

PSALM 80

This psalm is much to the same purport with the foregoing. Some think it was penned upon occasion of the desolation and captivity of the ten tribes, as the foregoing psalm of the two. But many were the distresses of the Israel of God, many perhaps which are not recorded in the sacred history some whereof might give occasion for the drawing up of this psalm, which is proper to be sung in the day of Jacob's trouble, and if, in singing it, we express a true love to the church and a hearty concern for its interest, with a firm confidence in God's power to help it out of its greatest distresses, we make melody with our hearts to the Lord. The psalmist here,

I. Begs for the tokens of God's presence with them and favour to them (v. 1-3).

II. He complains of the present rebukes they were under (v. 4-7).

III. He illustrates the present desolations of the church, by the comparison of a vine and a vineyard, which had flourished, but was now destroyed (v. 8-16).

IV. He concludes with prayer to God for the preparing of mercy for them and the preparing of them for mercy (v. 17-19). This, as many psalms before and after, relates to the public interests of God's Israel, which ought to lie nearer to our hearts than any secular interest of our own.

~~80~~ PSALM 80:1-7

MOURNFUL COMPLAINTS

To the chief musician upon Shoshannim, Eduth. A psalm of Asaph.

The psalmist here, in the name of the church, applies to God by prayer, with reference to the present afflicted state of Israel.

I. He entreats God's favour for them (v. 1, 2); that is all in all to the sanctuary when it is desolate, and is to be sought in the first place. Observe,

1. How he eyes God in his address as the Shepherd of Israel, whom he had called the *sheep of his pasture* (^{<3913>}Psalm 79:13), under whose guidance and care Israel was, as the sheep are under the care and conduct of the shepherd. Christ is the great and good Shepherd, to whom we may in faith commit the custody of his sheep that were given to him. He *leads Joseph like a flock*, to the best pastures, and out of the way of danger; if Joseph follow him not as obsequiously as the sheep do the shepherd, it is his own fault. He *dwells between the cherubim*, where he is ready to receive petitions and to give directions. The mercy-seat was between the cherubim; and it is very comfortable in prayer to look up to God as sitting on a throne of grace, and that it is so to us is owing to the great propitiation, for the mercy-seat was the propitiatory.

2. What he expects and desires from God, that he would give ear to the cry of their miseries and of their prayers, that he would shine forth both in his own glory and in favour and kindness to his people, that he would show himself and smile on them, that he would *sir up his strength*, that he would excite it and exert it. It had seemed to slumber: "Lord, awaken it." His cause met with great opposition and the enemies threatened to overpower it: "Lord, put forth thy strength so much the more, and come for salvation to us; be to thy people a powerful help and a present help; Lord, do this *before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh*," that is, "In the sight of all the tribes of Israel; let them see it to their satisfaction." Perhaps these three tribes are named because they were the tribes which formed that squadron of the camp of Israel that in their march through the wilderness followed next after the tabernacle; so that before them the ark of God's strength rose to scatter their enemies.

II. He complains of God's displeasure against them. God was angry, and he dreads that more than any thing, v. 4.

1. It was great anger. He apprehended that God was *angry against the prayer of his people*, not only that he was angry notwithstanding their prayers, by which they hoped to turn away his wrath from them, but that he was angry with their prayers, though they were his own people that prayed. That God should be angry at the sins of his people and at the

prayers of his enemies is not strange; but that he should be angry at the prayers of his people is strange indeed. He not only delayed to answer them (that he often does in love), but he was displeased at them. If he be really angry at the prayers of his people, we may be sure it is because they ask amiss, ^{<304B>}James 4:3. They pray, but they do not wrestle in prayer; their ends are not right, or there is some secret sin harboured and indulged in them; they do not lift up pure hands, or they lift them up with wrath and doubting. But perhaps it is only in their own apprehension; he seems angry with their prayers when really he is not; for thus he will try their patience and perseverance in prayer, as Christ tried the woman of Canaan when he said, *It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs.*

2. It was anger that had continued a great while: “*How long wilt thou be angry?*” We have still continued praying and yet are still under thy frowns.” Now the tokens of God's displeasure which they had been long under were both their sorrow and shame.

(1.) Their sorrow (v. 5): *Thou feedest them with the bread of tears;* they eat their meat from day to day in tears; this is the vinegar in which they *dipped their morsel,* ^{<304B>}Psalm 42:3. They had tears given them to drink, not now and then a taste of that bitter cup, but in great measure. Note, There are many that spend their time in sorrow who yet shall spend their eternity in joy.

(2.) It was their shame, v. 6. God, by frowning upon them, made them a strife unto their neighbours; each strove which should expose them most, and such a cheap and easy prey were they made to them that all the strife was who should have the stripping and plundering of them. Their enemies laughed among themselves to see the frights they were in, the straits they were reduced to, and the disappointments they met with. When God is displeased with his people we must expect to see them in tears and their enemies in triumph.

