

Psalm 80

Brief History: Throughout their history in the Promised Land, the children of Israel struggled with conflict among the tribes. The disunity went back all the way to the patriarch Jacob, who presided over a house divided. The sons of Leah and the sons of Rachel had their share of contention even in Jacob's lifetime (Genesis 37:1-11).

The enmity among the half-brothers continued in the time of the judges. Benjamin (one of Rachel's tribes) took up arms against the other tribes (Judges 20). Israel's first king, Saul, was of the tribe of Benjamin. When David was crowned king—David was from the tribe of Judah (one of Leah's tribes)—the Benjamites rebelled (2 Samuel 2–3). After a long war (2 Samuel 3:1), David succeeded in uniting all twelve tribes (2 Samuel 5:1-5).

The frailty of the union was exposed, however, when David's son Absalom promoted himself as the new king and drew many Israelites away from their allegiance to David (2 Samuel 15). Significantly, Absalom set up his throne in Hebron, the site of the former capital (v. 10). A later revolt was led by a man named Sheba against David and the tribe of Judah (20:1-2).

The reign of David's son Solomon saw more unrest when one of the king's servants, Jeroboam, rebelled. Jeroboam was on the king's errand when he met the prophet Ahijah, who told him that God was going to give him authority over ten of the twelve tribes of Israel. God's reason for the division of the kingdom was definitive: "Because they have forsaken me . . . and have not walked in my ways." However, God promised that David's dynasty would continue, over a much smaller kingdom, for the sake of God's covenant with David and for the sake of Jerusalem, God's chosen city. When Solomon learned of the prophecy, he sought to kill Jeroboam, who fled to Egypt for sanctuary (1 Kings 11:26-40).

After Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam was set to become the next king. Jeroboam returned from Egypt and led a group of people to confront Rehoboam with a demand for a lighter tax burden. When Rehoboam refused the demand, ten of the tribes rejected Rehoboam and David's dynasty (1 Kings 12:16), and Ahijah's prophecy was fulfilled. Only Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to King Rehoboam. The northern tribes crowned Jeroboam as their king. Rehoboam made plans to mount an assault on the rebel tribes, but the Lord prevented him from taking that action (vv. 21-24).

Meanwhile, Jeroboam further consolidated his power by instituting a form of calf worship unique to his kingdom and declaring that pilgrimages to Jerusalem were unnecessary. Thus, the people of the northern tribes would have no contact with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

“So, Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day” (1 Kings 12:19). The northern kingdom is called “Israel” (or sometimes “Ephraim”) in Scripture, and the southern kingdom is called “Judah.” From the divine viewpoint, the division was a judgment on not keeping God’s commands, specifically the commands prohibiting idolatry. From a human viewpoint, the division was the result of tribal discord and political unrest. The principle is that sin brings division (1 Corinthians 1:13, 11:18; James 4:1).

The good news is that God, in His mercy, has promised a reuniting of the northern and southern kingdoms. “He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah / from the four quarters of the earth. Ephraim’s jealousy will vanish, and Judah’s enemies will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, nor Judah hostile toward Ephraim” (Isaiah 11:12-13). When the Prince of Peace—Jesus Christ—reigns in His millennial kingdom, all hostility, jealousy, and conflict among the tribes will be put to rest. (Gotquestions.org, Israel’s Northern and Southern Kingdoms)

12 tribes of Israel

Jacob, also known as Israel, had 12 sons from his two wives and two concubines. They were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. The sons were not all part of the tribes of Israel. They can be more identified as the 12 patriarchs.

Later in the forming of the tribes of Israel, it was noted that Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, replaced him as part of the tribe. Because during those times, it was customary that the firstborn would inherit a double portion of the father’s inheritance. It was called the birthright. Unfortunately for Jacob’s firstborn, Reuben, he disqualified himself from the blessing because of his misdeed. He was caught sleeping with his father’s concubine, Bilhah. Therefore, the double portion of inheritance was given then to Jacob’s firstborn, Joseph with his second wife.

