

# “DON’T FORGET THE GOOD DEEDS OF GOD”

## PSALM 78:9-16

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### INTRODUCTION

In this passage the psalmist reviews two facts—Ephraim’s failure as the tribal leader of the people of God (vv. 9-11) and the mighty deeds of God which Ephraim had failed to remember (vv. 12-16). The psalmist has just referred to the failure of “the fathers” who had been “stubborn and rebellious” and who “did not prepare its heart, and whose spirit was not faithful to God” (v. 8). Now he points out the particular tribe which characterized these facts. The picture consists of well-armed soldiers who thus betrayed their trust, in spite of every external advantage.

### I. THE FAILURE OF MAN

The Ephraimites were the leading tribe in Israel prior to the ascension of David and his tribe of Judah. The psalmist mentions them again in v. 67 as those passed over for leadership in the choice of David and the tribe of Judah.

A. Ephraim’s equipment (9a)—Leupold suggests an idea like “fully equipped with bows”

B. Ephraim’s failure (9b-11)

1. Turning back in the day of battle (9b)

- a. The point here is not simply military defeat, for a faithful servant could be defeated and that might be a chastisement, but would not be a sinful failure such as is portrayed here.
- b. The point cannot be the separation of Ephraim from Judah, for that occurred in later history; this psalm focuses on the early history up to David’s time.
- c. We cannot do away with a specific idea of Ephraim by making them simply an allusion to the entire nation. In v. 67 they are specifically mentioned again.
- d. The main point then is “their treacherous conduct” as evidenced even in the next two verses for their spiritual failures. They were one of the smallest tribes during the wilderness wanderings, but had become very numerous and powerful by the time of the possession of the land. Moreover, Shiloh had become the religious capital of the nation (in Ephraim) and Shechem (also in Ephraim) had been the meeting place of the tribes in the land (Josh. 24:1; Jud. 9:2; I K. 12:1).
- e. They were leaders of the people, but morally leaders in their sin.
- f. The point of this verse is that at the critical time when they should have used their powerful weapons on behalf of the people, they turned about and fled in disarray—and the literal fades into the spiritual failure and disarray.
- g. But we must not give up entirely the literal idea of “turning back” in battle for a purely spiritual application.

2. Failure to keep the covenant of God (10a)

- They did not “guard, keep, take care of” the covenant which God had established with them at Sinai.
- This covenant was unilaterally given and enforced upon them by God, yet Israel was expected to accept the conditions and to abide by them.
- Israel did reply “all that the Lord has spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:8).
- But, Israel, as here represented by Ephraim, continually failed to keep their promise.

3. Refusal to walk in God’s law (10b)

- This parallel expression says basically the same thing.
- “His Law” is the content of His covenant, containing the individual “instruction” and “law” they were to accept and live by.
- The familiar verb “walk” speaks of lifestyle, manner of living.

4. Forgetfulness of God’s mighty deeds and miracles (11)

- a. “Deeds” is occasionally used for “deeds” in general, or even for evil deeds of men, but in the psalms at times refers to God’s deeds on behalf of His people: 9:11; 66:5; 77:12; 78:11.

- b. “Miracles” or “wonderful works” means “be surpassing, extraordinary.” In the psalms and elsewhere this form often speaks of God’s miraculous works on behalf of His people or in judgment upon their enemies: vv. 4 & 11, 9:1; 26:7; and 13 times; Ex. 3:20; Jud. 6:13; etc.

## II. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD SHOWN IN HIS WONDERS (12-16)

- The unfaithfulness of Israel to God stands in stark contrast with the abundant displays of God’s providential mercies and powerful acts of deliverances—especially at the time of the Exodus from Egypt and the wilderness wandering. As the following context displays, these divine miracles were followed consistently by the unfaithfulness of Israel.
  - The psalmist uses the noun form derived from the verb “wonderful works” just used in v. 11—“wonders”; the noun and verb focus on the powerful emotional effect of the miracles upon the people experiencing them and witnessing them.
- A. In the Land of Egypt—plagues and miracles (12b)
- The two lines are parallel and speak of the same location and the same wonders worked by God—Zoan being a more specific reference to the place where God was powerfully working. Zoan is the Tanis of the Egyptians, and according to Numbers 13:22 it was built 7 years after Hebron. See v. 43 below where again the psalmist speaks of “the field of Zoan.” Zoan was in the northeast corner of the Nile Delta in Egypt where the Israelites lived while enslaved by the Egyptians—more specifically “on the second from the last of the east arms of the Nile delta” and surely near “Goshen”
  - Zoan may have been the same as the city “Raamses” mentioned as being built by the Israelite slaves in Ex. 1:11 along with Pithom or at least close to it (K. 282). “The fields of” Zoan refer to the territory or region round about the city.
- B. At the Red Sea (13)
- In addition to the wonders performed by God within the land of Egypt proper, God also performed his mightiest and most memorable miracles at the Red Sea, here simply called “the sea.” God “divided” this sea and formed a wall on each side for the Israelites to pass through the sea safely.
- C. In the supernatural guidance in the wilderness (14)
- The leading here speaks of the special divine guidance by day with the pillar of “a cloud” and by night with “a light of fire.” See Exodus 13:21. The “cloud” is the special manifestation of God’s presence before His people.
- D. In the supernatural provision in the wilderness (15-16)
1. The plural of “rocks” may speak of the two separate incidents mentioned in the Pentateuch—one in the first year of wilderness wandering and the other in the last year (Ex. 17:6; Num. 20:8ff), and also imply that truly the rock “followed” the Israelites in the wilderness, supplying their needs on a continual basis (cf. I Cor. 10:4).
  2. Once the rock was split and water gushed out the Lord, who is the subject of activity throughout vv. 12-16, “gave abundant drink.”
  3. The abundance is further described as “like the ocean depths”—literally “like the deep”—the Hebrew is the same word used in Genesis 1:2. The “deeps” here could be a reference to “the great subterranean reservoir of waters from which all fountains and streams were supposed to be supplied. See reference to the “fountains of the great deep” in Gen. 7:11.
  4. The Psalmist now refers more specifically to the second incident of water from the rock at Kadesh mentioned in Numbers, since the word for “rock” is the one used there. He looks at the results not so much from the provision for water to satisfy thirst but more from the perspective of the abundance of the waters.

## CONCLUSION

This description of abundant provision is typical of our God who abundantly supplied the needs of His children—not just bare necessities. This is especially true of spiritual provision.

God has faithfully shown us His wonders also: In our salvation (Exodus)—the mightiest miracle imaginable; in our guidance and manifesting His presence, in His abundant provision—water from the rock.

**LET US NOT FORGET, TURN BACK, FAIL TO KEEP HIS COVENANT, WALK IN HIS WORD.**