III. He prays earnestly for converting grace in order to their acceptance with God, and their salvation: *Turn us again, O God!* v. 3. *Turn us again, O God of hosts!* (v. 7) and then *cause thy face to shine and we shall be saved.* It is the burden of the song, for we have it again, v. 19. They are conscious to themselves that they have gone astray from God and their duty, and have turned aside into sinful ways, and that it was this that provoked God to hide his face from them and to give them up into the

hand of their enemies; and therefore they desire to begin their work at the right end: “Lord, turn us to thee in a way of repentance and reformation, and then, no doubt, thou wilt return to us in a way of mercy and deliverance.” Observe,

1. No salvation but from God's favour: “*Cause thy face to shine*, let us have thy love and the light of thy countenance, and then we shall be saved.”
2. No obtaining favour with God unless we be converted to him. We must turn again to God from the world and the flesh, and then he will cause his face to shine upon us.
3. No conversion to God but by his own grace; we must frame our doings to turn to him (^{<BIB>}Hosea 5:4) and then pray earnestly for his grace, *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned*, pleading that gracious promise (^{<BIB>}Proverbs 1:23), *Burn you at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you*. The prayer here is for a national conversion; in this method we must pray for national mercies, that what is amiss may be amended, and then our grievances would be soon redressed. National holiness would secure national happiness.

^{<BIB>}PSALM 80:8-19

THE DESOLATED VINE

The psalmist is here presenting his suit for the Israel of God, and pressing it home at the throne of grace, pleading with God for mercy and grace for them. The church is here represented as a vine (v. 8, 14) and a vineyard, v. 15. The root of this vine is Christ, ^{<BIB>}Romans 11:18. The branches are believers, ^{<BIB>}John 15:5. The church is like a vine, weak and needing support, unsightly and having an unpromising outside, but spreading and fruitful, and its fruit most excellent. The church is a choice and noble vine; we have reason to acknowledge the goodness of God that he has planted such a vine in the wilderness of this world, and preserved it to this day. Now observe here,

I. How the vine of the Old-Testament church was planted at first. It was *brought out of Egypt with a high hand; the heathen were cast out of*

Canaan to make room for it, seven nations to make room for that one. *Thou didst sweep before it* (so some read v. 9), to make clear work; the nations were swept away as dirt with the besom of destruction. God, having made room for it, and planted it, cause it to take deep root by a happy establishment of their government both in church and state, which was so firm that, though their neighbours about them often attempted it, they could not prevail to pluck it up.

II. How it spread and flourished.

1. The land of Canaan itself was fully peopled. At first they were not so numerous as to replenish it, ^{<1029>}Exodus 23:29. But in Solomon's time *Judah and Israel were many as the sand of the sea*; the land was filled with them, and yet such a fruitful land that it was not over-stocked, v. 10. The hills of Canaan were covered with their shadow, and the branches, though they extended themselves far, like those of the vine, yet were not weak like them, but as strong as those of the goodly cedars. Israel not only had abundance of men, but those mighty men of valour.

2. They extended their conquests and dominion to the neighbouring countries (v. 11): *She sent out her boughs to the sea*, the great sea westward, and *her branches to the river*, to the river of Egypt southward, the river of Damascus northward, or rather the river Euphrates eastward, ^{<1158>}Genesis 15:18. Nebuchadnezzar's greatness is represented by a flourishing tree, ^{<2040>}Daniel 4:20, 21. But it is observable here concerning this vine that it is praised for its *shadow*, its *boughs*, and its *branches*, but not a word of its fruit, for *Israel was an empty vine*, ^{<3011>}Hosea 10:1. God came looking for grapes, but, behold, wild grapes, ^{<2382>}Isaiah 5:2. And, if a vine do not bring forth fruit, no tree so useless, so worthless, ^{<3311>}Ezekiel 15:2, 6.

III. How it was wasted and ruined: “Lord, thou hast done great things for this vine, and why shall it be all undone again? If it were a plant not of God's planting, it were not strange to see it rooted up; but will God desert and abandon that which he himself gave being to?” v. 12. *Why hast thou then broken down her hedges?* There was a good reason for this change in God's way towards them. This noble vine had become *the degenerate plant of a strange vine* (^{<2422>}Jeremiah 2:21), to the reproach of its great owner, and then no marvel if he *took away its hedge* (^{<2385>}Isaiah 5:5); yet God's former favours to this vine are urged as pleas in prayer to God, and

improved as encouragements to faith, that, notwithstanding all this, God would not wholly cast them off. Observe,

1. The malice and enmity of the Gentile nations against Israel. As soon as ever God *broke down their hedges* and left them exposed troops of enemies presently broke in upon them, that waited for an opportunity to destroy them. Those that passed by the way plucked at them; the *board out of the wood* and the *wild beast of the field* were ready to ravage it, v. 13. But,

2. See also the restraint which these cruel enemies were under; for till God had *broken down their hedges* they could not pluck a leaf of this vine. The devil could not hurt Job so long as God continued the *hedge round about him*, ^{<K10>}Job 1:10. See how much it is the interest of any people to keep themselves in the favour of God and then they need not fear any wild beast of the field, ^{<K12>}Job 5:23. If we provoke God to withdraw, *our defence has departed from us*, and we are undone. The deplorable state of Israel is described (v. 16): *It is burnt with fire; it is cut down*; the people are treated like thorns and briers, that are nigh unto cursing and whose end is to be burned, and no longer like vines that are protected and cherished. They perish not through the rage of the wild beast and the boar, but *at the rebuke of thy countenance*; that was it which they dreaded and to which they attributed all their calamities. It is well or ill with us according as we are under God's smiles or frowns.

