain faithful to God and His continual faithfulness to forgive upon repentance are Kingdom themes. But there may be more.

The exaltation of Judah as God's dwelling in Psalm 78 would take on greater meaning after the division of the kingdom into north and south upon Solomon's death and the subsequent apostasy of the northern kingdom. As the prophet Hosea would later write in Hosea 11:12: "Ephraim has encircled Me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit [following Israel's historical pattern in Psalm 78—see especially verse 36]; but Judah still walks with God, even with the Holy One who is faithful." Judah was in essence the faithful remnant of Israel. But Judah would later apostatize as well. Even then, however, an elect few remained as the true Jews, so to speak—the true Jews of today, the elect remnant according to grace, being God's Church (compare Romans 2:28-29; Romans 11:5).

In that sense, God building His sanctuary on Mount Zion could today figuratively represent the building of His spiritual temple, His Church, the spiritual Zion. Indeed, the psalm could be seen, in type, as showing the center of God's worship being moved from the physical nation of Israel to the spiritual remnant of Israel—again, the Church. Yet in looking forward to God's Kingdom, we should understand that the people of spiritual Zion will be established at the earthly Zion and all Israel will ultimately be saved—no longer enslaved to the pattern outlined in this psalm.

David in the concluding verses of Psalm 78 is in this picture representative of the rulers of God's coming Kingdom, especially the chief ruler, David's descendant Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd who will reign from the throne of David over all nations. David himself and all the saints will then reign with Him in perfect integrity and skill." [END]

Psalm 79:

The UCG reading program states: "Psalm 79, which begins the second cluster of psalms in Book III, is a lament over a devastating attack on Jerusalem and its temple. As with Psalm 74, this setting raises questions over Asaph's authorship noted in the superscription since Asaph would have seen no such invasion unless he lived well over a century to witness Pharaoh Shishak's invasion in the fifth year of Solomon's son Rehoboam (ca. 925 B.C.). Refer back to the Beyond Today Bible Commentary's introduction of Psalm 74 to see various suggestions for resolving this matter—the likeliest perhaps being that Asaph, as a seer, was foretelling the future.

Asaph may have been writing in Psalm 79 of Shishak's invasion, but it is likely that even later destruction was also being prophesied, such as that wreaked by the Babylonians (586 B.C.) and, later still, by the Romans (A.D. 70). The invasion and temple defilement by the Greek Syrians during the time of the Maccabees (ca. 168 B.C.) could also be represented here—as could the destruction and defilement of the end time yet to come. Note verse 2 in this regard: "The dead bodies of Your servants they [the invaders] have given as food for the birds of the heavens, the flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth." God through Jeremiah later warned of what His people would experience at the hands of the Babylonian invaders in similar

terms: "Their dead bodies shall be for meat for the birds of the heaven and the beasts of the earth" (Jeremiah 34:20; compare Jeremiah 7:33; Jeremiah 16:4; Jeremiah 19:7). Of course, Jeremiah's prophecy, in a dual sense, was foretelling both immediate and end-time devastation.

The word "saints" in Psalm 79:2 means "holy ones." This could perhaps refer to God's holy nation generally or more specifically to priests at the temple, yet it may have referred, as it would today, to spiritually converted people. An end-time setting would indicate the latter—and other prophecies do show that even some of God's end-time saints will be slain in the coming time of tribulation along with the people of Israelite nations generally.

The wording of verse 4, about being a reproach and target of scorn and derision, is very similar to that of Psalm 44:13.

Asaph asks "how long" this terrible situation will continue (verse 5). Will God be angry with His people forever? Will His "jealousy burn like a fire"?—that is, will His anger over His people's unfaithfulness utterly consume them? Things appeared so bad as to seem like this might be the case. So the psalm asks God for mercy, deliverance, atonement and salvation (verses 8-9). And it appeals to God to be true to His name as the Savior of His people—to defend His own reputation, as the enemy taunts, "Where is their God?" (verse 10).

The psalm is also a call for just retribution on the enemy and all nations that oppose God and His people: "Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You...for they have devoured Jacob" (verses 6-7). It asks for God to act as His people's divine Kinsman-Redeemer and Avenger of Blood, avenging the deaths of His slain servants (verse 10) and rescuing those who will likewise die at the hands of the enemy if He doesn't act (verse

11). Again, God's reputation is shown to be at stake: "Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the reproach they have hurled at you, O Lord" (verse 12, NIV). "The sevenfold restitution expresses a concern for full justice...the judgment must be equal to the severity of the reproach of God's name!" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verse 12).

Asaph at last expresses confidence that God, as a caring shepherd over His flock (see Psalms 23; 80), will act in His people's favor—so that they may praise Him for all time (79:13)."
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