



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 80

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- The title of this Psalm is *To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Lilies."* *A Testimony of Asaph. A Psalm*
- *To the Chief Musician*, Some suppose to be a leader of choirs or musicians in David's time, such as Heman the singer or Asaph (1 Chronicles 6:33, 16:5-7, and 25:6)
- As with Psalms 45, 60 and 69, this Psalm is *Set to "The Lilies"*
- The phrase may refer to the general beauty of the composition, to the tune, or to a six-stringed instrument that had a resemblance to a lily, or that was shaped like a lily



Introduction

- *A Testimony of Asaph*, may have been used here with reference to the contents of the Psalm as a public testimony in regard to the dealings of God with His people
- As with several of Asaph Psalms, some attribute this Psalm to a later Asaph
- And some say that the author is Asaph of David's times but was written in the spirit of prophecy
- The historical circumstances that inspired the prayer of this Psalm are not certain
- However, it seems to have been written on the same occasion of the previous Psalm (79)



Introduction

- This Psalm is a plea for Israel's restoration
- It is a lament in which the worshipping community calls upon God to rescue them from trouble
- Psalm 80 is a cry out to the Lord for help in the face of the Lord's anger
- And regardless of the exact experience that gave rise to Psalm 80, the Psalm is appropriate for the people of God who suffer at any time and may be applied to any affliction of the people of God in any age or period of time



Introduction

- The Psalm is properly divided into three parts, each closing with the prayer, *“Restore us, O God; Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!”* verses 3,7,19
- The first part is a prayer, addressed to God as a shepherd
- The second is a prayer founded on the troubles of His people
- The third is also a prayer - founded on the former dealings of God with His people
- According to St. Augustine, this Psalm is about the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and His vineyard (His church); it relates to the Head and the body; the King, and the people; the Shepherd and His flock



Introduction

Psalm Outline:

- A Prayer to Israel's Shepherd for Restoration 80:1-3
- A Lamentation Over God's People Affliction 80:4-7
- Israel Compared to a Vineyard 80:8-16
- A Prayer for its Restoration 80:17-19

A Prayer to Israel's Shepherd for Restoration 80:1-3



- Asaph here, in the name of the church, pleads to God by prayer, with reference to the present afflicted state of Israel
- He entreats God's favor for them and addresses God as the *Shepherd of Israel*, a name that is full of tenderness; denotes God's role as caregiver and protector and whom He had called His *people and sheep of His pasture*, (Psalm 79:13)
- Israel was under His guidance and care, as the sheep are under the care of the shepherd
- The title, *Shepherd of Israel* follows naturally from the metaphor, so often used of Israel being God's *flock*, (Psalm 74:1, 77:20, 78:52, 79:13),

A Prayer to Israel's Shepherd for Restoration 80:1-3



- And there are many references in Scripture to God's shepherding care of His people (Isaiah 40:11; Genesis 48:15-16; John 10; 1 Peter 2:25; Hebrews 13:20-21)
- This title speaks of the intimate relationships between shepherd and sheep
- This title of a *Shepherd* belongs also to Jesus who is *the Good Shepherd*, (John 10:11) and who was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and appointed by His Father as a Shepherd over them
- *Give ear*, Incline the ear; as if the ear of God was then turned away, or as if He was inattentive to what was occurring

A Prayer to Israel's Shepherd for Restoration 80:1-3



- But He who humbled Himself to be a shepherd to His people will not turn a deaf ear to their complaints
- The name Joseph seems here to be used to represent the whole people of Israel as he was a man so well-known and important in their history
- *dwell between the cherubim*, This refers to the Mercy Seat, God's throne
- The Mercy Seat was positioned above the Ark of the Covenant and was guarded by two cherubim (Exodus 25:17-22)
- The Lord's especial presence was revealed upon the Mercy-Seat between the cherubim

