

Psalms 78:0 ¶ Maschil of Asaph.

The Hebrew for “Maschil” describes this psalm of Asaph as one intended to instruct the people as they take note of their history.

Psalms 78:1 ¶ Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

The psalmist calls for the people to pay attention to what I am going to say. The Hebrew for “incline” makes reference to “cause to yield.” In other words, what I have to say is meant to cause you to yield to the LORD as you learn from your history.

Psalms 78:2 I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:

Psalms 78:3 Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.

Psalms 78:4 We will not hide *them* from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.

Asaph tells the people up front that he is speaking in a parable, a story with spiritual instruction. I liked the wording from the NLT: *“I will teach you hidden lessons from our past—stories we have heard and know, stories our ancestors handed down to us.”* The intent is to teach their children and future generations the reasons they should praise the LORD, about all the miracles He had done on their behalf.

I am reminded of the old saying that warns if we don’t learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it. Moses had taught this very truth, but it seems that the people as a whole had been lax in teaching their children about their history and the mighty works of God for generations.

Deuteronomy 4:9–10 “Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons; Specially the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb, when the Lord said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.”

Psalms 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:

Psalms 78:6 That the generation to come might know *them*, even the children *which* should be born; *who* should arise and declare *them* to their children:

Psalms 78:7 That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments:

Psalms 78:8 And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation *that* set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.

These verses emphasize the fact that God had given the people His commandments and had instructed them to teach these to their children throughout their generations as shown in the verses above and affirmed in those below. The LORD inspired Moses to

repeat this teaching three times to press upon the people the importance of this instruction.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.”

Deuteronomy 11:18–20 “Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates:”

Children have to be taught to trust God and keep His commandments. They have to be taught the works of God revealed in history. Unless they are taught differently, they are basically doomed to repeat the sins of those that have gone before them and rebel against God.

Psalms 78:9 ¶ The children of Ephraim, *being* armed, *and* carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.

Psalms 78:10 They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law;

Psalms 78:11 And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them.

The children of Ephraim seem to be singled out as representative of the people of Israel as a whole. JFB notes a possible reason: “The privileges of the first-born which belonged to Joseph were assigned to Ephraim by Jacob.”

1 Chronicles 5:1 “Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father’s bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright.”

Genesis 48:14–19 “And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim’s head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands wittingly....And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father’s hand, to remove it from Ephraim’s head unto Manasseh’s head. And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.”

Whether referencing Ephraim in particular or Israel as a whole, it is true that they did not keep covenant with God and were disobedient to His law. They paid no attention to (from the Hebrew for “forgot”) or chose to ignore all the works and miracles He had done on their behalf.

Psalms 78:12 Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, *in* the field of Zoan.

Psalms 78:13 He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap.

Psalms 78:14 In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire.

Psalms 78:15 He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave *them* drink as *out of* the great depths.

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

Asaph decides to draw attention to the miracles God performed in delivering the people out of the land of Egypt.

- He parted the waters of the Red Sea, causing them to pile up and stand aside so that all the people could cross the sea in safety.
- He led and protected them by a cloud during the day that became a cloud of fire in the night.
- He gave them an overflowing stream of water from the rocks in the wilderness to provide for their need not once, but twice—at Horeb and Kadesh.

Psalms 78:17 And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness.

Psalms 78:18 And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust.

Psalms 78:19 Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?

Psalms 78:20 Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?

The psalmist goes on to note that in spite of His miraculous provision, the people sinned even more against God, provoking His anger. They continued to try His patience by complaining because they had no food. They even questioned His ability to provide food for them in spite of all the miracles He had already performed on their behalf. Once again, He responded by having Moses strike the rock to provide water, and it flowed in abundance. Instead of being grateful, they continued to complain about the lack of food and to question His ability to provide them with food.

Spurgeon: “For them the heavens dropped manna, and they returned murmurs; the rocks gave them rivers, and they replied with floods of wickedness. Herein, as in a mirror, we see ourselves. Israel in the wilderness acted out, as in a drama, all the story of man’s conduct towards his God.”

Psalms 78:21 Therefore the Lord heard *this*, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel;

Psalms 78:22 Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation:

Psalms 78:23 Though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven,

Psalms 78:24 And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven.

Psalms 78:25 Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full.

