



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 78

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# Introduction

- This Psalm is titled *A Contemplation of Asaph*
- The author *Asaph* was the great singer and musician of David and Solomon's time (1 Chronicles 15:17-19, 16:5-7; 2 Chronicles 29:13) and 2 Chronicles 29:30 add that Asaph was a prophet in his musical compositions
- This Psalm is the longest of the historical Psalms and the second longest of all Psalms after Psalm 119
- Psalm 78 is classified as a historical Psalm because it tells the history of the nation of Israel, from their time in Egypt to the reign of King David



# Introduction

- It is a historical Psalm, but the history is not for the sake of records; it's history with a lesson (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13)
- What the psalmist shows throughout the Psalm is God's faithfulness to His people despite their unfaithfulness
- He shows that their repeated rebellion was due in big part to their inability to remember
- The need to remember and not forget is a theme that runs throughout this Psalm



# Introduction

- The Psalm does not tell the story of the past with any view of celebrating heroic ancestors and exalting national honors
- On the contrary, it is a long confession of national failings
- The psalmist invites his hearers to draw a lesson of warning for themselves from the past history of the nation
- The psalmist holds up the picture to his generation, in the hope that they may be taught to avoid repeating the sins of their forefathers



# Introduction

- Another major theme in the Psalm is that each generation has a responsibility to teach the next generation about the works and words of God
- In terms of its date; it is difficult to determine it
- However, it appears to have been written during David's life (or possibly shortly after) because the history which is related only goes so far as the time when David began leading Israel



# Introduction

## Psalm Outline

- Teach the Generations 78:1-8
- Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42
- The Plagues Which He Brought upon the Egyptians 78:43-51
- The Deliverance & Repeated Disobedience of Israel 78:52-58
- Their Punishment 78:59-64
- God's Wrath Against their Adversaries 78:65-66
- The Establishment of the Kingdom of David 78:67-72

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- Asaph begins the Psalm by declaring the need to teach
- Psalm 78 is a wisdom Psalm, written to instruct God's people
- Since the theme is the goodness and kindness of God to His stubborn and rebellious people; Asaph began by asking for the attention of God's people
- His first task is to get the attention of those whom he would address so they could hear the wisdom he would speak
- So, he orders them to *Give ear* and *Incline* their *ears*, both imperative verbs

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- To *incline the ear*, when applied to the people, means to hear with humility and obedience, but, when applied to God, means to hear with compassion and mercy
- *Incline your ears*, as a disciple does to the words of his master, with submission and humility, silent and sincere, that whatever is uttered for the purpose of instruction may be heard and properly understood
- He requests from his people to incline their ears *to the words of my mouth*, counting every word coming from his mouth, as conforming to the law of the Lord



# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- Some asked who is the speaker here and the answer varies
- Some, as St. Augustine, take it of the Father; St. Athanasius, St. Jerome with several others, of Christ; and others of Asaph himself, or David
- Those who believe the Speaker here is the Lord Christ, say that the Son of David is addressing His people whom He called from the Gentiles; *“As He says also in Hosea: ‘I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved.’”* (Romans 9:25)
- He presents to His people His law and the words of His mouth; He talks to them mouth to mouth

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- Those who believe the speaker here is David say that not only the kings, the rulers, the prophets, and the apostles, feel that the people of God are their people; but every single believer feels likewise; referring them to himself, and himself to them
- That is why 'Ruth' the Gentile, was counted as a 'believer', when she said to her mother-in-law 'Naomi': *"Your people shall be my people"* (Ruth 1:16)
- And Jephthah said to the men of Ephraim: *"My people and I were in a great struggle with the people of Ammon, and when I called you, you did not deliver me out of their hands"* (Judges 12:2)

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- And talking about his longing to build the house of the Lord, David says: *“Hear me, my brethren and my people”* (1 Chronicles 28:2)
- The psalmist counts God’s law as his law, referring it to himself, being a personal message presented from God to the believer; that is why the apostle says: *“My gospel”* (Romans 2:16, 16:25; 2 Timothy 2:8)
- So, he proclaims his great love for the divine commandment, cherishes it, and refers it to himself as a gift from God, to become his own, to acquire for himself, and to live it with his complete free will

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- The reason why the psalmist asks that what he says may be listened to with attention and humility is, that he is about to say difficult and *dark*, or mysterious matters, that require attention and humility
- By parables is understood here proverbs or metaphors that are usually short and figurative
- A parable, as we know from the teachings of Jesus, is a story which contains symbols and analogies, which convey a deeper meaning than the story at the surface
- Often, parables are meant to be applied to our own lives, in some way

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- Other times, parables give us a deeper insight into the truths and doctrines of God
- *Parables*, and *dark sayings*, since they contain symbols and analogies, cannot be fully understood without study and meditation
- However, they are very plain to the humble, diligent, and obedient seeker, who earnestly prays for the teaching of the Holy Spirit
- Asaph teaches us in this Psalm that the history of Israel is, in fact, a *parable*, from which we can explore deeper meaning, and uncover hidden things