A Prayer to Israel's Shepherd for Restoration 80:1-3



- It is very comfortable in prayer to look up to God as sitting on a throne of mercy and grace
- Asaph asked that the God of this majesty and glory would *shine forth* on behalf of His people
- He is asking God to give them such evidences of His presence now, as their fathers had under the first tabernacle
- When God does *shine forth*, darkness and gloom vanish, and He is magnified
- What the psalmist desires from God is that He would give ear to the cry of their miseries and of their prayers, that He would *shine forth* both in His own glory and in favor and kindness to His people



A Prayer to Israel's Shepherd for Restoration 80:1-3

- The three tribes, *Ephraim*, *Benjamin*, and *Manasseh* represent the whole
- Ephraim and Manasseh were the two sons of Joseph
- So, some think they seem to have been particularly mentioned here, because Joseph, their father, had been referred to in the previous verse
- And Benjamin is mentioned because, in marching through the wilderness, these three tribes always went together, as the descendants of the same mother, Numbers 2:18-24, 10:22-24

A Prayer to Israel's Shepherd for Restoration 80:1-3



- It is not clear from the Psalm itself, any particular reason why the prayer is offered that God would manifest Himself especially before these three tribes
- But some think that the reference is to these three tribes, *Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh*, marching immediately after the Kohathites, who carried the ark on their shoulders in journeying, Numbers 2:17 which is called the Lord's strength, and the ark of His strength, Psalm 78:61
- So, as before them the ark of God's strength arose to scatter their enemies, God can do so again at this time

A Prayer to Israel's Shepherd for Restoration 80:1-3



- Asaph is asking God that as He did in the past and went before those tribes, He can do it again
- *Stir up Your strength*, Put in action Your might which seems to be hidden or inactive
- Asaph is asking God to use His strength and come for salvation to His people and Be to them a powerful and a present help
- He is asking that God do this *before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh*, in the sight of all the tribes of Israel; let them see it to their satisfaction

A Prayer to Israel's Shepherd for Restoration 80:1-3



- St. Augustine presents to us a symbolic interpretation of this supplication, saying: “As ‘Ephraim’ means (fruitful); ‘Benjamin’ means (son of the right hand); and ‘Manasseh’ means (he who is forgetful); He asks God, therefore, to appear before him who is ‘fruitful’, ‘the son of the right hand’, the ‘one who is forgetful’, so that he no longer forgets, but You would dwell in his mind to save him.”
- St. Jerome comments on the word ‘Manasseh’, saying: “It means (forgetting) ... The son who took his inheritance, wasted it, and forgot what is mine; and now he remembers Me; I call him ‘Manasseh’, from forgetting; because he did not forget to return to his Father”

A Prayer to Israel's Shepherd for Restoration 80:1-3



- It is as though the tribe of Manasseh refers to someone who returned to his father after forgetting him for so long; but he remembered him and would never again forget him
- The son who returns to his father, enjoys the portion of Manasseh
- *Restore us, O God*, This begins a refrain that is repeated three times in this Psalm (3, 7, and 19)
- *Cause Your face to shine*, This goes back to the blessing the priests were commanded to proclaim to the people of Israel (Numbers 6:24-26)



A Prayer to Israel's Shepherd for Restoration 80:1-3

- It has the idea of God's presence, pleasure, and favor
- It expressed trust and dependence upon God, and confidence that His favor shown by His shining *face* was all that was needed for Israel's restoration and blessing
- God's face seemed to be turned away and they desperately needed Him to turn His *face* back to them, smile on them favorably, and rescue them from the destruction that is about to take place

A Lamentation Over God's People Affliction 80:4-7



- When God hides His face, we become greatly disturbed, and as St. Augustine says, we become sick
- When His response to our prayer is delayed, we sometimes assume that He rejects it, and wonder *How long?*
- Here we see Asaph's heart poured out in sorrow before God
- It is a terrible thing to sense that God is *angry* and that He is *against the prayer* of His people
- The sorrow is deeper when it is recognized that it is the God of heavenly armies, the *LORD God of hosts*, who has in some way set Himself against His people