Psalms 78:26 He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven: and by his power he brought in the south wind.

Psalms 78:27 He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea:

Psalms 78:28 And he let *it* fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations.

Their lack of faith in His ability to provide for them in every way made the LORD angry. Spurgeon's pointed observation: "This is the master sin, the crying sin. Like Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, it sins and makes Israel to sin; it is in itself evil and the parent of evils. It was this sin which shut Israel out of Canaan, and it shuts myriads out of heaven."

The people continued their complaining even after He fed them with manna from heaven, the same food the angels ate. He had also caused a great east wind to blow and bring an abundant supply of birds to add meat to their diet. All they had to do was pick up what was supplied; He dropped it all right at their feet.

Psalms 78:29 So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire;

Psalms 78:30 They were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat *was* yet in their mouths,

Psalms 78:31 The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen *men* of Israel.

Though God supplied everything they asked for, they continued to complain and whine. So, even though He supplied, God also exacted judgment by killing many of the sturdiest and choicest young men of Israel.

Psalms 78:32 For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works.

Psalms 78:33 Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble.

Psalms 78:34 When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and enquired early after God.

Psalms 78:35 And they remembered that God *was* their rock, and the high God their redeemer.

Psalms 78:36 Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues.

Psalms 78:37 For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant.

Did any of this result in repentance or gratitude? Not really. They continued in their sin of unbelief.

Verse 33 is basically declaring that they died in the wilderness without being allowed to enter the Promised Land. They spent their lives vainly wandering in the wilderness.

Another Spurgeon gem: “None live so fruitlessly and so wretchedly as those who allow sense and sight to override faith, and their reason and appetite to domineer over their fear of God. Our days go fast enough according to the ordinary lapse of time, but the Lord can make them rust away at a bitterer rate, till we feel as if sorrow actually ate out the heart of our life, and like a canker devoured our existence. Such was the punishment of rebellious Israel; the Lord grant it may not be ours.”

Though they made a pretense of repentance and acknowledging God as their Redeemer, it was just that—a pretense. Their hearts weren’t changed, nor were they committed to keeping covenant with God as they had promised.

This reminds me of how after tragedy, such as 9-11-01 in America, there is a great increase of people going to church to seek God’s favor but without any real desire to change their lives and live in obedience to Him. This is often true for individuals that face trouble in their lives as well.

I liked this quote from Trapp: “As iron is very soft and malleable while in the fire, but soon after returneth to its former hardness; so many, while afflicted, seem very well affected, but afterwards soon show what they are.”

Psalms 78:38 But he, *being* full of compassion, forgave *their* iniquity, and destroyed *them* not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.
Psalms 78:39 For he remembered that they *were but* flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.

Because God is so full of compassion, He forgave their sin and did not destroy them. Though they continued to provoke Him, He showed great longsuffering. He knew they were but flesh and would soon die, never to live again.

This is certainly a refutation of reincarnation.

It is also sad to note that this wilderness generation died in unbelief, with no hope of eternal life.

Psalms 78:40 ¶ How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, *and* grieve him in the desert!

Psalms 78:41 Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.

I liked the CJB translation of these two verses: “*How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wastelands! Repeatedly they challenged God and pained the Holy One of Isra’el.*”

I think that is a truth we don’t often reflect upon. We can cause God pain and grieve His Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:30 “*And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*”

I liked this quote from Guzik: “Not only did Israel’s stubborn disobedience provoke and tempt God, there was a real sense in which it **limited the Holy One of Israel**. In one sense it is impossible for the creature to limit the Creator. Yet, when God ties His work to man’s faith and /or obedience, there is a sense in which man can and does limit God.”

Psalms 78:42 They remembered not his hand, *nor* the day when he delivered them from the enemy.

Psalms 78:43 How he had wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan:

Psalms 78:44 And had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink.

Psalms 78:45 He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them.

Psalms 78:46 He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust.

Psalms 78:47 He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycomore trees with frost.

Psalms 78:48 He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts.

Psalms 78:49 He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels *among them*.

Psalms 78:50 He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence;

Psalms 78:51 And smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of *their* strength in the tabernacles of Ham:

Psalms 78:52 But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.