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- St. Paul agrees; in writing about the history of the children of Israel, he said, *“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”* (I Corinthians 10:11)
- Matthew 13:35 quotes Psalm 78:2 as a prophecy of the way Jesus would teach, *“All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ‘I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.’”* (Matthew 13:34-35)

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- The psalmist has no mere narrative of facts to recount, but a history full of significance for those who can grasp its hidden meaning
- *I will utter dark sayings of old*, He would bring out, and apply, to the present case, the sayings and truth of *old* wisdom
- *Which we have heard and known*, Asaph will not bring up *new* things for discussion, but things already within the mind of Israel
- Being about to write a history of matters that had within them mysteries hidden from the beginning of the world, he tells us he got the history of these from the fathers, who got them from their ancestors

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- The facts of their past history had been handed down orally from father to son among the Israelites, not simply learned from their sacred writings
- So, the facts of Christianity have reached us, not merely through the New Testament, but also by the teaching of the Church Tradition and Fathers
- Receiving the truth from the lips of others put the instructed believer under grave obligation to pass on the truth to the next generation



# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- *We will not hide them from their children, They had a responsibility to not hide them from their children*
- They shall still be handed down in the same way
- The psalmist knew that what they had received, they had to pass on to the next *generation*
- *Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD: Asaph knew what followed in this Psalm came from events and themes received from their fathers*
- The psalmist emphasizes the *strength* and the *wonderful works* of God – not the strength or wonderful works of His people

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- Asaph was concerned about passing on at least three things to the next generation, the *praises of the LORD* – teaching them that God was worthy of our adoration and gratitude; God’s *strength* – His power and greatness above and beyond all; and *His wonderful works* – God’s power and greatness in active assistance to His people
- Throughout the OT the people of God are told that they have a responsibility; not only to remember for themselves, but to tell the next generation about what God has done (works) and what God has said (words) (Exodus 10:1-2; Deuteronomy 6:6-9,20-25; Psalm 145:1-4)

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- This teaching serves to produce hope and trust in God and protect them from sin and rebellion
- If one generation fails to pass along their faith and the stories behind their faith, the chain will be broken and faith likely lost forever
- Although now, the written scriptures are easily attainable, it is still necessary that the works and doctrines of God be transmitted orally from generation to generation to establish reverence for God in the family, and to witness to the next generation the goodness of God in our lives

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- Using poetic repetition for style and emphasis, Asaph began by describing one of the greatest of God's *wonderful works*, the giving of God's word to *Israel* as he heard from the fathers
- He places first the fact that God gave the people of Israel the law and the commandments through Moses, and ordered that the law must be given by the parents to their children, and so to be handed down to future generations
- Centuries later the Apostle Paul would explain that one of the great advantages God gave to Israel was that He committed to them His word, *the oracles of God* (Romans 3:2)

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- *He established a testimony*, The law of God testifies God's will to man
- According to Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem, God presented to His people, His law, the tabernacle, and the Ark of the Covenant, as a testimony to keep His covenant
- But, having broken the covenant, He presented to them the body and blood of His only begotten Son, as a living testimony in His church
- Not only should our children be taught, they should be taught to teach *their children* so that the word and the work of God will continue throughout the generations

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- St. John Chrysostom considers the role of parents in raising their children a holy work, practiced by the parents to present to God sacrifices of thanksgiving, the subject of His pleasure
- He says, “Never deem it an unnecessary thing that he should be a diligent hearer of the divine Scriptures. For there the first thing he hears will be this, ‘Honor thy father and thy mother’; so that this makes for you. Never say, this is the business of monks. Am I making a monk of him? No. There is no need he should become a monk. Why be so afraid of a thing so replete with so much advantage? Make him a Christian.” (Homilies on Ephesians, Homily 21)

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- He now in verse 7 & 8 explains why God gave the law to His people, and ordered the parents to teach it to children, and the children to hand it down to the future generations
- It is to make them put no trust in false gods, or the idols of the gentiles, but learn to trust God for themselves, never forgetting His wonderful works
- But to trust alone in the true God, who gave them a holy law from heaven, accompanied by great signs
- They should not forget God's wonderful doings in delivering them from the bondage of Pharaoh

# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- Furthermore, that they should seek to know and diligently put into practice, God's commandments
- To the psalmist, losing trust in God and forgetting His works would lead to disobedience
- If the younger generation is well instructed, they would be more likely to be obedient, avoiding many of the errors of *their fathers*
- They should not imitate the ungratefulness and the unfaithfulness of their fathers, who, after all the favors granted to them through Moses, proved most ungrateful



# Teach the Generations 78:1-8



- For, while they were in Egypt, they could hardly be brought to trust Moses, and after having left Egypt, they several times rebelled against Moses and against God; were forever murmuring, and worshiping the golden calf
- They were *stubborn and rebellious*; they did not *set their hearts aright*, and their *spirit was not faithful to God*
- Asaph's focus was on heart and attitude
- According to St. Jerome, the generation that came out of Egypt bore four features: loss of goal; blasphemy of the Creator; resistance and rebellion; and rejecting of, and not receiving the work of the spirit of God in them