A Lamentation Over God's People Affliction 80:4-7



- There is a special significance in the repeated appeals to God (4, 14, 19) by the title, *LORD God of hosts*, which denotes His universal sovereignty, and therefore His ability to help Israel in its humiliation, and also recalls the days when He went forth with Israel's armies to victory
- *Against the prayer*, In spite of the prayer
- The Lord's wrath is described in three ways 4-7
- First, God's anger endures in spite of the prayers of the people
- He not only delayed to answer them (that He often does in love), but He was displeased at them

A Lamentation Over God's People Affliction 80:4-7



- If God be really angry at the prayers of His people, we may be sure it is because they ask wrongly and inappropriately, James 4:3
- But perhaps it is only in their own view that He seems angry with their prayers when in reality He is not
- Second, the people have been fed with the bread of tears
- The bread of blessings has been replaced with the painful situation of the enemy nations attacking Israel
- The temple, where one might experience the shining of God's face, contained a special bread known as the *showbread* (literally, the "bread of the face;" Exodus 25:30)

A Lamentation Over God's People Affliction 80:4-7



- Instead of that bread, however, the people now is fed with *the bread of tears*
- They have no peace, no comfort, nothing but continual sorrow
- Asaph used the metaphor of drinking tears to express the great sorrow of God's people
- Psalm 42:3 uses a similar image: *My tears have been my food day and night*
- *in great measure*, Some think it was a certain measure used by the Chaldeans
- Others think it signifies abundance or abundantly

A Lamentation Over God's People Affliction 80:4-7



- The tears are so great that they are made to drink their tears by the bowlful
- St. Augustine says, "What is, '*in great measure*' Hear the Apostle: 'God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able' The measure is, according to your powers: the measure is, that you be instructed, not that you be crushed."
- Third, Israel is a source of contention to the neighboring nations and a mockery to the enemies
- The mocking and sneering of Israel's enemies were painful for Asaph and the people of God in their low condition

A Lamentation Over God's People Affliction 80:4-7



- How long will these things continue?
- Their enemies laughed among themselves to see the fears they were in and the disappointments they met with
- When God is displeased with His people, we must expect to see them in tears and their enemies in triumph
- In verse 7, the refrain occurs for the second time, but with the slight variation or *O God of hosts* instead of *O God*
- This indicates greater earnestness; a deeper sense of the need of the intervention of God, indicated by the reference to His attribute as the leader of hosts, and therefore able to save them

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- In this passage 8-16, the psalmist contrasts God's former care for His people with their present trouble by the figure of a vine, once carefully tended and spreading far and wide in abundant growth, but now exposed to the ravages of wild beasts
- Many passages of the Old Testament speak of Israel as *a vine*: Deuteronomy 32:32-33, Isaiah 5:1, Jeremiah 2:21, Ezekiel 17:5-6, Hosea 10:1, and Joel 1:7
- The New Testament also applies the figure to Israel (Matthew 20:1, 21:33; Mark 12:1), and then more broadly to the people of God in general

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- Why the vine? God chose the vine, because among other trees it is seen as little and soft
- Its wood is not useful for construction, for making musical instruments, tent nails, or even for use as fuel; as fire totally consumes it within moments
- Its only privilege is its productive fruitfulness
- If it does not produce fruits, then it is completely useless
- That is what God demands for His Church to bring forth the precious fruits of the Spirit

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- The Israelites were in Egypt awhile, where they were grievously oppressed and trampled upon
- But in due time the Lord brought them with a mighty hand and outstretched arm
- The history of Israel as a nation begins with the Exodus
- This vine was transplanted from *Egypt* and brought into the Promised Land
- The nation was transplanted from Egypt into a soil better fitted for it by the loving hand of God, in order that it might have sufficient room to grow up and develop itself freely

