

Psalm 78-81 – Chapter Study

PSALM 78

A Contemplation Of Asaph.

This is one of the longest of the Psalms & recounts the history of Israel.

The Psalmist wants to encourage the people of his day with a reminder of the faithfulness of God.

1 Give ear, O my people, *to* my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

2 I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old,

3 Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us.

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.

5 For He established a testimony in Jacob,

A record of His mighty works -

And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children;

The great civilizations of the ancient world believed in many gods, but each had its own chief deity.

They believed their god had made a special relationship exclusively with them because they were a special people, better than everyone else.

What they owed that god was sacrifice, but not really much in the way of obedience.

The civil law people had didn't come from their god, it came from their ruler.

Israel was dramatically different in that God invited Israel, a displaced mass of slaves into a unique covenant with Him.

Part of that covenant was a highly detailed set of ***not only religious***, but ***civil laws***, governing just about every aspect of life.

That law code elevated Israelite society to a place far above the kingdoms around her.

One of the duties enjoined in the law was the imperative of teaching the next generation their history & passing on what was expected of them – v. 6

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,

and their children, & so on with each new generation.

7 That they may set their hope in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments;

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.

Part of the history that would be taught was how the generation who'd been liberated from the slave pits of Egypt had failed to enter the Land of Promise through unbelief.

The negative example of their ancestors would work to encourage faith in them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

During the Exodus, the people began to grouse about the monotony of the same miracle day after day!

That's hard to imagine but it's what they did – they complained because of the manna.

They wanted an occasional burrito or burger.

They got tired of water & groused for a chocolate shake.

“If God really loved us, He’d give us Peach Smoothies!”

19 Yes, they spoke against God: They said, “Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?
Yes! – So WHY doesn’t He then? He **doesn’t really** care about us.

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?”

Again, certainly He can! But they aren’t content with the bread He gives, they want other & disregard the love & care He’s shown by their greed to satisfy the flesh.

21 Therefore the Lord heard *this* and was furious; So a fire was kindled against Jacob, And anger also came up against Israel,

22 Because they did not believe in God, And did not trust in His salvation.

The unbelief of Israel was a foolish tragedy because the evidences of both the power & love of God were undeniable.

God’s anger was both understandable.

The judgments He sent among them were more than justified.

23 Yet He had commanded the clouds above, And opened the doors of heaven,

24 Had rained down manna on them to eat, And given them of the bread of heaven.

25 Men ate angels’ food; He sent them food to the full.

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

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

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

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

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

31 The wrath of God came against them, And slew the stoutest of them, And struck down the choice *men* of Israel.

The manna was God’s gracious daily provision.

When they selfishly demanded meat, God brought a cloud of quail into their camp.

Some of them were so greedy for meat, they tore into it & began to eat it raw.

Because they violated the rule about eating blood, they were judged as they chewed.

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

Even the demonstrate of God’s judgment didn’t persuade the die-hard unbelievers.

Once again we see an example of how evidence, proof are not the issue with many unbelievers.

It doesn’t matter how much evidence for God they encounter – they refuse to believe because God is not an option for them.

They will spin the evidence in some other direction, even absurd directions!

It doesn’t matter, as long as they can cling to their unbelief!

Like Richard Dawkins in the movie **Expelled**, when Ben Stein backed him into a corner on the issue of ultimate origins, instead of acknowledging there just MIGHT, **maybe** be a God, he’d rather believe that aliens brought life to Earth!

And they mock us for our faith in God!!

Philosopher of Science & founder of the *Discovery Institute* **Stephen Meyers** came out with a book recently titled *Signature in the Cell*.

It’s a masterful explanation & defense of Intelligent Design.

What science has learned about genetics & DNA has caused many devoted scientists to rethink their materialistic assumptions.

Many have moved from being atheists & agnostics over into being theists – that is, they believe in an all-powerful & eternal Creator.

They haven’t all become Christians, a few have, but most have at least moved away from pure naturalism to an acceptance of the idea of a Creator/Designer.

It was the evidence that persuaded them that there must be a God.

Meyers describes some of that evidence well in his new book.

But the die-hard skeptics have been brutal in their reviews of the book.

Many of them haven't read it but write a review anyway, saying something like, "Meyer's tries to defend an already debunked, disproven idea."

They never actually debunk or disprove any of Meyers proofs or points.

They can't. The evidence is the evidence.

They might as well hold up the book and say, "This doesn't exist."

The problem with unbelief isn't a lack of evidence, it's the absence of will *to* believe.

They don't WANT there to be a God because they don't want to be answerable to Him for their moral choices.

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

That's the result of rejecting God – futility & fear.

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

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

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

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

When the long warned judgments finally began to come, they "got right with God."