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- In the first eight verses of this Psalm, Asaph introduced it as a *parable* (verse 2)
- The *parable* that Asaph is to relate, is the parable of the history of the children of Israel
- By calling this history a *parable*, we learn that we should meditate on this history, and consider what we can learn from the actions, words and behavior of the children of Israel
- We should apply to our own lives, the lessons taught by this history, just as we seek to apply to our lives the lessons that Jesus taught through parables

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- And now the historical part of the Psalm begins with some general remarks on the transgressions of Ephraim
- In verses 9-72 the psalmist details the history of the nation of Israel from Zoan to Zion (Egypt to Jerusalem)
- The retelling emphasizes both the faithfulness of God and the forgetfulness of the people
- The tribe of *Ephraim* was one of the larger and stronger tribes of Israel, and sometimes God called Israel *Ephraim*
- In 2 Chronicles 25:7 God used the phrase *children of Ephraim* to refer to the people of Israel as a whole

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- *The children of Ephraim*, were defeated in war for not keeping the covenant of God, not walking according to the divine commandment, and forgetting God's works and wonders
- It is figuratively speaking to mean that the Ephraimites were like cowards who flee in battle and failed to fight for the cause of God
- The sense here is of a *spiritual* battle
- God equipped Israel for conflict; they were *armed* and had *bows*
- Yet they often failed in *the day of battle*, because *they did not keep the covenant of God*

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- God makes spiritual resources available to His people for the spiritual conflicts they face (Ephesians 6:10-18)
- However, the effectiveness of those resources depends in some regard on their decision to actually make use of them
- *They refused to walk in His law, and forgot His works and His wonders*, Disobedience and ignorance among God's people were examples of being *turned back in the day of battle*
- They forgot God's kindness to them, and the wonderful works He did for them in Egypt, which had been related to them by their fathers

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- This being a parable, we can learn about the effects of disobedience, and a lack of faith due to not remembering the goodness and power of God
- This is a warning to all generations: the spiritual battle may be lost
- Forgetfulness of God is a sin and is the source of innumerable iniquities
- Such forgetfulness leads to disobedience, and weakens our faith
- And then, disobedience and lack of faith directly lead to defeat in spiritual battles

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- *Zoan*, known to the Greeks as Tanis, was situated on the east bank of what was formerly called the Tanitic branch of the Nile
- It was famous as the capital of the Hyksos dynasty, and was re-founded by Ramses II
- *Marvelous things He did in the sight of their fathers, In the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan*, To show that the wonderful things done by Moses were not done in a corner, but in a most public place, up to the king's palace

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- Having touched upon the wonderful things that were done in Egypt before Pharaoh; he now describes the other miracles that were performed in the departure of the Israelites
- As Pharaoh's armies pursued Israel, God miraculously brought the people through the sea on dry land as God *made the waters stand up like a heap* (Exodus 14)
- St. Augustine says, "*He divided the sea*" in order that the water might stand up first as if it were shut in, is able by His grace to restrain the flowing and ebbing tides of carnal desires, when we renounce this world, so that all sins having been thoroughly washed away, as if they were enemies, the people of the faithful may be made to pass through by means of the Sacrament of Baptism."



# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- God miraculously guided them through the wilderness
- And He miraculously provided for them in the wilderness
- When the Israelites came into the wilderness of Sinai, God assured them and guided them with the two demonstrations of His presence – the *cloud* by day and the *fire* by night (Exodus 40:36-38)
- Often in the wilderness the nation of Israel needed water, and many times God miraculously provided
- One occasion was at Meribah where Moses struck the rock and it split, bringing forth water (Numbers 20:10-13; Isaiah 48:21)

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- And on *cloud* and *fire* St. Augustine says, “Jesus Christ our Lord is manifest in the flesh, as if in a cloud; but in the Judgment it will be manifest like as in a terror by night; for then there will be a great tribulation of the world like as it were fire, and it shall shine for the just and shall burn for the unjust.”
- He speaks of *streams out of the rock*, says, “is surely able upon thirsty faith to pour the gift of the Holy Spirit (spiritually signify), to pour, I say, from the Spiritual Rock that followed, which is Christ: who did stand and cry, ‘If any is athirst, let him come to Me: ‘and, ‘he that shall have drunk of the water which I shall give, rivers of living water shall flow out of his bosom.”

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- God repeatedly did great and amazing things for Israel in taking the people out of Egypt and preserving them in the wilderness
- Yet Israel's response was to sin *even more* and to rebel *against the Most High*
- In spite of these miracles of mercy they sinned yet more, and tempted God in their unbelief, so that while He supplied their needs He was compelled to punish them for their sin
- Their additional sin, observes St. Augustine, was unbelief, wherefore it is said that they *provoked* God *in drought*, because, though their bodies drank of the water from the rock, their minds remained thirsty and dry of all spiritual grace

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- Despite the work of God in their lives, despite His miraculous protection and providence, the children of Israel not only “*continued to sin*” and “*rebelled*”, but they went further, and “*willfully put God to the test*”
- The two words sum up Israel’s behavior
- They rebelled against God by constant disobedience to His revealed Will
- They tempted Him, by disbelieving doubts of His goodness, and impudent disrespectful demands that He should prove His power
- He gave them manna, but they soon wanted meat – *the food of their fancy* (Numbers 11:4-10)



# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42

- They were dissatisfied with what God provided
- They thought the reason why God didn't give them what they wanted was because He *could not* – that it was beyond His power
- *Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?* With these words they *spoke against God*
- They *tested* Him, expressing their lack of faith in His power and lack of trust in His care
- They did not believe that God could meet their needs in the wilderness

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- Speaking of food and drink a scholar more deeply, extends it to all Christians who neglect the Savior's counsel, "*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness;*" and "*do not worry saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, what shall we wear?*" but are anxiously distressed about mere temporal things
- Apparently, the more God gives, the less we appreciate it
- This resentful response to a series of miracles is not different than the effect to the feeding of the five thousand: "*they said to Him, 'what sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You?'*" (John 6:30), a demand for a further and better sign

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- God blessed and provided for Israel in the escape from Egypt and in the wilderness
- Israel responded with complaining and unbelief
- God *heard* it and He *was furious* with their sin against Him
- God *heard* what they said in their hearts, and what they expressed with their mouths, all their murmurings against Him, their distrust of His power and providence, and disbelief of His promises Numbers 11:1
- The sins Asaph had in mind were the sins of ingratitude, testing God, and doubting His power and His care

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- God was *furious* with these sins
- Asaph uses this situation to teach the children what happens when we forget what God has done
- The wrath of God was kindled for their attitude, which all began because they forgot about what God was doing to provide for them
- Because of the murmurings of the people against the Lord fire came down from heaven, and burnt among them, and consumed the greatest parts of the camp
- Wherefore the name of the place was called Taberah, which signifies a burning, Numbers 11:1



# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- Or it may be taken figuratively for the wrath of God, which is oftentimes compared to fire Nahum 1:6
- *Because they did not believe in God, And did not trust in His salvation, Asaph stated it clearly for emphasis*
- They trusted neither in God's power nor in His love
- They neither believed that He would nor that He could save them
- *His salvation*, It was this sin which prevented Israel from entering Canaan, and it will prevent multitude of people from entering heaven
- The next part expresses God's mercy; God remains faithful despite our unfaithfulness

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- Even though the people rebelled against God and complained, God gave the command and rained manna from heaven (23-24)
- He gave them and *kept* giving them *bread of heaven* and *angels' food*, and they ate *to the full*
- It was a great aggravation of their unbelief and distrust, that they had had great experience of His power and goodness to them
- For He had given them undeniable proofs of both, and those not only from earth beneath, but from the heaven above, having commanded the clouds, as The Creator, to serve Him and His people, and supply their wants

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- He had absolute control over the clouds and had only to command them and they would provide in abundance which is signified by *opened the doors of heaven*
- *bread of heaven*, literally descended from heaven, *the clouds above ... rained down manna on them to eat*
- Manna is called *Angels' food*, not because the Angels eat of it, but because they ministered it
- St. Paul called spiritual food, "*all ate the same spiritual food.*" (1 Corinthians 10:3)
- According to St. Athanasius: Asaph means to say that God, not only fed their bodies by material food, but fed their souls by spiritual food, which is called 'the bread of angels' by St. Paul

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- Verses 26-29 refer to God's provision of quails to provide meat for Israel (Exodus 16:13; Numbers 11:31-32)
- The winds are under the power and authority of God, they are His servants that obey Him
- He says to one, go, and it goes; and to another, come, and it comes
- St Jerome's interpretation is that God made *east wind* to cease to blow, in order that the westernly wind from the Red Sea might bring over the quails from Africa
- The period when the quails were brought to the camp of Israel was in spring, when on their northward migration from Africa

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- God changed the wind, so as to bring them into the camp
- Numbers 11:31-33 describes how God sent quail to Israel when they complained about the manna
- *rained ... the dust* indicate the speed, and the abundance of the descending quails
- He did not rain on them fire because of their lack of faith, but in His longsuffering, He rained on them *meat*, uncountable *featherhead fowls* like *dust* and *sand of the sea*
- He literally *let them fall in the midst of their camp*, bringing the meat they craved to them



# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42

- God *gave them their own desire*, but because their craving was rooted in their self-will, the result was not good
- *were well filled*, Exceedingly filled, or too much, as some versions describe it
- They eat, not merely to satisfy nature, but to indulge, gratify and satisfy their sensual appetite
- Gluttony is a sin
- *He gave them their own desire*, they lusted after flesh; and they had as much of it as they would

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- The Lord showed them that He could provide for His people
- He also showed them that when lust wins its desire it is not good and has consequences
- St. Paul explains in Romans 1:21-25 the consequences of these foolishness, *“although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened ... Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts,”*

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- St. Augustine asks, “Behold why He had delayed? and he answers, “let us hear. *‘while their food was still in their mouths, The wrath of God came against them.’*”
- *They were not deprived of their craving*, By the goodness and kindness of God unto them, but they did not repent of their sin of lusting; nor did they abstain from their fleshly lusts
- God rained on them meat to eat; but when they did not give thanks to Him for it, ate and were filled, and got haughty, the wrath of God came against them for their denial
- God gave a disobedient and rebellious Israel all they desired and the quail turned to a plague of judgment among them



# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- The psalmist goes on to show in these verses that God, to satisfy the Jews, showed His great power by great miracles
- Still, that He did not let their unfaithfulness go unpunished
- They were brought to faith and to obedience, both by the miracles and the punishments inflicted on them
- St. Jerome applies this to those who receive communion unworthily, into whom Satan enters, and of whom the Apostle mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:27
- Despite all the blessings and the strongest of corrections, *they still sinned*

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- Israel did not learn either from God's goodness or from His wrath
- St. Augustine says, "He had delayed therefore in order that He might first do what they had believed that He could not do, and then might bring upon them what they deserved to suffer. For if they placed their hope in God, not only would their desires of the flesh but also those of the spirit have been fulfilled."
- God said that the generation of unbelieving people could not enter the Promised Land; that generation would be *consumed* in the wilderness (Numbers 14:22-24)
- The *futility* was expressed in the idea that they came out of Egypt, but never into Canaan

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- The *fear* was expressed in their unwillingness to take the land by faith (Numbers 14:1-4)
- Neither gratitude for favors received, nor fear at punishments inflicted, had any effect on the stiff-necked people; despite of both, they *sinned still*
- God did wonders of grace, which led them out of Egypt, protected them from their enemies, and miraculously provided for them, yet *they still sinned*
- Their faithlessness was punished by their forty years of vain and purposeless wandering in the wilderness

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- It took the most extreme correction from God, but eventually a generation of people grew and *sought earnestly for God*
- When they were scourged by God, and put to death by Him, *they returned* to their senses, and asked God's help
- God was executing punishments on the people while in the wilderness and they would seek after God only during the time of crisis
- But even their seeking was insincere
- The only time the people remembered God was when God punished them

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- *they remembered that God was their rock...their Redeemer, The truth was brought to their recollection that it was He who had delivered them from bondage in Egypt, and who had brought them out into freedom*
- *As soon as they felt the scourge they came to implore God's mercy, repentant, but through fear*
- *And their repentance was empty, for with their mouth they called to mind God's previous goodness*
- *But while they so professed their devotion to Him, they lied in their heart; For their heart was not steadfast with Him, Nor were they faithful in His covenant*

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- Their calamities had the effect of producing temporary change
- They became professedly penitent; they manifested a wish to know God and expressed a purpose to serve Him
- It was, however, a temporary and hollow, not a deep and real, change or repentance
- Many people when in danger, promise God to change and correct their lives, and the moment they recover resume their old habits
- But God will not be mocked; and such people will not escape His judgment

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- The psalmist now compares God's goodness with man's wickedness, and says, that though God scourged His people, He did not forget His mercy
- Therefore, He did not chastise them as heavily as their sins deserved, for He had mercy on them, and did not utterly destroy them
- God's response to their stubborn rebellion, to their insincere seeking, to their failure to be *faithful in His covenant*, was not surprising
- For He is *compassionate and merciful* to both good and bad, "*for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good.*" (Matthew 5:45)

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- Asaph presents to us from verses 32 to 39 a remarkable and affecting picture of man's heart, and God's gracious patience, in all ages
- Man's sin calling for rebuke and punishment which produce only temporary change
- But God's great love never get weary
- In part, God's understanding of the weakness of humanity prompted His compassion and forgiveness
- One reason He was merciful to them was because of their weak nature



# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- The weakness of man's life moves the merciful God to lessen some of the strict severity which our sins deserve
- The life of man is *A breath that passes away and does not come again*
- It may be fitly compared to the wind, which moves swiftly, so the life of man is quickly gone, his days move swiftly on
- Man is a mere passing breath, *"a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away"* (James 4:14)
- Asaph just explained God's compassionate response to Israel's sin
- Yet he did not want to ignore Israel's sin, their great debt of ingratitude, and their rebellion against God

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- As God multiplied His mercies, Israel multiplied its acts of rebellion
- So, in order to set the evil of their ingratitude in a still stronger light, the psalmist goes back to recount the miracles which preceded and prepared for the Exodus
- *How often they provoked Him in the wilderness*, They were continually committing such sins against God as provoked the eyes of His glory; ten times they tempted Him, the Lord says, Numbers 14:22
- God is *grieved* at man's sins Genesis 6:6; Psalm 95:10; Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 3:17

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- *Yes, again and again they tempted God, They turned to their old ways again and again*
- *Because they kept on tempting God, they limited the Holy One of Israel; namely, they opposed His divine might, or doubted it*
- *And limited the Holy One, According to the Septuagint version, means hurt or provoked*
- *They did not remember His power, The exodus redemption is often presented in the Hebrew Scriptures as a demonstration of the power of God*

# Israel in the Wilderness 78:9-42



- *They did not remember His power, Which brought them out of Egypt, and crushed their enemies, and which so often supplied their needs in the wilderness*
- Asaph had in mind the great power God showed in setting Israel free from their 400 years of slavery in Egypt
- It is such foolishness that the Jews forgot the countless and most wonderful signs and miracles that God did in their favor while He was bringing them out from the bondage of Egypt
- In reciting this history, Asaph is following his own exhortation to the people in verse 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.*