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- As the vinedresser prepares the ground for his vine by clearing away the stones and thorns and all that would hinder its free growth (Isaiah 5:2), so God prepared Canaan for Israel by the removal of its old inhabitants
- In Canaan, God *planted it*, making *room* by casting out the Canaanite nations
- The vine of Israel was blessed in the Promised Land
- Under God's blessing they took *deep root* and *filled the land* in a way that the variety of Canaanite tribes had not
- The vine, carefully cultivated in a suitable soil, may be spread to any extent

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- The vine grew so large that it filled the land and covered the mountains and mighty cedars with its shade
- Its branches extended themselves over all the hills and mountains of Canaan which means that the people multiplied so much, and became so numerous, that they filled not only the fruitful valleys, but even the barren mountains
- St. Augustine says, “The branch is only useful for one of two things: either to produce grapes, or for the fire. If it wishes to escape getting consumed by the fire, it is committed to keep its place and abide in the vine.”

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- The psalmist is describing Israel as a prosperous nation that God established it to be
- God so blessed the Jews, particularly in the days of David and Solomon, that all the neighboring nations were subdued
- At its height under King David and King Solomon, Israel's domination stretched from the Mediterranean Sea *the Sea* to the Euphrates *River*
- And this was according to the promises which God had made to the fathers, Exodus 23:31; Deuteronomy 11:24

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- That is what literally happened to the people of Israel
- Literally, the Lord set His people in Egypt, as the first plant to be referred to Him
- Then He moved that plant from there, by the hand of Moses
- He cast out several nations before its face, to replant it in the Promised Land, where its people increased in number and filled it
- But, having been diverted from God, He *broken down her hedges* and into it many strangers entered to humiliate it
- It became defiled through the entrance of heathen worship into its temple

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- And in place of God's care, the beasts of the wilderness inside it devoured its children
- *Hedges*, Signifies the Lord's removal of His presence, power, and protection, from Israel; which were the *hedge* He set around them, and by which they were secured, fortified, and protected from their enemies
- Without protection of God's *hedges*, the land of Israel was ready to be plundered and devoured by her enemies
- This image is a picture of the nations stripping Israel of its wealth and power

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- Israel's land is laid waste by remorseless enemies
- The old Israel lost her hedges, when she no longer enjoyed the divine presence, the divine promises, and the spiritual understanding; And the demons could corrupt her fruits
- God Himself is our Stronghold who protects and hedges us
- In Satan's complaint against 'Job', he said to God: "*Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land*" (Job 1:10)

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- According to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, *the boar out of the woods*, and the wild beast of the field, are Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus, and the like; and in particular the devil who had authority over them
- While, according to St. Augustine, *the boar out of the woods* refers to the Gentile, counted by the Jews as unclean; as he comes out of the woods, and not out of the vine (the church of the Jews)
- In a spiritual meaning it is what will happen to such a soul, if it does not abide in what is given to it until the end, it becomes lost, and turns into a puppet for the devil

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- With an earnest plea Asaph prayed on behalf of the nation, begging God to *return* to them, to *look* upon the greatness of their need and to *visit this vine* that He Himself had planted
- The look of God carries in it an active divine work
- So the Lord sometimes departs from His church and people, and hides His face from them
- But it may be said that He *Return*, when He manifests Himself, shows His face and His favor again, and grants His gracious presence
- If He, *God of hosts*, above and below, is with His people, none can be against them; they have nothing to fear from any enemy

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- It is a prayer that God would guard, sustain, defend what He had planted; the vine which He had brought out of Egypt, Psalm 80:8
- *the branch that You made strong for Yourself*, Meaning the same thing, and the same people whom He confirmed in the land of Canaan, and made strong for His service and glory
- If the right hand of God refers to the Word Son of God; by His incarnation and His crucifixion, He planted the church, the divine vine
- Jesus told His followers that He is the true vine, that God the Father is the vinedresser and that they, abiding in Him as the vine, are the branches (John 15:1-8)

