

**May 19**

**Scriptures:** Read Psalm 78

**Key Verse:** “But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them.” (Psalm 78:38)

## Overview

Psalm 78 is an historical psalm entitled, “A Contemplation of Asaph”. It is a psalm of instruction as well as a warning for the people of Judah to follow the Lord faithfully and not make the mistakes of their forefathers. These warnings also apply to us today (1 Cor. 10:1-12; Hebrews 2:1-4). Asaph, a contemporary of David, traced Israel’s rebellious history and God’s merciful dealings with them. He urged the people, as did Moses, to pass on their spiritual heritage to successive generations by telling their children of God’s wondrous deeds and teaching them His Law (cf. Exodus 10:2; Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7). Asaph gave them several reasons why this was important, and it is still relevant today: (1) that the oral transmission may continue to the next generations; (2) that they might have trust and hope in the Lord, for faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17); (3) that they might not forget the works of God — His merciful redemption; (4) that they might keep His commandments; and (5) that they might not be stubborn and rebellious like their forefathers, but rather set their hearts on God and be faithful to Him.

Another purpose for Asaph’s discourse was to illustrate why God rejected the northern tribes (represented by Ephraim, v. 67) and chose Judah instead as the recipient of His promise. Ephraim was renowned for its good soldiers who were always anxious to engage in battle, but in the spiritual battle for the Lord they were renegades, even though they had been armed with the teaching of God’s Law. They did not keep the Lord’s covenant and were unfaithful, because they did not instruct their children in the Law nor tell them about God’s miraculous deeds; therefore, they “forgot His works” (78:10).

In order to remind the people, Asaph describes God’s work in detail, giving special attention to the greatest event of Israelite history: the Lord’s miraculous deliverance of His people from bondage in Egypt. After describing the exodus, Asaph tells of the nation’s experience in the wilderness. He showed how God graciously guided and gave them sustenance (water from the rock, manna, quail), even though they continually complained against him, tried his patience (“tempted God”), sinned against Him, doubted Him, acted hypocritically, and did not keep the covenant. We also read that they “limited the Holy One of Israel” (v. 41). The Hebrew word translated as “limited” is better rendered as “vexed”, which led to the limitation of the work of God because of their lack of faith and unbelief. Several times, God’s wrath burned against them, but because of His compassion, He forgave them and did not wipe them off the face of the earth (v. 38).

Asaph explained how the people were apostate and idolatrous during the time of the Judges, and he uses the metaphor of the “deceitful bow” (that causes one to miss the mark — a meaning of the word “sin”). Asaph is referring mainly to the northern tribes, for Ephraim was symbolized by the bow (v. 57; cf. Genesis 49:24). The Lord demanded their sole allegiance, so when they turned to worship idols, He was moved to jealousy. From this point in the psalm, we read of the

Lord's reaction. The tabernacle had been erected in Shiloh, a city within the inheritance of Ephraim (Judges 18:31; 1 Samuel 1:3, 24), but God forsook His tabernacle when He allowed the Philistines to conquer and take the Ark of the Covenant (vv. 60-61; 1 Samuel 5:1). He also ordained that the corrupted priests die in the battle (v. 64, 1 Samuel 4:11). At that time, however, the Lord was gracious to raise up Samuel, the one to anoint David from the tribe of Judah (v. 68), for God had chosen the tribe of Judah to fulfill His promise of redemption. Just as God had guided His flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron (77:20), He now chose David to be the shepherd of Israel; but the greatest Shepherd from the tribe of Judah who came to fulfill God's promises was Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Shepherd today (Hebrews 13:20).

## **Prayer**

We praise You, oh God, for delivering us from sin through the Blood of Christ and for being so patient and merciful during our times of complaining. Help us to faithfully pass on a godly heritage to our children and grandchildren.