

The essence of Psalm 78

Note: This chapter is the history of Israel's rebellion, and more importantly it is a record of God's faithfulness again and again in spite of the Jews' unfaithfulness. In time, the LORD chose a man of faith to lead His people. He was a man after God's own heart, and his name was King David.

God told the Jews to teach their children about the greatness of God

¹All of you who are God's people, put everything aside, and give me your full attention. Listen carefully to every word I am about to teach you. Oh, but don't merely listen out of respect. No, no! Listen with the intent of actually doing what you hear. ²I am going to speak to you in parables and word pictures, and they will be riddles not only about Israel's history but also about God's loving response when they rebelled and disobeyed. You will need to pay close attention. In fact, you will need to put on your thinking cap if you want to understand the full importance of the deep things I am going to share with you. ³All of us who are Jews know the things I am about to share because our fathers rehearsed them with us until we could recite them by heart.

All believers should do the same

⁴Now it's our turn. We parents simply cannot hide these truths from the next generation, because they need to know them too. Therefore, we need to teach our children how to praise the LORD as they learn about His greatness, His power, and the wonderful and awe-inspiring works He has done for His children in the past. ⁵All of the awesome things He did for the Jews in years gone by have established and continue to maintain His reputation as a powerful, loving, and trustworthy God. In addition to being such an awesome God, He also gave Israel His set of laws, and commanded them to teach those laws to their children.

⁶It is really important to teach our children the Word of God, because both they, and our grandchildren need to know these truths and live them. This can only happen if each generation teaches the one that comes after them. ⁷That way they can know how God has been actively involved in Israel's history, and it will cause the next generation to acquire and maintain a genuine hope and confidence in the true God, Jesus Christ¹. Then they can teach the generation that comes after them. ⁸If they have this kind of faith and trust, they will not forget all of the things LORD has done, and they will not become stubborn, unfaithful, and rebellious of heart toward the LORD like our fathers.

Why should we teach our children? Because the Jews rebelled!

⁹At some point in time, the Jews abandoned the practice of teaching their children God's greatness and His wonderful works. Why do I say this? Because since they were not faithful to God He was not there to help Joseph's descendants when they needed Him. For instance, the men of the tribe of Ephraim were well-trained soldiers armed with the best weapons of their day, but in the heat of battle they turned and ran from the fight. ¹⁰They abandoned the fight because God was not with them to give the victory. You see, these men were not faithful to God, and they did not guard with fidelity their obedience to the covenant God had made with them. In fact, they not only abandoned God's commandments, but they steadfastly refused to give Him any place in their lives. ¹¹Why did this happen? Because they had forgotten all of the mighty miracles God had done for His people when He delivered them from bondage in Egypt. ¹²They had no concept about all of the absolutely awesome things

God did when He brought hail, frogs, death of the firstborn, and all of the other miracles He did to show Pharaoh, Israel, and the rest of the world His awesome power. ¹³ In addition, He made the Red Sea separate down the middle and stand like giant walls. The bottom of the sea dried up allowing the children of Israel to cross over to the other side without getting mud on their sandals. What a miracle! ¹⁴ Throughout the wilderness wanderings the LORD led the children of Israel by providing a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This was quite a miracle in itself. ¹⁵ At one point during their wilderness wanderings God caused a big rock to split right down the middle, and water came out of the rock. This was not simply a trickle of water either. No! It was enough to fully satisfy the thirst of approximately two million people. ¹⁶ In fact, I imagine the people standing downhill from the rock had to run for their lives to higher ground, because there was a literal river of water flowing from the break in the rock.

They rebelled again

¹⁷ Even after the LORD had done all of these miracles for the children of Israel they still continued to sin by rebelling against Him in the desert. ¹⁸ They were barely out of sight of the Red Sea before they put God to the test by complaining about their lack of food. ¹⁹ The farther they traveled the more dissatisfied they became until they actually started talking badly about God by saying something like,

“Is there anyone who really believes that God is able to set a table of real honest-to-goodness food for us out in this God-forsaken desert?”

²⁰ Moses had struck the rock, and God had supplied sufficient water for all the people, but they kept saying,

“Can God provide food for us too? Will He show Himself powerful enough to give us what we need to eat?”