IV. What their requests were to God hereupon.

1. That God would help the vine (v. 14, 15), that he would graciously take cognizance of its case and do for it as he thought fit: "*Return, we beseech thee, O Lord of hosts!* for thou hast seemed to go away from us. *Look down from heaven*, to which thou hast retired, — from heaven, that place of prospect, whence thou seest all the wrongs that are done us, that place of power, whence thou canst send effectual relief, — from heaven, where thou hast prepared thy throne of judgment, to which we appeal, and where thou hast prepared a better country for those that are Israelites indeed, — thence give a gracious look, thence make a gracious visit, to this vine. Take our woeful condition into thy compassionate consideration, and for the particular fruits of thy pity we refer ourselves to thee. Only behold the vineyard, or rather the root, which *thy right hand hath planted*, and which therefore we hope thy right hand will protect, that *branch which thou*

madest strong for thyself, to show forth thy praise (²³⁶⁷Isaiah 43:21), that with the fruit of it thou mightest be honoured. Lord, it is formed by thyself and for thyself, and therefore it may with a humble confidence be committed to thyself and to thy own care.” *As for God, his work is perfect.* What we read the *branch* in the Hebrew is the *son (Ben)*, whom in thy counsel thou hast made strong for thyself. That branch was to come out of the stock of Israel (*my servant the branch*, ³⁰⁸⁸Zechariah 3:8), and therefore, till he should come, Israel in general, and the house of David in particular, must be preserved, and upheld, and kept in being. *He is the true vine*, ⁴⁸¹¹John 15:1; ²³¹¹Isaiah 11:1. *Destroy it not for that blessing is in it*, ²³⁶⁸Isaiah 65:8.

2. That he would help the vine-dresser (v. 17, 18): “*Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand*,” that king (whoever it was) of the house of David that was now to go in and out before them; “let thy hand be upon him, not only to protect and cover him, but to own him, and strengthen him, and give him success.” We have this phrase, ¹⁰⁷⁸Ezra 7:28, *And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me.* Their king is called the *man of God's right hand* as he was the representative of their state, which was dear to God, as his Benjamin, the *son of his right hand*, as he was president in their affairs and an instrument in God's right hand of much good to them, defending them from themselves and from their enemies and directing them in the right way, and as he was under-shepherd under him who was the great shepherd of Israel. Princes, who have power, must remember that they are *sons of men*, of *Adam* (so the word is), that, if they are strong, it is God that has made them strong, and he has made them so for himself, for they are his ministers to serve the interests of his kingdom among men, and, if they do this in sincerity, *his hand shall be upon them*; and we should pray in faith that it may be so, adding this promise, that, if God will adhere to our governors, we will adhere to him: *So will not we go back from thee*; we will never desert a cause which we see that God espouses and is the patron of. Let God be our leader and we will follow him. Adding also this prayer, “*Quicken us*, put life into us, revive our dying interests, revive our drooping spirits, and then *we will call upon thy name*. We will continue to do so upon all occasions, having found it not in vain to do so.” We cannot call upon God's name in a right manner unless he quicken us; but it is he that puts life into our souls, that puts liveliness into our prayers. But many interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, apply this to the Messiah, the Son

of David, the protector and Saviour of the church and the keeper of the vineyard.

(1.) He is the man of God's right hand, to whom he has *sworn by his right hand* (so the Chaldee), whom he has exalted to his right hand, and who is indeed his right hand, the arm of the Lord, for all power is given to him.

(2.) He is that son of man whom he *made strong for himself*, for the glorifying of his name and the advancing of the interests of his kingdom among men.

(3.) God's hand is upon him throughout his whole undertaking, to bear him out and carry him on, to protect and animate him, that the *good pleasure of the Lord might prosper in his hand*.

(4.) The stability and constancy of believers are entirely owing to the grace and strength which are laid up for us in Jesus Christ, ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 68:28. In him is our strength found, by which we are enabled to persevere to the end. Let thy hand be upon him; on him let our help be laid who is mighty; let him be made able to save to the uttermost and that will be our security; *so will not we go back from thee*.

Lastly, The psalm concludes with the same petition that had been put up twice before, and yet it is no vain repetition (v. 19): *Turn us again*. The title given to God rises, v. 3, *O God!* v. 7, *O God of hosts!* v. 19, *O Lord (Jehovah) God of hosts!* When we come to God for his grace, his goodwill towards us and his good work in us, we should pray earnestly, continue instant in prayer, and pray more earnestly.