But their repentance wasn't genuine; it wasn't sincere.

They didn't admit they were wrong, they were just unhappy & appealed to God for relief.

Think of the hypocrisy in their request for help!

God is good enough to ask for help for when trouble comes – but He's not good enough to live for when everything is going well.

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;

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

Oh the patience & forbearance of God!

40 How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, *And* grieved Him in the desert!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

49 He cast on them (Egyptians) the fierceness of His anger, Wrath, indignation, and trouble, By sending angels of destruction *among them*.

50 He made a path for His anger; He did not spare their soul from death, But gave their life over to the plague,

51 And destroyed all the firstborn in Egypt, The first of *their* strength in the tents of Ham.

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

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

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

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.

Conquest of Canaan.

56 Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God, And did not keep His testimonies,
57 But turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers; They were turned aside like a deceitful bow.
58 For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, And moved Him to jealousy with their carved images.

59 When God heard *this*, He was furious, And greatly abhorred Israel,
60 So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, The tent He had placed among men,
61 And delivered His strength into captivity, And His glory into the enemy's hand.
62 He also gave His people over to the sword, And was furious with His inheritance.
63 The fire consumed their young men, And their maidens were not given in marriage.
64 Their priests fell by the sword, And their widows made no lamentation.

This all refers to the time of the Judges when Israel went through cycle after cycle of renewal & rebellion.

65 Then the Lord awoke as *from* sleep, Like a mighty man who shouts because of wine.
66 And He beat back His enemies; He put them to a perpetual reproach.
67 Moreover He rejected the tent of Joseph, And did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,
68 But chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved.
69 And He built His sanctuary like the heights, Like the earth which He has established forever.
70 He also chose David His servant, And took him from the sheepfolds;
71 From following the ewes that had young He brought him, To shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance.
72 So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.

And that brought the history of Israel up to the current day.

V. 41 deserves our consideration & a message one day.

Yes, again and again they tempted [provoked] God, And limited the Holy One of Israel.

It's especially that last part that provokes me – "They limited the Holy One of Israel."

They limited the unlimited.

They made finite the infinite.

They cut power to the all-powerful.

They diminished the unshrinkable.

They reduced the irreducible.

God wanted to do ***so much for*** them, but they wouldn't ***let*** Him!

He ***told*** them what He wanted to do, He shared His heart with them and made them great promises.

But when it came time to fulfill them, they drew back.

They were like the child on the edge of the pool who refuses thru fear to jump to His father's waiting, beckoning arms.

Yes, junior is going to get wet, he's going into the water, but Dad is going to hold him and keep him safe and teach him over time to swim.

Dad is going to show junior his fear of the water is irrational.

But as long as Junior refuses to jump, he's limiting his dad's ability to teach him.

May we never limit the Holy One thru unbelief, thru fear.

He wants to do so much MORE than He's already done, which is much.

But He wants to do so much more – in our lives, in our church, in this county.

Psalm 79

A Psalm of Asaph.

Like Psalm 74, this is a cry of anguish over enemies who've laid waste to the temple.

It's a lament for the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians.

¹ O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance; Your holy temple they have defiled; They have laid Jerusalem in heaps.

2 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.

3 Their blood they have shed like water all around Jerusalem, And *there was* no one to bury *them*.

4 We have become a reproach to our neighbors, A scorn and derision to those who are around us.

5 How long, Lord? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire?

6 Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You, And on the kingdoms that do not call on Your name.

7 For they have devoured Jacob, And laid waste his dwelling place.

8 Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us! Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us, For we have been brought very low.

9 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!

As in some of the previous psalms, Asaph appeals to God's mercy & asks God to save His people for His glory's sake.

10 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.

11 Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You; According to the greatness of Your power Preserve those who are appointed to die;

12 And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom Their reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.

13 So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture, Will give You thanks forever; We will show forth Your praise to all generations.

The problem with the Babylonians was that while God ***used them*** as the instrument of His judgment on Judah, they ***went too far*** & became brutal beyond what they ***knew*** they ought to have done.

For that, they themselves would in turn be judged.

This Psalm, along with similar passages, provides insight into guidelines for ***how to conduct*** a just war.

Because we live in a fallen world where evil men & groups seek to dominate others, sometimes the use of force ***is*** necessary to stop them.

In Romans 13 Paul says God authorizes the civil government to use force to restrain evil.

Every once in a while I see a bumper sticker that irks me – "War is not the answer."

It all depends what the question is. Sometimes war ***IS*** the answer.

If the question is, What do we do about Hitler & Imperialist Japan?

The answer is – stop them!

If war is never the answer then the Nazi's rule the Western world while Japan with its ethnic cleansing genocide rules the East.

