

“HOW OFTEN WILL I GRIEVE HIM?”

PSALM 78:40-53

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INTRODUCTION

The sinning of Israel against Yahweh described in this psalm sounds like “a broken record.” Again and again a new section of the psalm begins with the sad refrain that Israel had sinned yet again. The psalm opened with an account of the failure of the “fathers” of the coming generation who had been stubborn and rebellious and had not prepared their heart or been faithful in their spirit (v. 8). Then vv. 9-11 recount the failures of Ephraim and Israel with them; v. 17 recounts the continuing sin in the desert when they had tested the Lord; v. 32 relates the fact that Israel “still sinned” despite all that God had done in the past; and now v. 40 speaks of “**how often**” they “rebelled against Him in the wilderness” and brought Him grief; compare v. 41 for “**again and again**” that they “tempted” God. Before the psalm is concluded we will find one more account of Israel’s rebellion against God in v. 56. These multiplied references to Israel’s failures cause the description of God’s restraint, compassion, and forgiveness in vv. 38-39 to stand out even more brilliantly, and show the hypocrisy of the feigned repentance of vv. 34-35.

The root cause is “forgetting” what God has done for them (v. 7, v. 42); such lack of remembrance results from a heart that is “unprepared” to seek and be faithful to God (v. 8). How easy it is for us to forget all that is ours in Christ.

YOU MUST REMEMBER YOUR REDEMPTION IN CHRIST

With this section of the psalm Asaph picks up the discussion from verse 12 of events in Egypt evidencing the mighty works of God on behalf of Israel—miraculous interpositions for Israel that ought to have motivated them to remain faithful to their God. Following this account of the plagues in Egypt, the psalmist describes the entrance into the Promised land (54-55) and has a brief discussion of the history under the Judges (56-64), and finally the choice of Zion (once Shiloh had been devastated by the Philistines and the ark taken captive) and the ascendancy of the tribe of Judah and the united kingdom under David (65-72).

- I. THE NATURE OF THE SIN (40-41)
 - A. Rebellion (cf. v. 17)
 - B. Testing God (cf. v. 18)
- II. THE EFFECTS OF THE SIN—ON GOD (40-41)
 - A. Grieving Him
 - B. Bringing Him pain—the “Holy One of Israel”
- III. THE REASON FOR THE SIN—“They did not remember His power and His redemption” (42)
 - A. The deliverance from the adversary—in this case Egypt (42-43)
 1. The “hand” of God
 2. The “signs” and “wonders”
 - B. The powerful plagues to bring about deliverance (44-51)
[Omitted are the gnats/lice, murrain on cattle, boils on people, and darkness]
 1. Plague one—“water to blood” (44)
 2. Plague four—“flies” (45a)
 3. Plague two—frogs (45b)
 4. Plague eight—locusts (46)
 5. Plague seven—hail (47-48)
 - a. Vines and sycamore trees

- b. The cattle and herds/flocks
- c. Hailstones, “frost,” “bolts of lightning.”
- 6. Plague 10—death of the firstborn (49-51)
 - a. The basis for the judgment—God’s wrath (49)
 - “burning anger”
 - “wrath”—“fury”
 - “indignation”
 - “trouble” (resulting)
 - “deputation [sending forth] of destroying angels” [lit. ‘angels of evil’]
 - b. The way made clear for His anger (50)
 - The soul/life not spared from death
 - The “life” given to the plague.
 - c. All the firstborn smitten (51)
 - The chief of their strength/manhood
 - Limited to the “tents of Ham”—Egyptians
 - Included firstborn of animals and people

IV. THE GRACIOUSNESS OF GOD DESPITE THEIR SIN (52-53)

- A. Shepherded His people
 - 1. Led forth like sheep (52)
 - 2. Guided like a flock (52b)
 - 3. Led them safely (53a)
 - “In security”—root of “trust”
 - “They do not fear”—basis of fear taken away
- B. Covered up—engulfed—their enemies (53b).

CONCLUSION

“Savior like a Shepherd lead us,” says the hymn-writer. And, indeed, He does! He is so gracious to His people. He has miraculously delivered us from our enemies. We have so much for which to be thankful.

We are secure in the Lord; we must trust in Him and not be afraid.
Let us not be like the Israelites of old; let us **remember and not forget**.

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