A double portion of inheritance

And since it was a double portion, Jacob blessed Joseph's two sons and called them his own. They received the same blessings along with the other sons.

Genesis 48:5 says, "Your two sons born to you in the land of Egypt are now mine. Ephraim and Manasseh belong to me just as Reuben and Simeon do."

Yet, if we count them all, it will appear that they had 13 tribes. But Levi did not receive his tribal territory since the Levites were ministers to the tabernacle. God promised them that He would be their inheritance.

So, to put it simply,

12 tribes – (1 Levi) – (1 Joseph) + (1 Ephraim) + (1 Manasseh) = 12 tribes

Psalm 80 NKJV

This psalm is titled To the Chief Musician. Set to “The Lilies.” A Testimony of Asaph. A Psalm. As with Psalm 45, Psalm 60 and Psalm 69, this psalm is Set to “The Lilies.” The phrase may refer to the general beauty of the composition, to the tune, or even to a six-stringed instrument known as the Shoshannim. Some believe it to be a kind of lily-shaped straight trumpet, a six-stringed instrument, a word commencing a song or the melody to which these psalms were to be sung.

This is Asaph’s prayer to God on behalf of the Northern Kingdom (Israel – Samaria) after it was taken captive by Assyria in 722-21 B.C. “Joseph can be referred to the whole nation (Psalm 77:15), the mentioning of Joseph’s sons (Ephraim and Manasseh) and his brother (Benjamin) suggests that the Northern Kingdom is meant. Asaph praying for Samaria and asking God for restoration and reunion for the whole nation indicates that some of the old rivalries were ending and that some of the people of Judah were concerned over “the ruin of Joseph” (Amos 6:6).

The refrain “Restore us” (verses 3, 7, 19) marks out the three (3) requests Asaph made to the Lord for both kingdoms.

- **Save Your Flock** (verses 1-3)
- **Pity Your People** (verses 4-7)
- **Revive Your Vine** (verses 8-19)

A. Save Your Flock.

1. (1-3) A prayer to Israel’s Shepherd for restoration. The request here is that the Lord might lead His people through this crisis as He led them safely through the wilderness.

¹Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth!

a. Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel: The image of a king or ruler over a people being regarded as the shepherd was common in the ancient world.

Asaph rightly understood that in a special and wonderful way, Yahweh was the Shepherd of Israel. It was He who had and would lead Joseph like a flock.

The ‘Shepherd of Israel’ reminds us of Jacob’s blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh in which he invoked ‘the God who shepherded me all my life long’ to ‘bless these boys,’ and of the title in Genesis 49:24, ‘the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel’.

The Great Shepherd of the Christians, of course is Jesus. We also know that Jesus is the Light of the world. Wherever there is a presence of God, there is a Light, or Fire, or Clouds. This above then, is a request for the Light of God to shine forth even brighter than in the past.

b. You who dwell between the cherubim: This refers to two aspects. The lesser aspect is the presence of God as connected with the ark of the covenant and the institution of the tabernacle/temple. The greater aspect is the recognition that in heaven and its reality, God does dwell between the cherubim.

c. You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth: Asaph asked that the God of this majesty and glory would shine forth on behalf of His people. When God does shine forth, darkness and gloom vanish, and He is magnified.

**²Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, Stir up Your strength,
And come and save us!**

a. Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh: In the order of arrangement around the tabernacle and in the order of march, these three tribes were grouped together on the west side of the tabernacle (Numbers 2). And the allusion is to these three tribes marching immediately after the Kohathites, who carried the Ark on their shoulders in journeying (Num. 2:17). Which is called the Lord’s strength, and the Ark of his strength (Psalm 78:61).

b. Stir up Your strength and come and save us: The God mighty is enough to shepherd Israel and bring the people from Egypt to Canaan was strong enough to deliver them in their present crisis – if His strength was stirred. This was a prayer of faith, understanding, and dependence.

Christ is now come in the flesh, and His end in coming was to save his people from their sins, from the curse and condemnation of the law, and wrath to come. He has become the author of eternal salvation, in working out which he has shown His great strength.

