

Psalm 78
The Wise Will Learn from the Past

Introduction: This is the second longest Psalm. Please note the phrase “the Most High” (vv. 17, 35, 56) an expression most common in Daniel. This Psalm challenges our thinking that, “If God would only ____, then I would trust and obey Him more.”

Superscription: *A Maskil* (a thinking opportunity) of *Asaph*

1) Introduction to the psalm—78:1-8

- a) This is a wisdom psalm in a parable format that recounts Israel’s history, particularly that of the northern tribe of Ephraim, from God’s perspective.
- b) God’s discipline of Israel is part of His wondrous works.

2) Out of Egypt and into the wilderness—78:9-39

- a) **Flashback # 1** (the exodus and wilderness wanderings)—78:9-16
 - i) Infidelity of God’s people—78:9-11
 - (1) Ephraim does not drive out the Canaanites. (Judg. 1:29) They are hot-tempered and self-absorbed complainers. (Judg. 8; 12) This is where the tabernacle is set up in Shiloh. (1 Sam. 1:24) They tolerate idolatry while the tabernacle is in Shiloh. (Judg. 18:31) They are used as representative of the northern 10 tribes. Something similar in Hos. 5:15-6:6
 - (2) Behind their defeat (v. 9) lay disobedience (v. 10) and behind their disobedience lay forgetfulness (v. 11). (Motyer)
 - ii) Fidelity of God—78:12-16 (cf. Ex. 13-17)
 - (1) Performs wonders, divides the sea, leads them, splits rocks, gives them water to drink.
- b) **Flashback # 2** (the manna and the quail; Num. 11)—78:17-33
 - i) Infidelity of God’s people—78:17-20
 - (1) Sinned against Him, rebelled against the Most High, tested God, spoke against God
 - (2) The issue was not God’s ability to provide, but rather Israel’s impatience and insolence. (FSB)
 - ii) Fidelity of God—78:21-31
 - (1) Wrath and anger (v. 21, 31)
 - (2) Grace (vv. 22-30) (cf. Ex. 16; Num. 11)
 - (3) Anger (v. 31)
 - iii) Infidelity of God’s people—78:32-33
 - (1) With sin and unbelief
- c) **Flashback # 3** (the pattern of the wilderness wanderings)—78:34-39
 - i) Infidelity of God’s people—78:34-37
 - (1) Repentance when the pressure was on, flattery, lying, infidelity
 - ii) Fidelity of God—78:38-39

- (1) Stubbornly compassionate pardon, preservation, longsuffering
 - (a) The stubborn sin of His people is often met by the stubborn compassion and grace of God.

3) **Out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land—78:40-72**

- a) **Flashback # 1** (the plagues against Egypt and the exodus)—78:40-55
 - i) Infidelity of God's people—78:40-43
 - (1) Rebelled, grieved, tested, provoked the Holy One, did not remember
 - ii) Fidelity of God—78:44-55
 - (1) Selective summary (6/7 of 10) of plagues in Egypt (vv. 44-51)
 - (a) "He leveled a path for His anger." There were no obstacles to impede its progress. (NET)
 - (2) Wilderness and the Promised Land (vv. 52-55)
 - (a) Summarizes the book of Joshua in 2 verses (vv. 54-55)
- b) **Flashback # 2** (entering the Promised Land; book of Judges?)—78:56-64
 - i) Infidelity of God's people—78:56-58
 - (1) Tested (vv. 18, 41), rebelled, disobedience, turned away, acted treacherously, twisted, provoked, moved him to jealousy
 - (a) They did not change because their location changed.
 - ii) Fidelity of God—78:59-64
 - (1) Wrath, rejection of northern tribes, abandoned Shiloh, suffering (1 Sam. 4:10)
- c) **Flashback # 3** (rejection of Ephraim and selection of Judah)—78:65-72
 - i) Fidelity of God repeated—78:65-72
 - (1) Aggressive (dangerous, violent) activity on behalf of Israel (vv. 65-66)
 - (a) Of course, God does not sleep! (Ps. 121:4)
 - (2) Choice of leadership among the 12 tribes (vv. 67-68)
 - (a) Negatively (rejected Joseph/Ephraim) and positively (chose Judah)
 - (i) Remember that Ishbosheth attempted to establish a kingdom in Ephraim after Saul's death. (2 Sam. 2:8)
 - (b) Judah was the 4th born, not first-born. The tribe had done nothing to distinguish itself in Judges. It didn't earn being chosen. Remember the prophecy in Gen. 49:10.
 - (3) Established tabernacle in Jerusalem (vv. 69)
 - (4) Sovereignly chooses King David (vv. 70-72) (cf. 2 Sam. 7)
 - (a) From humble beginnings (v. 70)
 - (i) God chose, God took
 - (b) Given great responsibilities over **both** kingdoms (v. 71)
 - (i) God brought
 - (c) David is evaluated as a man characterized by: (v. 72)
 - (i) Integrity of character—*upright heart*
 - (ii) Exceptional leadership—*guided them with his skillful hand*

4) Things to remember:

- a) There is a danger that the more God gives, the less we appreciate it. (Kidner)
- b) There is a danger of discontentment, ingratitude, and spiritual defection.
- c) Our record is our shame, but God's persistent goodness is our hope for the unfinished story. (paraphrase of Kidner)
- d) Our sins they are many, His mercy is more.

Sing: *His Mercy is More*