

“THE GOD WHO SMOKES”

PSALM 80

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INTRODUCTION

You may be shocked by my title, but God indeed does smoke as v. 4 here with a literal reading makes clear. Indeed, this is the only place in Scripture where a person is said to “smoke” rather than that his “anger smokes.” God, because of His absolute holiness, indeed becomes “smoking angry” against sin; and because that is true, He cannot favorably respond to the prayers of His rebellious and disobedient people, prayers which become to Him like fingers grating on a chalkboard or as a grain of sand in one’s eye.

However, not all of God’s people are rebellious and disobedient, and some had come to genuine repentance and now seek God’s favor once more. What is difficult for them, is that God seems to ignore their prayers and does not come to their aid. What is taking Him “so long” (cf. v. 4)?

As we noted last week, the historical background of this psalm seems to be the captivity of the northern tribes, an event which had profound effect also upon the faithful people of the southern kingdom [note the pronouns “us” in this psalm]. How long would God allow these circumstances to continue? How long would the threat even against the southern kingdom endure. Will God come to their aid and deliver them. Biblically and historically, we know that the north fell in 722 B.C.; but Assyria also came to the south and demanded tribute from King Hezekiah—a godly king. Then, when the king decided tribute was not enough, he attacked and demanded that Judah surrender (this happened in about 701 B.C.). When exactly this psalm was composed by the godly descendant of Asaph, we cannot be certain. But the dangers were grave and his concern, that represented the concerns of all the people, was deep.

The psalmist begins with a plea for God to come once more in a mighty Theophany resulting in deliverance/salvation for them, an indication of His divine favor, and restoration (vv. 1-3). Then he reviews the deep sorrows they experience, the humiliation at the hands of their enemies, and once again the need for restoration and salvation (vv. 4-7; repetition of the “refrain” of v. 3 in v. 7). The main part of the psalm is a historical review of God’s mighty work of deliverance for His people—under the figure of the transplanting of a vine from Egypt and its planting in Israel with the resulting growth and prosperity under the divine hand of blessing—but tragedy took place and the vine was ruined (8-13). While still continuing with the figure of the vine, the psalmist makes a plea with words similar to the refrain of vv. 3 & 7 in v. 14, and beseeches God to turn, look down favorably upon them, see their plight, and care once again for his vine. The psalmist reviews God’s past action for His vine (15), the current abuse of the vine (16), and issues a plea for a renewal of divine favor upon the vine (17). He concludes the psalm with a pledge from himself and the godly in the nation that once God “turns again” to them (v. 14) and “revives” them (18b), they will not turn back from Him (18a) but will worship Him by calling on His name (18b). He ends the psalm (v. 19) with the same refrain found in vv. 3 & 7, and imitated in v. 14: “cause us to turn—restore us”, be favorable to us by “causing your face to shine upon us,” so that “we will be saved.”

Surely, this psalm is an expression of a heartfelt plea from a godly, concerned, and deeply troubled believer. God always hears the pleas of His people, even if His ways are difficult to discern and His timing is hard to endure.

YOU MUST ENDURE GOD’S TIMES OF TESTING AND TRUST HIM UNTIL HE RESTORES AND DELIVERS YOU.

- I. O SHEPHERD OF YOUR PEOPLE, ONCE MORE GO BEFORE US AND BE OUR CONQUEROR (1-3).
 - A. Shepherd Your people like a flock (1).
 - B. Go forth as you did with the ark before your people—before the sons of Rachel (1b, 2).
 - C. Restore us, shine upon us, save us (3).

- II. O GOD OF HOSTS, SEE OUR DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES AND RESTORE US—SAVE US (4-7).
 - A. How long will you be angry with our prayers? (4)
 - B. We have a monotonous diet of tears for our food and drink—in large measure (5).
 - C. Our “neighbors” fight over how they are going to hurt us and mock us. (6)
 - D. Restore us, shine upon us, save us (7).

- III. O GOD WHO HAS PLANTED YOUR VINEYARD, NOTE ITS ABUSE AND RESTORE IT (8-17).
 - A. God transplanted the vine from Egypt, cleared the ground, caused in to take deep root (8-9).
 - B. The vine filled the land, covered both mountains and cedar trees, and went from Sea to River (9b-11).
 - C. God has taken down its walls and allowed scavengers to strip it (12-13).
 - D. God of hosts, we need You to “turn again, look down, see, and visit/take care” of your vine (14).
 - E. It is in bad shape and the people are perishing at your rebuke (16).
 - F. Your shoot/root of the vine was planted by Your right hand of strength; its “son/branch” has been strengthened for yourself (15).
 - G. Let your hand be upon this “son/man of your right hand, the son of man (branch) whom you made strong (17).

- IV. O GOD OF HOSTS, RESTORE AND REVIVE US AND WE WILL NOT TURN BACK FROM YOU (18-19).
 - A. Once you “turn” to us (14) and cause us to “turn/restore” us (3, 7, 19), we will not “**turn back/away/become apostate**” [different verb] from you (18).
 - B. Revive us and we will worship you—call on your name (18b).
 - C. Restore us, shine upon us, save us (19).

CONCLUSION

If you want to understand “the rest of the story” as to how the answer finally came to the people of God, read II K. 18-20; see 18:1-16 for the start of godly Hezekiah’s reign, and 18:17-19:37 for the amazing story of the attack of Judah by Assyria and of God’s miraculous deliverance; especially see 19:32-36. God does hear and answer prayer!

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