²¹ Well, God heard their griping and complaining. As a result, He became angry with the whole nation of Israel. In fact, He became so infuriated with them that His cup of wrath was full and ready to run over the brim. ²² It was only right that He should be angry with them because even after all that He had done for them, they still didn't believe in Him. No matter how much He did, they simply would not trust Him to deliver them out of their difficulties and supply their needs. ²³ In spite of all this, God was tender and compassionate toward them even though He was still angry. He caused the heavens to open, ²⁴ and He rained down manna upon the ground for the people to eat. ²⁵ It wasn't the same old slop everyday, but it was majestic food like angels eat. He wasn't stingy either, because He gave them all they could eat each day. It was a literal “all you can eat” buffet.

²⁶ He not only gave them manna, but to their detriment He also gave them the desire of their greedy hearts. By his great power He caused the wind to blow from the east and from the south ²⁷ driving quail by the thousands into the camp of the Israelites. ²⁸ They fell on the ground everywhere in the camp, and there appeared to be as many birds as all the grains of sand on all the beaches of the world. Simply stated, the people had demanded meat from God, and the LORD gave it to them. ²⁹ Yes, the people ate the meat all right, ³⁰ but before their lust had been fully satisfied, while the food was still in their mouths, ³¹ God's anger was unleashed upon those wicked people. As a result, the strongest and most important men, as well as many others, instantly became deathly sick and died.

There came a point where God had had enough!

³² In spite of God's provision and the way He punished rebellious men, the Israelites still did not believe in His wonderful and extraordinary works on their behalf. ³³ Therefore, God decided to put an end to their rebellion. He set things in motion so that in a moment of time the adults of their generation started dying at the average rate of 50,000 adults per year (that's 1,000 per week). ³⁴ When the children of Israel saw all of these people dying off, they realized that they might be next, so many of them started seeking God in earnest. ³⁵ When the pressure was on, they remembered who God was and that He had been there for them all the time. Yes, Jehovah was the One willing and able to buy them back, not only from the guilt of their sin, but also from the destruction that would follow if they were not rescued.

They rebelled again

³⁶ Even after this short revival it wasn't long before they lied to the LORD again. They spoke words of obedience, but in their hearts they had no intention of obeying Him. ³⁷ You see, they were not convinced in their hearts that they could trust Him. They simply were not totally committed to that truth, and their doubt kept them from being faithful to Him.

In spite of all of this, God forgave them again

³⁸ But, since God has a deep sympathy for the hurts and heartaches of His children, accompanied by a strong desire to come to their aid², He forgave their sin and rebellion. Can you imagine God holding back His awesome anger and power instead of destroying those wicked, rebellious people? He should have wiped them out, but then, there were lots of times when He kept His anger in check instead of destroying them. ³⁹ Do you know why He did this? Because the whole time that these people were sinning against Him, He remembered that they were mere human beings with all the frailties of sinful men. He also remembered that man's life span is as short in relation to eternity as the steam that vapors off a boiling pot. Man is born, lives his life, and dies never to return to this life again.

They rebelled more times than can be counted

⁴⁰ Oh, there were many other times in the desert when the people of Israel were disobedient and rebellious toward God. The LORD was unhappy with them and broken-hearted over the way they treated Him. ⁴¹ Over and over again they put God to the test because they were selfish and unbelieving. Over and over again they caused pain and heartache for the One and only true God, Jehovah, the God of Israel. ⁴² They neither remembered nor took into account the raw, awesome power of the LORD when He performed all of those miracles to procure Israel's freedom from their enemy, Egypt. They forgot the fact that He rescued them from the unbearably harsh and demanding slavery under Pharaoh.

They forgot what He had done **TO** Egypt

⁴³ The LORD did not do His awesome miracles in some obscure, hard to find place. No, He performed them right in the middle of Egypt, and He even did them on Pharaoh's own property and in his palace.

In these places

⁴⁴ He turned the waters of all the rivers and streams into blood so that the Egyptians could not drink from them;

⁴⁵ He caused swarms of flies to cover everyone and everything, and He sent millions of frogs to cover the whole surface of the ground and then die causing a terrible stench;

⁴⁶ He caused swarms of grasshoppers to eat all of their crops and destroy all of the hard work the farmers had done that growing season;

⁴⁷ He caused large hailstones to fall, smashing all of their vines, and He caused a severe frost to destroy all of the fruit-bearing sycamore trees;

⁴⁸ He caused huge hailstones to kill the Egyptians' cattle, and He caused a massive lightning storm to strike and kill their flocks and herds; and

⁴⁹ He poured out His fierce anger, His overflowing rage, and His total disgust for their sinful ways.