# The Plagues Which He Brought upon the Egyptians 78:43-51



- Having said, in verse 42, that the Jews forgot all the miracles God did in their favor, when He was bringing them out of the land of Egypt, he now describes, in the following verses, how God afflicted Pharaoh, until He ultimately overwhelmed him and his whole army in the sea, all of which is to be found in Exodus, 7-14
- So, Asaph reminds them of the plagues God brought upon the Pharaoh and his people because of them, calling them signs and wonders
- The plagues were special demonstrations of God's power
- By the rivers of Egypt, he means the branches of the Nile that flow through it

# The Plagues Which He Brought upon the Egyptians 78:43-51



- This was the first of the plagues of Egypt, Exodus 7:20
- *swarms of flies among them, And frogs*, The fourth and second plagues, Exodus 8:20
- The order is different from that of Exodus, matching only the first and last plagues
- They were attacked by swarms of flies (mosquitoes) which tormented them
- And instead of fish, the River Nile got filled with frogs, which invaded every place in their homes and the piles of those they killed got rotten and became the source of defilement and sickness

# The Plagues Which He Brought upon the Egyptians 78:43-51



- Different sorts of *locust* ate up every green herb and tree, *their crops* on which much labor had been used to fertilize and cultivate
- Here in verse 47, again, there is an reverse of the order in which the plagues came, since the plague of hail preceded that of the locusts
- There is also an addition to the narrative of Exodus in the mention of *vines*, which may indicate a use of tradition
- Grapes and figs, *vines ... sycamore* are among the fruits frequently represented in paintings in Egyptian tombs

# The Plagues Which He Brought upon the Egyptians 78:43-51



- Their crops were devoured by pests, and their labor was in vain
- And as the vines were the drink of the rich, and the sycamore was the food of the poor, the plague of hail and frost struck both the rich and the poor
- Hail and frost are not common phenomena in Egypt; yet God changes the laws of nature to chastise the wicked



# The Plagues Which He Brought upon the Egyptians 78:43-51



- And because of the evil of man, the cattle, as well, perished by the wrath of nature, *He also gave up their cattle to the hail, And their flocks to fiery lightning*
- This is to be understood of the fire that was mingled with the hail, and ran upon the ground, and destroyed their flocks, Exodus 9:23
- Finally, to include any he may have omitted, as, in fact, he did, he says in verse 49, *He cast on them the fierceness of His anger, Wrath, indignation, and trouble, By sending angels of destruction among them*, touching on the most grievous of all the plagues, the slaughter of the first born by the destroying angel

# The Plagues Which He Brought upon the Egyptians 78:43-51



- St. Augustine comments at much length on this passage, touching the punitive ministry of good and evil angels, pointing out that both have great authority over the powers of nature, and that evil spirits are sometimes permitted by God to exhibit this influence
- They may tempt also, as in the cases of Job and Ahab; and may, as well as good angels, be employed as the executioners of God's wrath
- And he decides that evil angels were the instruments of the slaughter of the beasts and the first-born in Egypt

# The Plagues Which He Brought upon the Egyptians 78:43-51



- But when God punishes the righteous with temporal penalties, He does it by the hands of His good angels
- However, other scholars say that the angels are here called *evil*, not by reason of their nature, but merely as bringing evils on the heads of sinners
- God's anger prompting Him to revenge, was restrained by His mercy, urging Him not to destroy them entirely, but at length *He made a path for His anger*
- By removing every obstacle that mercy had thrown in the path of justice, God made a way for His indignation,
- And He killed all the first born of men and beasts

# The Plagues Which He Brought upon the Egyptians 78:43-51



- Asaph emphasizes the fact that after minor plagues had failed to touch Pharaoh's conscience, God finally attacked the very lives of the Egyptians
- God's wrath came in stages upon the Egyptians, with the hope that they would repent
- He denied them the water to drink, then disturbed them by the frogs, then struck their cattle and crops, and finally He destroyed their firstborn with no exception, that grief came forth into every house, from the palace of Pharaoh to the captive inside the prison
- *in the tents of Ham*, of the Egyptians, the descendants of Ham; for Mizraim, from whom the Egyptians have their name, was a son of Ham's, Genesis 10:6

# The Deliverance & Repeated Disobedience of Israel 78:52-58



- After the death of the firstborn, the Egyptians begged the Israelites to leave and sent them away with gifts, happy to be rid of them
- Asaph then summarized the next many years
- The Israelites went out of Egypt by God's Mighty Hand like sheep, weak, timorous, unarmed, harmless, and inoffensive
- The power of God was wonderfully displayed in the delivery of His poor, helpless, and oppressed people
- He went before them as the Shepherd of the flock, in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night

# The Deliverance & Repeated Disobedience of Israel 78:52-58



- He kept them together as a flock from scattering, straying, and being lost; and directed their way in the wilderness
- They went out with great confidence
- In verses 53-54, Asaph speaks of God's providence and protection as they took possession of the land promised to them
- In contrast to their enemies, who were seized with panic (Exodus 14:25), Israel had no cause for fear (Exodus 14:13)
- God destroyed the pursuing Egyptian army when the waters of the sea came crashing down upon them