³Restore us, O God; Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!

a. Restore us, O God: This begins a refrain that is repeated three times in this psalm (Psalm 80:3, 7, and 19). It expressed trust and dependence upon God, and confidence that His favor (shown by His shining face) was all that was needed for Israel's restoration and blessing.

Restore means to rebuild, reinstate, bring back; even to repent and turn back our lives over to God and to trust God with our whole heart, mind, and soul.

b. Cause Your face to shine: This goes back to the blessing the priests were commanded to proclaim to the people of Israel (Numbers 6:24-26). It has the idea of God's presence, pleasure, and favor.

c. We shall be saved: "To be 'saved' means here to be rescued from the assaults of hostile nations. The poet was sure that Israel's sole defense was God, and that one gleam of His face would shrivel up the strongest foes." (Maclaren)

The psalmist is very aware that the only possible hope for any one is God. Noah was saved in the flood, Daniel was saved in the lion's den, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were saved in the fire. None of these people of God were saved from their problem. They were saved in the problem. These people the psalmist is begging for here, may be in captivity, but God can deal with them in captivity possibly even better than He could when they were having no problems. It is not so important the circumstance you find yourself in, as it is how you handle the circumstance. God is never unaware of our problem. In fact, He is in it with us, like there was the fourth figure in the fire.

B. Pity Your People.

2. (4-7) The shepherd image blends in with the image of Israel as God's people: "We are his people and the sheep of his pasture" (Psalm 100:3). But the Lord was now angry with His people, and His anger smoldered like a fire about to erupt and consume them. God's anger makes His people sorrowful.

⁴O LORD God of hosts, how long will You be angry Against the prayer of Your people?

a. O LORD God of hosts, how long will You be angry? Asaph's heart poured out in sorrow before God. It is a terrible thing to sense that God is angry and that He is against the prayer of His people. The sorrow is deeper when it is recognized that it is the God of heavenly armies, the LORD God of hosts, who has in some way set Himself against His people.

b. Against the prayer: "That God should be angry with us when sinning seems natural enough, but that he should be angry even with our prayers is a bitter grief." (Spurgeon)

The Fall of Jerusalem

2 Chronicles 36:15-16 New Living Translation

¹⁵ The Lord, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent his prophets to warn them, for he had compassion on his people and his Temple. ¹⁶ But the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets until the Lord's anger could no longer be restrained and nothing could be done.

2 Chronicles 36:15-16 The Message

15-16 God, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent warning messages to them. Out of compassion for both his people and his Temple he wanted to give them every chance possible. But they wouldn't listen; they poked fun at God's messengers, despised the message itself, and in general treated the prophets like idiots. God became more and more angry until there was no turning back...

⁵You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in great measure.

a. Tears to drink in great measure: Asaph used the metaphor of drinking tears to express the great sorrow of God's people.

b. Psalm 42:3 uses a similar image: My tears have been my food day and night. Such was their constant grief, that they could not cease from tears while they were eating their meals, and so ate tears with their food.

c. The idea seems to be, not so much that God gave tears to them in great measure, but that he measured them out to them, as one measures drink to others. That is, the cup, or cask, or bottle in which their drink was served to them was as if filled with tears only.

⁶You have made us a strife to our neighbors, and our enemies laugh among themselves.

a. **Our enemies laugh among themselves:** The mocking and taunting of Israel's enemies were painful for Asaph and the people of God in their low condition. It stung to be strife to their neighbors, and to hear their mocking laugh.

b. "The psalmist points to an angry God, a weeping nation, and mocking foes, a trilogy of woe." (Maclaren)

⁷Restore us, O God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!

Restore us, O God: Asaph repeats and strengthens the refrain from Psalm 80:3, adding of hosts, emphasizing His power and authority. Fresh expression of their misery made for a fresh prayer for restoration and rescue by the shining, approving face of God.

C. Revive Your Vine.

3. (8-19) The image now changes to that of Israel the vine that God has cared for like a gardener. Israel's task was to give shade to other nations, to offer those nations the benefits of God's rule. But due to Israel's disobedience. God has "broken down her hedges" and removed His wall of protection around Israel, leaving her vulnerable to attack.

