

Virtual Prayer Meeting for Kelham Baptist Church

December 16, 2020

SONG: "It Came upon the Midnight Clear"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQjpDKKPK4>

Song: "Child in the Manger"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9EHF_UnFDA

Psalm 80 is definitely a psalm for our times. Three times in the psalm, the psalmist wrote, "Turn us again" (vss. 3, 7, 19). "Turn us again" can be translated "restore us" or "revive us." Those three pleadings are echoed in each of those verse by the declaration of hope: "We shall be saved." The psalm is attributed to Asaph, who was one of the leaders of David's appointed choirs (1 Chron. 6:31, 39). They were of the Kohathite priestly descendants of Aaron (for more information, you can read this link: <https://biblehub.com/topical/k/kohathites.htm>). Whether this was David's Asaph or another Asaph of a later age is not certain. If it was David's Asaph, this psalm is prophetic of the destruction, yet future in David's day, of the Northern Kingdom. If it was a later Asaph, he was expressing the confusion and hopes of his contemporaries in Judah as they saw the Assyrians besiege and capture Samaria (Israel's capital) in 722 B.C.

The psalm notably uses different names for God in its petitions:

1. Shepherd of Israel (vs. 1)
2. LORD (JHVH) God of hosts (vss. 4 and 19)
3. God (vs. 3)

4. God of hosts (vs. 14)

The psalmist's intensity reflects itself in the repeated use of "O" (vss. 1, 4, 7, 14, 19). The psalmist's continued fellowship with God despite a national tragedy (and his relating all of his life to God) comes through in the personal pronouns he uses: "Thou" (2x in verse 1, "thy" verses 2-3, "thou" again in verse 4, combined with "thy," "thou" in verses 4, 5, and 6, "thy" in verse 7, "thou" verses 8, 9, 12, and 15, "thy" 2x in verse 17 combined with "thou," ending with "thy" in verses 18 and 19).

The superscript for the psalm, contains the compound word "Shoshannimeduth" (vs. 1). It should probably be hyphenated as "shoshannim-eduth," since each of those words has meaning in itself. "Shoshannim" means "lilies" and may refer to a lily-shaped trumpet being called for in the singing of this psalm. "Eduth" means "testimony" or "witness." The whole thing may be simply a tune name to which the psalm was to be sung, much as "It Came upon the Midnight Clear" is usually sung to the tune name listed in our hymnals at the lefthand side of the bottom of the page, CAROL. "Shoshannim" appears twice more in the Book of Psalms, 45:1 and 69:1.

Young's Literal Translation offers another legitimate view: "'On the Lilies.' A testimony of Asaph." The Hebrew LASAPH can be translated "of," "by," or even "for" Asaph. The Hebrew preposition is a single letter with wide variety of meaning. This does not rule out its being a genuine psalm by David for Asaph, but David's name is not mentioned. It would clearly be prophetic in that case. The name "Asaph" means "gatherer," and it could be that this psalm was to be "gathered up" with others in a collection.

The first petition of the psalm is a request to be heard: "Give ear," from a word the carries the implication of something significant to be asked. It is addressed to the "Shepherd of Israel," a specific term that appears only here but the meaning of which is echoed throughout the Old Testament. Psalm 23 boldly proclaims, "The LORD is my shepherd." Jesus clearly claimed this title in John 10:11 in one of the great I AM statements in the New Testament, "I am the good shepherd." "I am" is the Greek equivalent of Jehovah reflected in compound names for God throughout the Old Testament—"Jehovah-nissi" (Exod. 17:16): God our Refuge; "Jehovah-jireh" (Gen.

22:13-14): God our Provider; “Jehovah-rapha” (Exod. 15:26): God our Healer; “Jehovah-shalom” (Judges 6:24): God our peace; “Jehovah-raah” (Ps. 23:1): God my Shepherd; “Jehovah-tsidkenu” (Jer. 23:6): God our righteousness; “Jehovah-shammah” (Ezek. 48:35): God there. “I am” is God’s divine name revealed to Moses in Exodus 6:3: “But by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them.”

In making to his petition to the Shepherd of Israel, the psalmist implicitly invoked all the qualities he knew and saw in lowly shepherds. The shepherd leads his sheep, feeds his sheep, guards his sheep, cares for the injuries and illnesses of his sheep, and if necessary dies for his sheep (compare John 10:11, in which Jesus says, “The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” in contrast to the hireling, whom He says in verse 12, “leaveth the sheep, and fleeth”). It is that kind of care the psalmist seeks for his nation.