# The Deliverance & Repeated Disobedience of Israel 78:52-58



- The last plague inflicted on the Egyptians, and it was the end of the captivity of the children of Israel
- God brought them to the borders of that land - the land of promise where He intended to set His temple, and to turn its mountains into holy mountains
- They who came out from Egypt did not indeed enter that land, except Caleb and Joshua, but they were conveyed to its borders before all of them fell

# The Deliverance & Repeated Disobedience of Israel 78:52-58



- Many of the Canaanite peoples were dead before Israel ever came to the land
- The land was divided among those to whom He had made an eternal promise of the land
- God led the Israelites under Josue, to conquer the old inhabitants who were most devoted to idolatry, and to banish them
- *“For they did not gain possession of the land by their own sword, Nor did their own arm save them; But it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance,”* (Psalm 44:3)
- Yet they tempted and rebelled against God the Most High



# The Deliverance & Repeated Disobedience of Israel 78:52-58



- In spite of all God's goodness to them, they persisted in their old unfaithfulness
- The Jews entered by God into the land of promise, proved to be not better than their fathers who had perished in the desert, for they too *tested and provoked the Most High God* by abandoning His worship, and by the service of idols
- *His testimonies*, The Laws of God and His commandments
- They repeated the history of their rebellious fathers, practiced their sins, and did not keep God's covenant
- Bringing along with them their corruption to the land of inheritance, they came to be like a bow that sends forth arrows without a goal

# The Deliverance & Repeated Disobedience of Israel 78:52-58



- *a deceitful bow*, A bow that could not be depended on; a bow, one of whose arms was longer or more elastic than the other, so that the arrow would turn aside from the mark
- The marksman would attempt to hit an object and would fail
- So, it was with the people of Israel
- They could not be depended on, no reliance could be put on their promises
- When Israel came into the Promised Land, they often worshiped the gods of the Canaanites, setting up altars on the *high places* and worshipping gods of *carved images*

# The Deliverance & Repeated Disobedience of Israel 78:52-58



- Despite the infinite goodness of God, the people *tested and provoked God* and *did not keep His testimonies*; they were *turned back and acted unfaithfully*; and worse still, *moved Him to jealousy with their carved images*
- On *their high places*, they set up altars to their idols, and sacrificed thereon to them
- The Lord would have His holy place remain as the only spot for sacrifice
- But Israel, in intentional deliberate rebellion determined to have many altars upon many hills



# Their Punishment 78:59-64

- Once more God punished them for their sins, abandoning them to their enemies and even allowing the Ark to be captured, 59-64
- These verses cover the period from the entrance into Canaan to the fall of the sanctuary of Shiloh
- *God heard* or rather He knew
- As He heard the voice of Abel's blood crying out, as He heard the voices of Sodom and Gomorrah, the sins of His people crying unto heaven
- God responded to their rebellion severely: *He was furious, And greatly abhorred Israel*



# Their Punishment 78:59-64

- *the tabernacle*, The tabernacle which Moses built in the wilderness by the command of the Lord, and according to the pattern showed him; and which, when the Israelites were settled in the land of Canaan, was set up in Shiloh; Joshua 18:1
- The removal of the ark by the Philistines was a demonstration in act that God had forsaken the place
- The ark was never restored to Shiloh
- Asaph remembered the tragedy at *Shiloh*, where the Philistines overran the tabernacle, killed the priests, and captured the ark of the covenant (1 Samuel 4:11-22)



# Their Punishment 78:59-64

- It refers here to the times of Eli and Samuel
- *His strength*, The ark is considered as the symbol of God's power
- This constituted the defense of the people; this was the sign of the presence of God, which, when with them, was their real protection
- The glory that departed was the glory of God's blessing upon and presence with an obedient Israel
- God allowed that the people He had chosen for His inheritance, as His own and favored people to be surrounded and defeated by the swords of the enemy



# Their Punishment 78:59-64

- Even though they were God's inheritance, His portion and possession, and He had chosen them for it, (Psalm 33:12); thirty thousand Israelites were slain in the battle in which the ark was captured (1 Samuel 4:10)
- They fell in battle because they were no longer supported by the divine strength
- Fire here may be regarded as an image of destructive war, as in (Numbers 21:28)
- The fire of war consumed the young men, so that the maidens remained unmarried

# Their Punishment 78:59-64



- There was no joy nor there were marriage celebrations
- Asaph reminded Israel that the losses at Shiloh were more than just the ark of the covenant
- There was also a great loss of life, including the priests (1 Samuel 4:10-22)
- By the priests he refers to Hophni and Phinehas the sons of Eli the priests who fell by the swords of the Philistines
- The widows made no lamentation on the loss of their men, for their sorrow over what happened to all the people was much greater than any personal sorrow



# God's Wrath Against their Adversaries 78:65-66



- But God, in His grace, did not abandon His people
- Even though the people had committed these grievous sins against the Lord and the Lord had rejected the people, God still kept His promises
- God took pity on His people and delivered them from their adversaries, 65-66
- God seems like someone awoke from sleep to work diligently in the life of His people
- *“The Lord neither slumber nor sleep”* (Psalm 121:4)