(8-11) The vine of Israel is planted in the Promised Land.

⁸You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations and planted it.

a. You have brought a vine out of Egypt: The vine is a familiar picture of Israel in the Old Testament. This vine was transplanted from Egypt and brought into the Promised Land. In Canaan, God planted it, making room by casting out the Canaanite nations.

b. Israel is the vine that God planted in the Promised Land. In Egypt, the vine could not prosper, because it was denied the necessary things to produce fruit. The law was given to these Israelites on the way to the Promised Land, and they had the opportunity to produce much fruit for God. They failed. This vine was the same as the natural branch on the tree. Jesus is the true vine, as we see in the following verse.

John 15:5 “I am the vine, ye [are] the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” The trouble with the physical house of Israel is they did not abide with God.

⁹You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land.

a. Caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land: The vine of Israel was blessed in the Promised Land. Under God’s blessing they took deep root and filled the land in a way that the variety of Canaanite tribes had not. It grew so strong and secure in the land that it did what was botanically impossible in a literal sense: the vine grew big as the mighty cedars and cast its shadow upon the hills.

b. The Lord prepared room for his interest, church, and people, in the Gentile world, in the first times of Christianity. By sending the Gospel into all parts of it, and making it successful, and still there is room (Luke 14:22 Parable of the Feast).

¹⁰The hills were covered with its shadow, And the mighty cedars with its boughs.

This was, indeed, a land of milk and honey. It was fertile land and grew giant trees. The family of God moved in, and the land prospered.

¹¹She sent out her boughs to the Sea, And her branches to the river.

a. She sent out her boughs to the Sea, and her branches to the river: At its height under King David and King Solomon, Israel's domination stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River.

b. This broad dominion of Israel was promised in Exodus 23:31 and Deuteronomy 11:24. 1 Kings 4:21 shows it was fulfilled by the reign of Solomon, who inherited David's dominion.

(12-13) The unprotected vineyard.

¹²Why have You broken down her hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit?

a. Why have You broken down her hedges? In ancient Israel a vineyard was often surrounded by a thick and thorny hedge that kept out thieves and wild animals. Asaph looked at Israel's troubled state and could see that the symbolic hedges were broken down by the hand of God.

b. All who pass by the way pluck her fruit: Without protection of God's hedges, the land of Israel was ready to be plundered and devoured by her enemies.

c. When Israel began on this journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, God had been the hedge around them and helped them against their enemies. He had stood between the Red Sea and the Israelites, while the Israelites crossed unharmed. He had been with them in battle and the enemy had run away, knowing that Israel was protected by their God. Now it appears that the protection of God is gone. Their enemy can have free run on them. Now that Israel's God is not protecting her, all the people around her are taking whatever they want from her.

¹³The boar out of the woods uproots it, And the wild beast of the field devours it.

a. The boar out of the woods uproots it: Wild boars are noted for their destruction and can quickly lay waste to a vineyard. The enemies of God are pictured as such wild, destructive beasts.

b. “No image of a destructive enemy could be more appropriate than that which is used. We have read of the little foxes that spoil the vines, but the wild boar is a much more destructive enemy, breaking its way through fences, rooting up the ground, tearing down the vines themselves, and treading them under its feet. A single party of these animals will sometimes destroy an entire vineyard in a single night.” (Wood, cited in Spurgeon)

(14-16) A prayer for God to take pity upon the desolate vine.

¹⁴Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; Look down from heaven and see, And visit this vine.

a. Return, we beseech You: With an earnest plea Asaph prayed on behalf of the nation, begging God to return to them, to look upon the greatness of their need and to visit this vine that He Himself had planted.

b. Look down from heaven: The habitation of God. As if he did not now see his desolate vineyard or regard it. The idea is, that if He would look upon it, He would pity it, and would come to its relief.

c. Visit this vine: It is a visitation of mercy and not of wrath that is asked. The coming of one who is able to save, and without whose coming there could be no deliverance.