The psalmist yet again begins to enumerate many of the wonders God had worked on behalf of His people in delivering them out of Egypt. All of these plagues were directed to show the impotence of Egypt’s pantheon of false gods. (See journal on Exodus 12.)

- He had turned the rivers and waters into blood, making the water undrinkable.
- He sent a plague of flies and a plague of frogs.
- He destroyed the crops of Egypt with a plague of locusts.
- He destroyed the plants and trees of Egypt with hail and frost.
- He destroyed their cattle and flocks with a hail storm and lightning.
- He sent His destroying angels to kill all the firstborn of Egypt, effectively weakening the future of the nation.
- He then brought His own people out of Egypt like a flock of sheep and guided them through the wilderness.

Psalms 78:53 And he led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.

Psalms 78:54 And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, *even to* this mountain, *which* his right hand had purchased.

God kept His people safe as they left Egypt and drowned the armies of Egypt in the sea. He then led them safely to take possession of the Promised Land, including Mt. Zion, the place of His sanctuary. It was the right hand of His strength that enabled them to take possession.

Psalms 78:55 He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents.

Psalms 78:56 Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies:

Psalms 78:57 But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow.

Psalms 78:58 For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images.

It was God that cast out the heathen people of the land and divided it among the tribes for their inheritance. Still, they chose to rebel against “the most high God” and disobey His commandments—just as their fathers before them had. They made God angry by building altars on the high places and worshipping the idols of false gods.

Good quote from Maclaren by Guzik regarding “a deceitful bow”: “As such, a weapon does not shoot true, and makes the arrow fly wide, however well aimed and strongly drawn, so Israel foiled all Divine attempts, and failed to carry God’s message to the world, or to fulfil His will in themselves.”

Psalms 78:59 When God heard *this*, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel:

Psalms 78:60 So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent *which* he placed among men;

Psalms 78:61 And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy’s hand.

Psalms 78:62 He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance.

Psalms 78:63 The fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage.

Psalms 78:64 Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation.

God became very angry at Israel and abandoned the tabernacle at Shiloh and allowed the Philistines to capture the ark. (This event is recorded in 1Samuel 4.)

He gave His people over to their enemies in His anger. He had chosen Israel as His special inheritance among the peoples on earth, and they had proven faithless in spite of His faithfulness. Their young men were killed, and the young women left without husbands. The priests were killed, and their widows left so overwhelmed they were unable to mourn.

Spurgeon: “The nation had failed in its solemn task of instructing the young in the fear of Jehovah, and it was a fitting judgment that the very production of a posterity should be endangered.”

Psalms 78:65 Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, *and* like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine.

Psalms 78:66 And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach.

Suddenly, the LORD turned His attention back to His people; the psalmist makes the comparison to a man awaking from sleep or a man awaking out of a drunken stupor. He slaughtered His enemies and put them to shame.

Good quote from Poole: *“Smote his enemies in the hinder part, with the disease of the emerods, which was both painful and shameful. He caused them to perpetuate their own reproach by sending back the ark of God with their golden emerods, the lasting monuments of their shame.”*

Psalms 78:67 Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim:

Psalms 78:68 But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved.

Psalms 78:69 And he built his sanctuary like high *palaces*, like the earth which he hath established for ever.

God rejected the house of Joseph/Ephraim as the firstborn and chose the tribe of Judah and Mt. Zion (in Judah’s allotted land). There He built His sanctuary where it will be established forever. Yes, it was destroyed by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar and again by Rome; but when King Jesus comes to establish His kingdom, He will build a temple that will endure.

Spurgeon: *“God had honoured Ephraim, for to that tribe belonged Joshua the great conqueror, and Gideon the great judge, and within its borders was Shiloh the place of the ark and the sanctuary; but now the Lord would change all this and set up other rulers. He would no longer leave matters to the leadership of Ephraim since that tribe had been tried and found wanting.”*

Psalms 78:70 He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds:

Psalms 78:71 From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance.

Psalms 78:72 So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.

God then chose the shepherd boy David as His servant. He made him the king and spiritual shepherd of the people of Israel. He led them with a heart of integrity and guided them with intelligence, understanding and wisdom (from the Hebrew for “skillfulness”).

As with the previous psalm, the ending is abrupt. Asaph has made his point, however. He has followed God’s instructions and taught the people their history with the intent that they learn from the sins of their ancestors.