He was so angry that He sent a group of His destroying angels ⁵⁰ to exact vengeance upon Egypt. Those heavenly beings didn't spare any of the Egyptians when He caused a devastating plague to come upon them, ⁵¹ nor did He spare any of them that night when His death angel killed the firstborn of every family that did not have blood on their doorpost.

They forgot what He had done **FOR** Israel

⁵² Although the LORD was severe with the rebellious people of Egypt, He was kind and gentle with the children of Israel. He led them out of Egypt like a shepherd guides his sheep, and ⁵³ He brought them safely away so that they had no reason to be afraid of how the Egyptians might retaliate against them. In fact, He caused the Red Sea to open as a safe passage for the children of Israel to follow in order to reach safety on the other side of the sea, and then He caused the sea to slam back together forming a tomb for Pharaoh and every man of his army. ⁵⁴ In the end, the LORD brought His people into the promised land, and through God's power they took possession of it. ⁵⁵ In addition, The LORD caused the children of Israel to drive most of the other nations out of the promised land, and He gave each tribe a portion of the land as an inheritance forever. At that time God's people were finally able to live in their tents in relative peace.

They rebelled again

⁵⁶ You would think that God's punishment of Egypt and His tender care for the people of Israel would satisfy His people, but it wasn't long before they put God to the test once again. Yes, they continued to rebel and became disobedient to the one true and powerful God. The people did this because they turned their backs on God and abandoned His commandments. ⁵⁷ They were disloyal, unfaithful, and deceitful³ toward God, and they were as treacherous toward Him as a man who would stab his trusting friend in the back without giving it a second thought. ⁵⁸ Their actions were treacherous because they not only abandoned the true God, but they provoked Him to anger by building altars in high places. As soon as they were built, they made God jealous by worshipping their false gods upon those altars.

God finally gave up and allowed them to suffer the results of their rebellion

⁵⁹ As soon as God saw what they had done, He became angry enough to destroy all of them. He despised the very people He had selected as His chosen ones, ⁶⁰ and as a result, He abandoned the temple where Samuel grew up (the same temple men had built for Him as an earthly place to dwell). ⁶¹ Israel was the LORD's showcase nation that He wanted to make strong and glorious, but in His anger He delivered them into the hands of their adversaries. ⁶² He allowed Israel's enemies to overpower them and whittle them down with swords and spears. ⁶³ The fire of God's wrath toward them devoured Israel's best young men, and her young virgins had no one left to marry. ⁶⁴ The LORD's priests were cut down with the sword along with the other people, and things were so bad that the widows were devastated to the point where they couldn't even cry over the severity of their loss. Fortunately for Israel, the LORD didn't stay angry forever.

Then God chose a faithful man, King David, to lead Israel

⁶⁵ After the destruction was over and the people had time to repent, the LORD started stirring like a man awakening from a deep sleep. When He did it, He moved with all of His might, like a Navy SEAL pursuing an opponent. ⁶⁶ The LORD beat back Israel's enemies and drove them out of Israel. Then He caused those adversaries to bear God's contempt forever. ⁶⁷ He also rejected the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh as the place He would have established His new earthly dwelling place. ⁶⁸ In their place He chose the tribe of Judah and Mount Zion in Jerusalem as the site of His new earthly abode. ⁶⁹ There He had men build a temple and dedicate it to the LORD. That temple was as beautiful as the Garden of Eden when the LORD first created it, and that temple was probably one of the seven wonders of the world. ⁷⁰ He also chose a lowly shepherd boy named David. ⁷¹ This man was a nobody, but God took him from the fields of innocent sheep and made him king over the rebellious people of Israel. These were the people of God, and they were precious to Him. ⁷² He chose well when He chose David because he was faithful to the LORD and a faithful leader of Israel. He used skillful hands, godly wisdom, and undying faith to guide the people of Israel well.

¹ In John 14:6 Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me." Therefore, the name "Jesus Christ" has been used

² Definition of "Compassionate", www.dictionary.com/browse/compassionate

² Definition of "Treacherous", *Ibid.*