

“THE SHEPHERD OF GOD’S CHOICE”

PSALM 78:65-72

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INTRODUCTION

In I Sam. 13:14 God told Saul when rejecting him as ruler over Israel that He had “sought out for Himself a man after His own heart” and that the Lord “has appointed him as ruler over His people.”

- God was not looking for the biggest and strongest person—Saul was that person.
- God was not looking for the eldest son of his family—David had 7 other brothers older than he.
- God was not looking for the person with the most glamorous job resume—David was a mere shepherd.
- God was looking for a person whose heart was single-mindedly focused on eternal values.
- God was looking for a person who was humble and would be totally dependent upon Him.

God chose (elected) that person in David, a young man whom He had been preparing for years in solitary places out with his sheep when he had time to seek God and to develop a deep and wholesome relationship with Him.

In this final passage of Psalm 78, we see God’s choices—His sovereign “election.” What He did not choose, and what He did choose. His people were not deserving of God’s favor, yet God continued to act on their behalf. He heard the cries of those who were seeking him in their time of despair and ruin, and He came to help them. God was not “asleep”, despite outward appearances. He was still a mighty warrior and He drove back Israel’s enemies. God is the God of Election—He did not choose Joseph or Ephraim; he did choose Judah and Mount Zion, and He chose David, His servant.

GOD HAS CHOSEN YOU ALSO; GO AND DO HIS SERVICE!

I. GOD NEVER SLEEPS WHEN HIS PEOPLE ARE IN NEED (65-66)

A. God takes action (65)

1. As though a “sleeper.”
2. Like a powerful warrior invigorated from wine—giving a **ringing cry**
 - Not “overcome by wine”
 - Not “sobered up from wine”

B. God defeats the enemies of His people (66)

1. Smiting them backwards
2. Placing on them everlasting reproach
 - cf. the incidents in I Sam 5 (see the “fall” of Dagon, and the plagues on their cities)
 - Not really speaking of their “posterior”
 - Reference to all the military setbacks under Samuel, Saul, and David

II. GOD’S SOVEREIGN CHOICES (67-72)

A. His “rejection” of Joseph and Ephraim

- cf. v. 59—“rejected/abhorred Israel” and then abandoned the tabernacle at Shiloh, “the tent which He had pitched among men”
 - Here the “tent” of Joseph reminds us of that abandoned tabernacle/tent in Shiloh.
 - But the “tent” also represents those living in their tents—they are rejected for leadership.
1. Joseph was the illustrious patriarch of Israel in the early days, and his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh became strong in numbers and prominent leaders.
 2. Ephraim, as seen in 9-11, had been the main leader during the period of the Judges, but had miserably failed (vv. 9-11).

B. His Choice of the tribe of Judah (68)

1. Compare the divine prophecy of Judah’s future leadership: Gen. 49:10—“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes—that is, “He to whom it belongs”, the rightful king.
2. See Ezek. 21:26-27—the rightful ruler will come; Zedekiah, the last king, takes off his crown
3. The kingship goes to the line of David, but ultimately to Messiah.

C. His choice of Mount Zion (68b-69)

1. God’s love is seen in selecting Mt. Zion—not because of its natural prominence or desert
2. God there “built His sanctuary”—His holy place where He manifests his presence (69).

- At first the Ark was the only part of sanctuary furniture there; the rest of the tabernacle was at Gibeon (I K. 3:4-5).
 - Even in David's time the place of the ark was given a more permanent structure that was at times in the Psalms described as a "temple."
3. The exaltation of the sanctuary was like the high places/heights/heavens—strong and enduring
 4. The exaltation of the sanctuary was also solid and stable like the earth—founded forever.
 - Here we see the permanency of the choice of Zion—though modest at first.
 - David began temple preparations even in his days; Solomon built the temple.
 - Even once the temple was ruined, the site was still the place of God's choice and will be so "forever."
 - This "forever" not only depicts Christ's ascendancy and reign after His resurrection, but also speaks of His future reign in Jerusalem for 1,000 years, and eventually the New Jerusalem.
- D. His Choice of David as Ruler over His people (70-72)
1. God's privileged servant: David is frequently referred to as God's "servant"—see e.g. Ps. 18 title.
 - The word show that he willingly submitted to God, was humble in his attitude toward God, and gladly worked for God and did His bidding as a human servant would to his master.
 - The point is not that David was a good man, and His servant, so that God chose him; rather, God's choice of David made David His servant.
 - That choice is described in I Sam. 16 and elaborated in the following chapters along with a sharp contrast with God's rejection of Saul. David is "a man after God's own heart."
 - The title of "servant" was given in Scripture to only a select few such as Moses, Joshua, Caleb, and Job.
 2. David's humble beginnings—"from the sheepfolds"
 - a. From "after/behind/following the ewes nursing" their young
 - The expression does not refer to those pregnant, but "those giving suck."
 - Such a shepherd cares for those most needing care
 - Shows a real tenderness by the shepherd.
 - b. Now brought to "shepherd" with the same tender care His people
 - Jacob—His people
 - Israel—His inheritance (what a privilege—God's own inheritance)
 3. David's qualifications as a shepherd and guide (72)
 - a. The "integrity of his heart"
 - One with integrity has a **completeness and simplicity** of mind and heart that is unified in objective. *The heart is that which controls ones emotions, will, and thoughts.*
 - b. "Skillful hands"
 - The second term is literally "understanding"; but here, as in 136:5; Pr. 3:19 and several other passages it refers to "the act of understanding," and so may be rendered "skillful"—especially since connected with "hands."

CONCLUSION

"If Israel's record is her shame," [all the record of this psalm] "God's persistent goodness emerges as her hope (and ours) for the unfinished story" (K. 286). The writer has now attained his goal, which, as noted earlier, involves a defense of David and his house as the God-given leader; the people must then have the correct attitude and submit willingly to David. Of course, in giving praise and recognition to the under-shepherd of God's people, the psalmist also heaps praise upon the Over-Shepherd of God's people who gave to them their under-shepherd.

From this passage and its sources in II Sam. 7:8=I Chr. 11:2 are derived the numerous later references of both Christ being the Chief Shepherd of His flock—the church—and of ministers being the shepherds/pastors of the flocks/churches under their care (cf. A. p. 338). The switch from being a literal shepherd to being a shepherd of people may be compared with the switch of the early apostles from being literal fishermen to being "fishers of men."

In this psalm we see that God sovereignly chooses the place for His house, and the shepherd for His flock. He also has chosen us as his sheep.

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