

“WANDERING FAR AWAY FROM GOD”

PSALM 78:54-64

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INTRODUCTION

In this section of Psalm 78, the sad history of Israel’s rebellion against God continues, even after God brought them into the Promised Land. In v. 56 we read for the **third time** about their “testing” of God and their “rebellion” against him. Then in v. 58 we hear about what became the characteristic sin of Israel in the land—**idolatry**. Such idolatry resulted in extreme divine wrath toward such sin and the resulting rejection of Israel’s worship and the tabernacle in Shiloh; even the Ark of the Covenant that was the sign and reality of God’s presence in their midst was not protected, but was captured by the Philistine enemy. Israel was crushed and even the priesthood fell victim to death.

What a sad story! Israel’s privileged situation in being given the Promised Land made their rebellion and testing of God even worse. Although the prominent sin during the period of the Judges was idolatry and the high places (v. 58), behind such sin was a failure to “keep His testimonies (v. 56). “God’s word is always sinned against first;” then follows the outward evidences of departure from Him.

YOU MUST REMEMBER GOD’S WONDERFUL DEEDS AND KEEP HIS DIVINE TESTIMONIES AND COMMANDS.

- I. GOD’S CONTINUED FAITHFULNESS IN GIVING ISRAEL ITS INHERITANCE OF THE LAND (54-55)
 - A. Reaching the “**Holy Land**” (54)
 1. The land, like its owner, is “**set apart**” for God’s use and from wicked practices.
 2. The land was given to them by God’s “right hand” of power—they get no credit.
 - B. Dispossessing the Pagan Canaanite nations (55)
 1. Driving them out
 2. Apportioning them for Israel’s inheritance
 3. Made Israel dwell in their “tents.”
- II. ISRAEL’S CONTINUED SIN (56-58)
 - A. Rebelling against and putting God to the test (56; cf. 17-18; 40-41)
 - B. Not keeping God’s testimonies (56b)
 - C. Treachery against God (57) [“treachery” is a “betrayal of trust, deceptive action or infidelity”]
 1. Turning back—used twice in the verse, two different verbs
 - “Like their fathers”
 - Compare Ephraim who “turned back in the day of battle” in v. 9; second verb here the same.
 - Ephraim failed to drive out all the Canaanites; left them to be a constant source of corruption to Israel—led them to imitate their practices.
 2. Became like a “deceitful bow”—a bow of treachery
 - Cf. v. 9—“Ephraim an archer, equipped with bows
 - A deceitful bow fails both in aim and in expectation.
 - Such a bow is worse than useless; it is a hazard to its user!
 - D. Practice of Idolatry (58)
 1. The equipment of Idolatry
 - a. High places—scenic places of beauty; worship of creation instead of Creator; high elevations
 - b. Graven images—representing are forms of idols—false gods.
 2. The effects of idolatry
 - a. God “provoked”—righteous indignation
 - b. “Jealousy” aroused
 - False gods are His “rivals, competitors”

- God is jealous for His name, reputation, glory.