¹⁵And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, And the branch that You made strong for Yourself.

a. The branch that you made strong for yourself: Meaning the same people whom He confirmed in the land of Canaan and made strong for His service and glory. The word translated “branch” signifies a son, as Israel was, to the Lord, son, and firstborn (see Exodus 4:22-23).

b. The main idea is that Israel is God’s own people, His vine, and His chosen son. He planted the nation in Canaan, and He alone can protect and deliver them. He had treated the people like a favored son, just as Jacob had laid his right hand of blessing on Ephraim rather than the firstborn Manasseh (Genesis 48:12-20). They did not deserve His blessing, but in His grace, He bestowed it.

¹⁶It is burned with fire, it is cut down; They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.

a. It is burned with fire, it is cut down: This is a description of the desolations that had come upon the nation, such as would come upon a vineyard if it were consumed by fire.

b. They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance: At the frown on Your face, as if God has only to look upon people in anger, and they perish. The word ‘they’ refers to those who were represented by the vine which had been brought out of Egypt - the people of the land.

(17-19) Restoration in the Man of God’s Right Hand.

¹⁷Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.

a. Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand: In Israel’s low place, Asaph knew that the nation needed leadership. He asked God to be with and to bless (Let Your hand be upon) a particular man – the man of God’s right hand. Perhaps Asaph had first in mind the present king of Israel; but ultimately the Man of God’s Right Hand is Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:20).

b. Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself: Again, this was likely prayed with reference to the present king of Israel. Yet the ultimate Son of Man was Jesus Christ, who received God’s strength as a submitted Son to His Father in heaven.

¹⁸Then we will not turn back from You; Revive us, and we will call upon Your name.

a. Then we will not turn back from You: In the strength of this Son of Man made strong, this Man of God’s Right Hand, God’s people would be restored to faithfulness. They would be revived and once again call upon His name.

b. Revive us: “Only the Lord can ‘revive’ (Psalm 80:18) the people by forgiveness of their sins, by renewal of the covenant, and by driving out the enemies. This is not merely a prayer for deliverance from the enemy but an urgent petition for the blessings of God.” (VanGemeren)

¹⁹Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!

a. Restore us, O LORD God of hosts: The refrain is repeated a third and final time, yet this time adding Yahweh, the covenant name of God (LORD God of hosts). Under the leadership of God’s great Messiah, God’s people would be restored and once again know the shining radiance of God’s face. They would be rescued.

b. Cause Your face to shine: “Both for Israel and the Church this prayer has been answered in Christ. In Him we may be restored to God. In Him, the face of God is shining upon us in grace.” (Morgan)

The psalm is closed by the refrain in its third and most perfect form. First, we had, “Restore us, O God” (verse 3). Then, “Restore us, O God of hosts” (verse 7). Now, “Restore us, O Lord God of hosts”. The appeal to God continually increasing in intensity. Having made his third appeal, the psalmist seems to feel that he has done all that he can and ends the psalm.

Isaiah 43:1-4 The Message (A Word of Encouragement)

When You’re Between a Rock and a Hard Place

But now, God’s Message, the God who made you in the first place, Jacob, the One who got you started, Israel: “Don’t be afraid, I’ve redeemed you. I’ve called your name. You’re mine. When you’re in over your head, I’ll be there with you. When you’re in rough waters, you will not go down. When you’re between a rock and a hard place, it won’t be a dead end—Because I am God, your personal God, The Holy of Israel, your Savior. I paid a huge price for you: all of Egypt, with rich Cush and Seba thrown in! That’s how much you mean to me! That’s how much I love you! I’d sell off the whole world to get you back, trade the creation just for you.

Resources:

The New International Leadership Bible

Biblegateway.org

Enduring Word Bible Commentary / Psalm 80

Warren Wiersbe Commentary / Psalm 80

Easy English Bible / Psalm 80

Bible Study.org / Psalm 80

Ashbury Seminary.edu/Dr. Timothy Tennent

GodTV.com/12 Tribes of Israel

Gotquestions.org/Israel-Northern-Southern Kingdoms