

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 80 — A Vine from Egypt

1.0 Introducing Psalm 80

- Psalm 79 closes with “the sheep of Your pasture” (v. 13) while Psalm 80 opens with “Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock” (v. 1).
- Rich in imagery, Psalm 80 reminds Christian readers of the Gospel of John’s references to the Shepherd (“I am the good shepherd,” John 10:11) and the Vine (“I am the true vine,” 15:1).
- This psalm appears to be an application or explanation of Genesis 49:22-24,
²² *Joseph is a fruitful bough,
A fruitful bough by a spring;
Its branches run over a wall.*
²³ *The archers bitterly attacked him,
And shot at him and harassed him;*
²⁴ *But his bow remained firm,
And his arms were agile,
From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob
(From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), . . .*
- As in Psalm 76, the translators of the Septuagint added “a psalm concerning the Assyrians” to the superscription.
 - ✓ Many commentators agree that the background for Psalm 80 is the Assyrian invasion and deportation of the northern tribes in 722 B.C. (see 2 Kings 17:6).

2.0 Reading Psalm 80 (NAU)

80:1 A Psalm of Asaph.

Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel,
You who lead Joseph like a flock;
You who are enthroned *above* the cherubim, shine forth!

80:2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your power
And come to save us!

- 80:3 O God, restore us**
And cause Your face to shine *upon us*, and we will be saved.
- 80:4** O LORD God *of* hosts,
How long will You be angry with the prayer of Your people?
- 80:5** You have fed them with the bread of tears,
And You have made them to drink tears in large measure.
- 80:6** You make us an object of contention to our neighbors,
And our enemies laugh among themselves.
- 80:7 O God of hosts, restore us**
And cause Your face to shine *upon us*, and we will be saved.
- 80:8** You removed a vine from Egypt;
You drove out the nations and planted it.
- 80:9** You cleared *the ground* before it,
And it took deep root and filled the land.
- 80:10** The mountains were covered with its shadow,
And the cedars of God with its boughs.
- 80:11** It was sending out its branches to the sea
And its shoots to the River.
- 80:12** Why have You broken down its hedges,
So that all who pass *that way* pick its *fruit*?
- 80:13** A boar from the forest eats it away
And whatever moves in the field feeds on it.
- 80:14** O God *of* hosts, turn again now, we beseech You;
Look down from heaven and see, and take care of this vine,
- 80:15** Even the shoot which Your right hand has planted,
And on the son whom You have strengthened for Yourself.
- 80:16** It is burned with fire, it is cut down;
They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.
- 80:17** Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,
Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.
- 80:18** Then we shall not turn back from You;
Revive us, and we will call upon Your name.
- 80:19 O LORD God of hosts, restore us;**
Cause Your face to shine *upon us*, and we will be saved.

For the choir director; on the Gittith.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 80

3.1 Outline

- I. Expressing the Prayer for Restoration (vv. 1-3)
- II. Explaining the Prayer for Restoration (vv. 4-7)
- III. Expanding the Prayer for Restoration (vv. 8-19)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “Shepherd of Israel”
 - Asaph’s focus on the divine Shepherd and His flock appears again in this psalm (cp. Psalms 74:1; 78:52).
 - Compare Jacob’s blessing upon Joseph in Genesis 48:15 and 49:24.
 - Observe the despair and depression of the psalmist and the people of Israel. Note that the psalm focuses on the fact that God is still the Shepherd of His people, even when they do not feel like He is.
- **v. 1** “enthroned *above* the cherubim”
 - Asaph depicts God enthroned in the Temple above the golden cherubim on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant.
 - The Shepherd of Israel is the covenant-keeping God who resides in their midst.
- **v. 2** “Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh”
 - Rachel’s sons Joseph (v. 1) and Benjamin (v. 2) represent the Northern and the Southern kingdoms, respectively.
 - Ephraim and Manasseh were Joseph’s sons.
 - In Numbers 2:17-24 these three tribes marched directly behind the ark of the covenant and the Levitical priests.
 - Cf. Psalms 77:15; 78:9; and 81:5.
- **vv. 3, 7, 19** Refrain
 - In the increasingly emphatic refrain (note the progressive lengthening of the divine title), the psalmist voices the prayer of God’s people for their restoration.
 - They need the restoring and refreshing of their souls that only the Shepherd can provide (cp. Psalm 23:3).
- **v. 3** “cause Your face to shine *upon us*”
 - God’s face “shining upon” someone is symbolic of His favor.
 - Compare the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6:24-26.
- **v. 4** “How long will You be angry with the prayer of Your people?”
 - This is the 100th question in the Book of Psalms.
 - “Unlike Psalm 79, this psalm has no note of confession or penitence. Were they asking for the wrong things, or was it that their conduct ensured that their prayers would not be answered (cf. Isa. 1:15)? Perhaps the people themselves did not know and were facing the same dilemma which troubles many people today, prayers unanswered for reasons they do not fully understand. All they knew was that life was harsh and painful. Tears were their daily diet, tears to drink ‘in full measure.’”—Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 265.
- **v. 8** “a vine from Egypt”
 - Genesis 49:22 is probably in view here.