Asaph explained that the Shepherd of Israel personally “leadest Joseph like a flock.” We might wonder why he used “Joseph” to refer to the nation instead of “Jacob” or “Judah” or “Israel.” We cannot be sure, but this seems to call us back to the dying prayer of Jacob in Egypt for his descendants in Genesis 49. (It is a prophetic prayer worthy of study—verse 10 is prophetic of Messiah’s descent from Judah through King David. “Shiloh” likely means “the one to which it [the kingdom] belongs.”) In that prayer in Genesis 49, Jacob speaks of Joseph (vss. 22-26) and says, “His hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty *God* of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:).” “Stone” translates the word usually rendered Rock, and it should probably carry that meaning here.

The psalmist goes beyond Jacob and Joseph, however, in his petition, referring to God as “though that dwellest between the cherubims,” a reference to the holiness of God portrayed in the mercy-seat, topped as it was with two golden cherubs with outstretched wings over the mercy-seat (Exod 25:17-22) above the ark of the covenant. The first time cherubim appear in the Bible, they are portrayed with “a flaming sword” to guard the way to the tree of life—to make it impossible for man to return to paradise and eat from the tree of life. Unger observed that the cherubim are “connected with vindicating the holiness of God against the presumptuous pride of fallen man... The cherubim apparently have to do with the holiness of God as violated by sin” (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, p.

192). His petition to this holy God is simple: “Shine forth.” The word seems to call forth a visible representation of God’s presence in judgment, much as occurred after the rebellion of Korah (Num. 16:19), where the “glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation.” Hebrews refers to Jesus as “the brightness of his glory” (1:3), and Jesus Himself spoke of coming judgment in Matthew 24:30, “Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

Verse 2 of Psalm 80 fully verbalizes the heart of the psalmist’s prayer in the last two words: “Save us.” Once more we have an unusual phrase for the nation, “Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,” rather than Joseph, Jacob, or Israel. These are the descendants of Rachel, the two Joseph tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:5), and the tribe of Benjamin. The two Joseph tribes inhabited the heart of the land in the Northern Kingdom (Manasseh also had part of its inheritance on the east side of the Jordan, Numbers 32:1-5). Only the small tribe of Benjamin remained with Judah in the Southern Kingdom. This request has led scholars to surmise the psalm was written at the initial phase of the Assyrian assault on the Northern Kingdom, represented by Ephraim and Manasseh and that the psalmist sought the Shepherd of Israel to “stir up thy strength for come and save us” (Ps. 80:2). “Stir up” means to “rouse” and suggests the psalmist’s only rational explanation for what he saw was that God was asleep. If only He would awake His strength would be sufficient.

That thinking, however, is put back on course by the request of verse 3: “Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.” The people had turned from God, as the history of the Northern Kingdom from Jeroboam on shows (1 Kings 12:26-33). They needed God to “turn” (Ps. 80:3) them back to Himself and they would “be saved.” What is easy to miss is the writer’s complete confidence that if God would intervene by bringing revival national salvation would result. It is that hope and that certainty that we need in these dark days in our world. God alone was their hope, and He is ours.

Next the psalmist addressed God in the most powerful of terms, “LORD God of hosts” (Ps. 80:4). This refers to God as the God of the numberless heavenly armies. Recall the

fear of Elisha's servant in 2 Kings 6 when he saw the city of Dothan, where he and Elisha were, surrounded by the armies of the king of Syria: "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" (vs. 15). Elisha then prayed for God to "open his eyes, that he may see" "and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (vs. 17). In the days of King Hezekiah, after the events of this psalm, Sennacherib had surrounded Jerusalem, causing great fear. God announced to Hezekiah, "I will defend this city, to save it" (2 Kings 19:34) and the Angel of the Lord "smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred four score and five thousand" (vs. 35) soldiers. Sennacherib departed back to Nineveh.

Pleading to the "LORD God of hosts" (Ps. 80:4) was a powerful reminder that God is able to conquer any number of enemies or foes. The question asked, "How long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people," expressed once more the psalmist's confusion at the state of affairs. God had at His disposal all the power of the heavenly armies (Rev. 5:11), how long would He wait? Of course, Jesus reminded Peter that God's ways are not always our ways when He said, "Put up again thy sword into his place... thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? (Matt. 26:52-53). (A legion was normally 6,000-men strong. More than seventy-two thousand angels could certainly have conquered Rome, if Jesus had wished.)

Next the psalmist cataloged the sufferings of God's people and tied them personally to God's discipline: "Thou" (Ps. 80:5). God had fed them tears and given them tears to drink (a picture of continual sorrows—eating and drinking). The nations around them "our neighbours" saw them as a "strife," an object of contention or cause for discord. Their "enemies laugh among themselves." The idea contained in all of this is that the people had been publicly humiliated by God.