# God's Wrath Against their Adversaries 78:65-66



- Yet, getting up to Judge after an extended period of silence in longsuffering, He would seem as though awakening from sleep
- The story of how God exalted Himself over the Philistines and *put them to a perpetual reproach* is found in 1 Samuel 5
- In it all, God demonstrated that He was able to guard His glory when His people neglected His glory
- God was not pleased with the pride and malice of the Philistines because they, *“took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon.”* (1 Samuel 5:2)
- Even while the symbol of His presence was captive in a pagan temple, God demonstrated His glory

# The Establishment of the Kingdom of David 78:67-72



- Asaph explained how God did not choose the other tribes to be the home of *His sanctuary*
- *He rejected the tent of Joseph*, and instead chose Jerusalem (*Mount Zion*) to be the spiritual center of Israel
- The *tent of Joseph* is the sanctuary at Shiloh, which was north of Bethel, and thus within the limits of the tribe of Ephraim
- When a permanent site was to be assigned to the tabernacle and the ark, God did not choose for them Shiloh, but that of Jerusalem
- A prophecy regarding Christ and His Church

# The Establishment of the Kingdom of David 78:67-72



- Jeremiah points to the fall of Shiloh as a warning to the disbelieving generations, who refused to believe that God could possibly desert Jerusalem and allow His Temple to be destroyed (Jeremiah 7:12,14,26:6,9)
- God chose Judah, for Judah would be the tribe through which the Messiah would come
- St. Augustine remarks, “God did not reject Joseph, and select Judah by reason of their personal merits; had He done so, He would have chosen Joseph, who excelled very much, whether one regards his chastity, his patience, his wisdom, or his love of his enemies; but He chose Juda on account of David, and David on account of Christ, and He destroyed the synagogue to build up the Church.”

# The Establishment of the Kingdom of David 78:67-72



- *His sanctuary* The Temple of Solomon
- David set up only a tent for the ark, but a temple was then designed, and preparations were made for building it
- *like the heights*, A very stately place, magnificent and glorious
- It was built as firm as *the heights*, *Like the earth which He has established forever*
- Here is the parable, which the psalmist promised in the beginning of the Psalm; for the sanctuary of the Old Testament was not *established forever* but was the only the type of the sanctuary of the New Testament

# The Establishment of the Kingdom of David 78:67-72



- God chose a leader from the tribe of Judah, to lead the people into godliness, to shepherd them back into God's grace
- God chose David to be the leader of the people
- God *chose David His servant* from a humble position, lest he attribute his elevation to any merits of his own
- The humble shepherd boy *following the ewes that had young*— was God's choice *to shepherd Jacob His people and Israel His inheritance*
- From being a shepherd, as he really was, to *shepherd Jacob His people*

# The Establishment of the Kingdom of David 78:67-72



- From feeding sheep, took him to feed men; for he placed him over the kingdom of Israel and of Jacob, His people and His inheritance
- Psalm 78 ends on a hopeful note
- It concludes with recognition of and gratitude for the goodness of God in the *integrity* and *skillfulness* of David's rule
- On the whole, David performed his task of governing Israel faithfully
- He had the direct testimony of God to that effect (1 Kings 9:4)
- He was more anxious to serve than to rule

# The Establishment of the Kingdom of David 78:67-72



- *the integrity of his heart*, because, with a pure heart, he never sought his own glory, but that of God; not his own benefit, but that of the people
- David fed the sheep, not as his own, but as belonging to his Master, as a servant, and not as an heir
- In his wisdom, or, as he expresses it, *by the skillfulness of his hands*, he guided the people; because, whatever he did, he did it on due reflection, not rashly, not without taking counsel, or selfishly
- All which perfections, however applicable they may be to David, are, absolutely speaking, to be found completely in Christ alone



# The Establishment of the Kingdom of David 78:67-72



- Had David been so perfect in them, he would not have been so severely condemned for coveting the wife of another, for the commission of murder and adultery, for pointlessly making a census of the people
- David's heart *mostly* had integrity; the heart of Jesus was perfect in integrity
- David guided Israel with great skill; Jesus leads His people with perfect skill
- Christ, though, was truly innocent in heart, and wise in His works, "*Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth.*" (1 Peter 2:22) and He alone could boldly say, "*Which of you convicts Me of sin?*" (John 8:46)

# Discussion



- What is the central message of this Psalm?
- How does this Psalm serve as a warning to God's people?
- Why did the psalmist encourage God's people to tell their children of God's faithfulness in the past? (78:1-8)
- What did Asaph want Israel's future generations to avoid? (78:8)



# Discussion

- What is the historical pattern outlined in verses 12–72?
- How did the children of Israel express their rebellion against God?
- How did the Lord feel about His people's rebellion? (78:21-22,58-59)
- In what ways does God bring judgment upon His people?

# Discussion



- How does God show His mercy?
- How is the hypocrisy of the Israelites described? (78:32-37)
- According to the last verse, whom did God finally use to save His people?