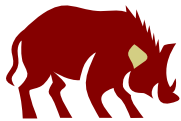


- Other such metaphors include the vineyard in Isaiah 3:14-15; 5:1-7; 27:2-6; Jeremiah 2:21; 12:10; Hosea 10:1; Matthew 21:33-46; and John 15:1.

- **v. 11** “the sea . . . the River”

- These geographical references identify western and eastern limits of the Promised Land: the Mediterranean Sea and the River Euphrates.

- **v. 13** “A boar from the forest”



- The boar might symbolize Assyria and her invasion of Israel and Judah. Assyria carried the northern ten tribes into captivity (722 B.C.).
- Ancient rabbis identified a letter in the Hebrew word translated “forest” as the middle letter of the Psalter.

- **v. 14** “O God of hosts”

- This verse is similar to the refrain of verses 3, 7, and 19.
- Their prayer is that the God of hosts (He can summon all the powers of heaven and earth to do His will, to help His people—see study note on Psalm 24:10) will look down from heaven and take care of (provide for) “this vine” (see notes on v. 8, above).

- **v. 14** “turn again now”

- “Verse 14 is . . . the crux of the psalm: a plea that in his mercy he will look on me again, and thus do for me something I cannot do for myself. . . . He must bring the straying sheep back, for they will never come back of their own accord.”—Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms 73–150*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 35.

- **v. 17** “the man of Your right hand”

- This could be a reference to Benjamin (whose name means, “son of *my* right hand”).

- **v. 17** “the son of man”

- Some commentators take this as a reference to the Messiah. This was also the view of the early rabbis (cp. Psalms 8:5 and 110:1).
- Such phraseology in this verse could refer to Israel (cp. v. 15; Exod 4:22) or to their king.

- **Subscription** “on the Gittith.”

- “Gittith” (also, Psalms 8:1; 84:1) may refer to a musical instrument or a melody associated with the city of Gath.
- “Gittith” might also be a reference to a melody associated with the winepress and songs sung during the treading of the winepress. Compare references to judgment by means of the figure of the winepress (Isaiah 63:2; Lamentations 1:15; Joel 3:13).
- Reference to a winepress fits the figure of the vine in Psalm 80.

4.0 Singing Psalm 80



O Thou Who the Shepherd of Israel Art

Tune: “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise”

O Thou Who the Shepherd of Israel art,
Give ear to our pray’r and Thy favor impart;
Thou Leader of Joseph, Thou Guide of his way,
’Mid cherubim dwelling, Thy glory display.

In Ephraim’s, Manasseh’s and Benjamin’s sight,
O come Thou and save us; awake in Thy might.
O God, give us favor, restore to Thy grace;
And then we shall live in the light of Thy face.

From Egypt’s dark border a vine Thou didst take;
Destroying the heathen didst room for it make.
Where planted it grew at Thy sov’rign command,
With roots deeply set and boughs filling the land.

The axe hews it down; it is burned in the fire;
They perish, rebuked in Thy terrible ire.
O lay then Thy hand on the Man of Thy might,
The Son of Man made to stand strong in Thy sight.

No more shall we wander, delighting in shame;
Revive us, O Lord, we will call on Thy Name.
O Lord God of Hosts, us restore to Thy grace,
And then we shall live in the light of Thy face.

— Author unknown

5.0 Praying Psalm 80

- Thank you, Lord, for being the great Shepherd of Your people. [v. 1]
- O God, restore us. [vv. 3, 7, 19]
- Father, look upon Your vine and care for it. [v. 14]
- Revive us and cause us to serve and praise You. [v. 18]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 80

- The Almighty God of all the hosts of heaven and earth is our Shepherd.
- God cares for us even when we feel that He doesn’t even hear our prayers any more.
- God can and will restore us to the fellowship we once enjoyed.