If war isn't the answer then African slaves are still picking cotton on Southern plantations.

I could go on.

Sometimes, to check evil, to halt the expansionist greed of a dictator, war is the ***only*** answer.

They don't respond to diplomacy – they ***use it*** to better their position & prepare for war because they're determined to have it.

In 1939 English Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain met with the German Chancellor, Adolf Hitler in Munich to find out Germany's intentions in Europe.

Germany had just taken over Austria & has about to grab a piece of Czechoslovakia.

Chamberlain asked Hitler to play nice & not kill any more Czechs than he had to.

Hitler ***promised*** that once they had the Sudetenland Germany was finished expanding.

When Chamberlain returned to England, he gave a speech & said –

"I believe it is ***peace for our time***. . . . Now I recommend you go home, and sleep quietly in your beds."

Not long after, Hitler invaded Poland & WWII was on. Over the next 6 years, 70 million died!

Sometimes war IS the answer!

But those who fight cannot throw morality out the window.

The use of force must be limited only to the objective of halting evil, it can never be used to promote it!
God allowed the Babylonians to invade & defeat Judah but the Babylonians went too far & became cruel.

That in turn called down God's wrath on them.

Psalm 80

To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Lilies." a Testimony of Asaph. A Psalm.

This is another desperate cry for help from God.

This was most likely composed early in David's reign when either the Syrians to the northeast or some of the eastern kingdoms like Moab & Edom were attacking Israel & causing trouble.

1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who dwell *between* the cherubim, shine forth!

2 Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, Stir up Your strength, And come *and* save us!

3 Restore us, O God; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!

4 O Lord God of hosts, How long will You be angry Against the prayer of Your people?

5 You have fed them with the bread of tears, And given them tears to drink in great measure.

6 You have made us a strife to our neighbors, And our enemies laugh among themselves.

7 Restore us, O God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!

8 You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it.

9 You prepared *room* for it, And caused it to take deep root, And it filled the land.

10 The hills were covered with its shadow, And the mighty cedars with its boughs.

11 She sent out her boughs to the Sea, And her branches to the River.

12 Why have You broken down her hedges, So that all who pass by the way pluck her *fruit*?

13 The boar out of the woods uproots it, And the wild beast of the field devours it.

14 Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; Look down from heaven and see, And visit this vine

15 And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, And the branch *that* You made strong for Yourself.

16 *It is* burned with fire, *it is* cut down; They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.

17 Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, Upon the son of man *whom* You made strong for Yourself.

18 Then we will not turn back from You; Revive us, and we will call upon Your name.

19 Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!

Psalm 81

To the Chief Musician. On An Instrument of Gath. A Psalm of Asaph.

If Psalm 80 was a **request** for help, this is a **celebration** of it.

1 Sing aloud to God our strength; Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob.

2 Raise a song and strike the timbrel, The pleasant harp with the lute.

3 Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon, At the full moon, on our solemn feast day.

4 For this *is* a statute for Israel, A law of the God of Jacob.

God had already shown His people He wanted them to **remember** His great acts of deliverance by celebrating them yearly.

Here was another they could commemorate.

5 This He established in Joseph *as* a testimony, When He went throughout the land of Egypt, *Where* I heard a language I did not understand.

6 "I removed his shoulder from the burden; His hands were freed from the baskets.

7 You called in trouble, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah

Asaph remembers how God heard the cry of oppressed Israel in bondage in Egypt & delivered them.

8 “Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will listen to Me!
God **wanted** to rescue them, but they needed to realize there were some problems that **hindered** that rescue they could take care of -

9 There shall be no foreign god among you; Nor shall you worship any foreign god.
Get rid of your idols!

This is like the guy who’s drowning. A lifeguard stands in a boat ready to throw him a life-ring with a rope attached.

But the lifeguard can see that the guy his holding an anchor in one hand.

“Help! Save me,” gurgle. “Let go of the anchor!”

10 I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

What has your idol ever done for you but consumed your livelihood?

11 “But My people would not heed My voice, And Israel would *have* none of Me.

12 So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels.

13 “Oh, that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways!

14 I would soon subdue their enemies, And turn My hand against their adversaries.

15 The haters of the Lord would pretend submission to Him, But their fate would endure forever.

16 He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat; And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you.”

Israel kept getting into trouble because they kept turning from God.

The Lord makes it clear – obeying Him, following His word is the path to abundance & peace.

Following the Lord obediently doesn’t mean one’s life will never know hardship.

Trials comes because they build character & make us more like Jesus.

And sometimes bad stuff happens just because we live in a cursed & fallen world.

But generally speaking, when we follow God’s word, both individually & especially collectively as a society, the result is blessing.