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- Jesus Himself was brought out of Egypt and replanted in the Promised Land, preaching throughout the breadth of the land
- Asaph is asking God, not to destroy them for the sake of Christ, whom He has appointed to work out the salvation of His people by His great strength, and who was to come from this vine, or descend from Israel
- The great desolation of this vine came from the *rebu*ke of God Himself
- *They perish* not through the rage of *the wild beast and the boar*, but *at the rebuke of His countenance*
- Because of God's anger it is burned with fire and cut down

Israel Compared to a Vineyard

80:8-16



- Planting the church by Jesus Christ, God burned the evil of the Gentiles, and consumed it by His Holy Spirit
- While giving enlightenment to the repentant returning to Him, the divine fire consumes evil and iniquities
- The Jews – the old vine – having persisted upon denying faith in the Savior Messiah, is burned by the divine wrath
- “Nebuchadnezzar and those who followed him, because of Your anger, burned that vine, and destroyed its city. And the Romans did the same because of the anger of Your only begotten Son, Your Face, and the image of Your Person; whom they crucified.”
Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

A Prayer for its Restoration

80:17-19



- *the man of Your right hand*, Some understand it to be the people of Israel in general, beloved, supported, and strengthened, by the Lord
- And others of that king (whoever it was) of the house of David that was now to go in and out before them
- We read in Ezra 7:28, “*So I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me.*”
- Their king is called the *man of God's right hand* as he was their representative
- The right hand is the place of honor; *the man of Your right hand* means one who occupies such a position of honor

A Prayer for its Restoration

80:17-19



- But according to several scholars, the talk here is about the Lord Christ, the Son of Man, the Subject of the pleasure of the Father, and the One chosen by Him to be the Savior of the world
- *You made strong*, For the accomplishment of His purposes, promises, and covenant, for the bringing about the salvation of His own people
- Under the leadership of one whom God had chosen the nation would be kept faithful
- In the strength of this Son of Man made strong, this Man of God's Right Hand, God's people would be restored to faithfulness
- They would be revived and once again call upon His name

A Prayer for its Restoration

80:17-19



- Some say the prayer is for national rather than spiritual life - for a recovery from the destruction which has almost come upon them
- *Then we will not turn back from You*, If God will adhere to their kings, they will adhere to Him
- But again, many scholars apply this to the Messiah
- He is that *the son of man whom He made strong for Himself* for the glorifying of His name
- The psalmist prophetically sees that a day is coming when the failed vine will find restoration

A Prayer for its Restoration

80:17-19



- He sees that there will be a day when God's face will again shine on the nation
- There will be a time when salvation will come to the people
- Indeed, it is through this Son that the vine of Israel would be reconstituted in a spiritual sense and revived—so that it would never turn from God again
- There will come a time when the fruit of the vine will fill the whole earth, *"Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob; Israel shall blossom and bud, And fill the face of the world with fruit."* (Isaiah 27:6)

A Prayer for its Restoration

80:17-19



- The appeal to God continually increasing in intensity
- The Psalm is closed by the refrain in its third and most perfect form
- Israel will be restored, God will smile favorably on His people and they shall be saved
- Jesus is the divine response to the cry, *Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!*
- Having made his third appeal by the covenant Name, the Psalmist seems to feel that he has done all that he can and ends



Discussion

- What is the situation that the psalmist is mourning over in this Psalm?
- How would you describe the tone of this Psalm?
- What key questions does the psalmist ask the Lord regarding their situation?
- Does God actually feed people with sorrow?



Discussion

- What sort of metaphor does this Psalm use to help us visualize the church?
- What must the Vinedresser do to prepare the vineyard? How does the metaphor of calling God a vinedresser point to His patient working with His people?
- How did Jesus use the imagery of a vine and its branches in John 15?