In verse 7, Asaph repeats the plea of verse 3 that God would "turn us again," here addressing it to the "God of hosts." Again the stress is on God's overwhelming power. Yet, as we know, we have the choice to be turned or not. "Cause thy face to shine," repeated from verse 3, is a plea for God to be pleased once more and bless His people with His benevolent and loving presence. It acknowledges implicitly that that cannot

happen unless the nation gets turned around. We tend to pray, “Bless us,” rather than make us fit recipients or your blessings. James 4:3 reminds, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume *it* upon your lusts.” Psalm 80 does not make this mistake. Only if God turns the people can His face shine upon them. Only if God turns His people can they be “saved” (vs. 7).

Verse 8-11 of Psalm 80 recall God’s rescue of the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt in the imagery of a vine (vs. 8). The Promised Land was prepared as a fitting place for the vine to be planted (vs. 9). The ground, so to speak, was prepared; the vine grew and had incredible success, covering the land from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan river (vs. 11).

Verse 12 picks up the confusion of verse 4, which asked “how long.” Now the question is “why.” Vineyards and fields were often protected by hedges planted for protection from animals and thieves. The hedges were planted on an elevated mound with dirt from the ditch that was dug on the outside. Both were deterrents. Often small shrubs were planted in close proximity so that it was impossible to pass. Thornbushes were popular, a kind of ancient barbed wire. Yet God had broken down those spiritual and metaphorical hedges from the Northern Kingdom—else how could the enemy enter and succeed? The ever present wild boar of the forests (likely representing the “unclean” Gentile enemies from afar) and the wild beasts of the field (Persian fallow deer and roe deer, perhaps representing surrounding peoples) ravaged God’s vineyard. Why would God allow that?

Part of the answer comes in verse 14: “Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven and behold, and visit this vine.” Not only had God’s people (the Northern Kingdom) turned from Him; He had turned from them because of their sin. “Visit” translates a word that can mean “visit” but it can also mean “pay attention to.” None of this could have happened if the Sovereign God of the heavenly armies were looking at His people. This is an acknowledgment of the alienation sin brings. Even our Savior cried, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me” (Matt. 27:46) as He bore our sin on the cross. Sin always separates us from God. Sin breaks fellowship.

Verses 15-16 reminds God of the conditions in the Northern Kingdom. His vineyard the vineyard He had planted with His right hand, the hand of strength, was “burned with fire,” “cut down.” The psalmist knows, however, that it is God’s work: “They perish at the rebuke of thy countenance.”

Psalm 80:17 points to the brighter future the psalmist seeks for God’s people and hints at the ultimate fulfillment of that. “The man of thy right hand” clearly is prophetic of Messiah. Hebrews 1:3 speaks of Jesus as having “sat down on the right hand of the majesty of high.” Hebrews 10:12 again references Him as having “sat down on the right hand of God.” Messiah is “the man of thy right hand.” While sometimes this can simply be seen as a reference to a human ruler, a chosen king, the next phrase in Psalm 80:17, “the son of man,” seems to point directly to Messiah. Mark 14:62 ties the two terms together: “Ye shall see the son of man sitting on the right hand of power.” Daniel 7:13-14 says it powerfully: “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed.”

The final petition of Psalm 80 repeats the requests of verses 3 and 7 and is addressed once more to the “LORD God of hosts” to restore, or turn back, God’s people to Him.

In the future his psalm will have great meaning for Jews during the Tribulation period. In the present, it offers us the only solution to turning back the slide we see in our culture. Lockdowns and the virus have temporarily gotten people out of regular church attendance. Experts in habit formation have studied how long it take to create or break a habit and they reveal, “It took an average of 66 days for the new behavior to become automatic” (<https://www.healthline.com/health/how-long-does-it-take-to-break-a-habit#realistic-time-frame>). When the pandemic is over, will our nation turn back to houses of worship? Only God knows.

Song: "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tM5pwwUGMI>

The hymn was originally written and sung in Latin.

https://traditioninaction.org/religious/Music_P000_files/p016rpAdeste.htm

For that version, click on the hyperlink and then the link on the page

That says "Listen to *Adeste Fideles*."

I kind of like the Latin version myself.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Dale Allen—recuperation/therapy; Janie
Tom Anderson—fall/wrist injury
Bob and Judy Barker—health
Beverly Beardain—headaches
Shirley Craig—health
Gary & Judy Goree—health
Bette Fehrle—vertigo/dizziness
Mark Handley's mother—hospital
Charles Harris's daughter—knee
Justine Hoel—Thanksgiving
Julia Huntley—health—Atrial fibrillation
Kuykendall family—positive Covid tests/Carole fall
Glenna Littleton—recuperation, knee surgery
Deb & Ron Meek—quarantine
Deb's son, Caleb, his wife, and their son—Covid
Ron Meek's cousin—health
Glenn Myrick—health issues
Becca Rocco—work
Jolene Rogers—Covid
Joni Sapp—health & well-being
Brother of Al Vass, oral cancer
Youth and leaders