

## The Blessing of God's Discipline

As we began Psalm 80 last week, we learned that the imagery of the Shepherd caring for the sheep, along with the mercy seat which depicts God's presence as well as forgiveness for sin at the very beginning of this Psalm, sets in place the care and compassion that God has for his people. Even though they've sinned, God has made a way for his covenant children to continue in a caring and compassionate relationship with him. The language of Joseph in verse 1, as well as Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, in verse 2, which depicts tribes from the North and the South, indicates that this Psalm is addressing the people of God as a whole. The last portion of verse 2, "stir up your might and come to save us!", indicates that the people of Israel are clearly in trouble. Biblical scholars, *generally*, believe that this Psalm is depicting a time of the sinfulness of Israel that would eventually lead to their captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. To further support this, along with the verses that we'll cover in a moment, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, adds the inscription, "A Psalm concerning the Assyrian."

Each division of this Psalm is highlighted by a similar refrain that we first see in verse 3: "Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!" Notice that the phrase translated "your face shine" reminds us of the benediction of Aaron in Numbers 6:24-26. The Psalmist is crying out for the blessing and favor of God in the midst of trouble. And yet, even though God is caring and compassionate, and even though he *loves his covenant people*, he will not, *and cannot*, ignore ongoing, unrepentant disobedience. So, then, in this first section we begin to get a glimpse of the Psalmist crying out to God on behalf of the people for deliverance in a more general way. This next stanza that goes from verses 4-7 will begin to get more specific. Let's go now from shepherd us from harm to:

### —Save Us from Our Enemies

I've already noted that this Psalm likely depicts the time of sinfulness and disobedience leading up to the eventual captivity of the Israelites by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. In this next section the Psalm begins to depict in greater detail the fact that the ongoing sin of the Israelites negatively affects every aspect of their daily lives. This section begins by showing us the devastation of the people as it refers, first of all, to their *worship of God*. It seems as if God doesn't even want to hear their prayers. Look with me in verse 4: "O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?" God's *anger* at the people's prayers is depicted with a Hebrew word that means to "smoke or smolder." This is a picture of God's reaction to the ongoing disobedience and the lack of repentance by his people. This may remind us of a time after

the *Babylonian* captivity where the prophet cried out to God: “You have wrapped yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through.” (Lam. 3:44)

Along with the people’s *worship of God*, particularly their prayer life being affected, verse 5 calls attention to their daily, *personal lives*. “You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure.” Because of their flagrant disobedience and their unwillingness to repent, the lives of the Israelites are depicted in a vivid picture of nothing but sorrow and tears in every way. They *eat* the “bread of tears,” and they *drink* “the full measure of tears.” There seems to be no relief in sight for their condition. Along with the *worship of God’s people* and their daily *personal lives*, verse 6 depicts the painful taunts and scorn of the enemy nations surrounding Israel. “You make us an object of contention for our neighbors, and our enemies laugh among themselves.” There’s no escape from the misery and punishment in any aspect of their lives.

This is an ongoing theme that all Christians would do well to pay attention to. Are you unhappy in worship? Are you dissatisfied with much of your day-to-day life including many of your relationships? Are you struggling to be joyful? Keep in mind that, dealing with the issues we face in a God-honoring way is always appropriate. And yet, when we consistently lash out at those we disagree with and blame them for our bitterness of heart, when we make choices based solely on our emotions, this is what is known as emotionalism and is sometimes called emotional immaturity. Paul writes, “Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.” (1 Cor. 14:20). It’s been rightly said that we can’t be an emotionally immature person while also being spiritually mature. You see, don’t you, that if we’re primarily driven by our emotions by the things that come into our lives this, *at the very minimum*, will impede healthy, spiritual growth. If we’re God’s children, he loves us too much to allow anything to short-circuit our growth in godliness and, if needed, he will discipline his children out of his love. “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives.” (Hebrews 12:6)

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