III. GOD'S RIGHTEOUS PUNISHMENT (59-64)

- A. His Just Indignation (59)—“God **heard**” these “prayers” & the counterfeit “worship” of the people.
1. “Filled with anger” (same verb in v. 21 and in v. 62)
 - a. Sin, rebellion, idolatry, failure to keep His testimonies are abhorrent to God
 - b. God is justly angry; He will not tolerate sin.
 - c. Sin will keep people out of Heaven.
 2. God “greatly abhorred and rejected” Israel (also in v. 67)
 - a. Idolatry is a direct affront to His sovereignty and uniqueness, extreme abhorrence and rejection is the result.
 - b. “Greatly” qualified the abhorrence and rejection
This qualifying word serves both **to enhance the abhorrence**—he abhorred them not merely a little but exceedingly, and also **to restrict the meaning**—He rejected them exceedingly, yet not utterly or altogether. The rejection was broad during this period—the whole people under the ascendancy of Ephraim.
- B. His Abandonment of the Nation (60-64)
1. Abandonment of Shiloh (60)
The tabernacle was at Shiloh in the tribe of Ephraim from the time of Joshua (18:1, 10) through the period of the Judges (Jud. 18:31) and until the time of Samuel (I Sam. 4:3). After the events of I Sam. 4, the tabernacle was first removed to Nob (I Sam. 21:2), then to Gibeon (I K. 3:4), and finally under David on Zion (II Chr. 15:1).
 - a. “Dwelling” of the divine presence—the Shekinah glory
 - b. “God’s tent” that “he pitched”—set up—among men; the only official place of God’s dwelling.
 - c. Jeremiah later refers to this same historical incident of God’s abandonment of Shiloh and its utter overthrow as evidence that he would soon do the same with the temple in Jerusalem (Jer. 7:8-15; also 26:6—“I will make this house like Shiloh, and this city I will make a curse to all the nations of the earth”).
 2. “Giving up” the Ark of the Covenant (61)
 - a. Taken over by the Philistines (I Sam. 4)
 - Taken “captive” by them (see I Sam. 5).
 - In their “hand”—power, control; but, they really had no control!
 - b. Character of the Ark
 - God’s “strength”—See I Sam. 4:3 where the elders suggested taking the ark from Shiloh into the battle with the Philistines so that “it may come among us and deliver us **from the power** of our enemies.”
 - God’s “Glory”—the Shekinah glory manifested there
 - God was so unhappy with the sins of Judah that He actually forsook the one place which He had chosen for the special manifestation of His presence. Even later when the ark was returned to Israel from Philistia, it was taken to Kirjath-jearim, not to Shiloh (I Sam. 7:2).
 3. Giving over the People (62)—one who is so “shut up” to the will of the enemy, has no recourse, and has no other option.
 - a. Over 30,000 slaughtered (I Sam. 4:10).
 - b. “Filled with wrath” over His “inheritance”
 - Note that Israel had “inheritance” of the land, but they were “God’s inheritance.”
 - It is quite humbling to note how high of a privilege God’s people have in Him. That God would regard His people with such importance—His “inheritance”—is a powerful evidence of His grace.

4. Young men and young women affected—the strongest and those with the most potential (63).
 - a. Young men were “eaten up” by the fire of war.
 - b. Maidens/virgins had no “wedding songs”—“they were not praised in song.”
 - Indeed, their young men were killed.
 - The “utter desolation of the land” is depicted here by the **utter “silence”** maintained in the land: the joyous strains of the marriage-song are not heard here in this verse, and in verse 64 neither are heard the sad wail of the funeral chant. **It was a land of silence, a land of the dead.**
5. Priests were killed—could no longer serve the tabernacle (64a).
 - a. Especially a reference to Hophni and Phinehas—taken he ark into battle.
 - b. Also to Eli, who heard the news and fell over backwards and broke his neck.
6. Widows could not weep (64 b)
 - a. Can apply to all widows
 - Turmoil so great makes difficult weeping.
 - Bodies of men not available for mourning customs.
 - Do not wish to give “fodder” for the gloating of the enemy (cf. Mic. 1:10).
 - b. Special application to the wife of Phinehas—who died in childbirth (I Sam. 4:19-22)
 - Heard of the deaths of husband and f-in-law
 - Heard of capture of the ark
 - No answer to the words of encouragement concerning her son—paid no attention and did not answer.
 - Only reply—his name is “Ichabod.” “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God was taken.”

CONCLUSION

What a sad account! God’s continued faithfulness; Israel’s continued sin; God’s righteous punishment—His just indignation and His abandonment of the nation—the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the people, the young men and young women, the priests, and even the widows.

Why? They had forgotten God, forsaken His testimonies, and were faithless to God in following false gods.

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