

Salvation is from God

In my previous article from Psalm 80, we saw that if we're God's children in Jesus Christ, 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.

Interestingly, Hosea prophesied about this very time frame in the life of Israel. He writes: "They shall not pour drink offerings of wine to the LORD, and their sacrifices shall not please him. It shall be like mourners' bread to them; all who eat of it shall be defiled. ... The days of punishment have come; the days of recompense have come; Israel shall know it." Hos. 9:4a, 7a.

Keep in mind that — even though God's people, as a whole, were punished — there was always a remnant of Israelites who were true spiritual children of God. This is important when we think of God's people corporately. There will often be times of ongoing, unrepentant sin in the life of the church. When this happens, everyone is affected in some measure — either directly or indirectly. But God in his grace and mercy often brings about the spiritual growth of His people even in the midst of our suffering.

This would also have been true in Israel. Many who were not being directly punished for unrepentant sin would, by grace, grow spiritually through all the difficulties that they went through. Along with that, there would have been some who were not initially true spiritual children of Abraham who came to saving faith through their ordeal.

Well-known Oxford literary scholar and Christian apologist C.S. Lewis once wrote: "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." Although the statement itself is not particularly profound, it does underscore the biblical truth that either people live and make daily choices according to their sinful nature or — by God's grace — they've been given a new nature; they're being positively changed and, as a pattern of life, are making daily choices according to God's will because they want their lives to be what God wants.

Notice now the refrain in Verse 7 slightly changed from Verse 3: "Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved!" Again, we hear the psalmist crying out for God's blessing to ultimately be on his people in Israel no matter what they're currently facing. This takes us now from save us from our enemies to *salvation is from God*.

The next stanza of the psalm takes in verses 8-19. I want to call our attention to the fact that this last section is divided into periods of past, present, and future from the time of the current troubles depicted by the psalmist. Let's begin first with the *past*.

This section takes in verses 8-11. Notice now that the metaphor has changed. The people of Israel are no longer seen as sheep cared for by a loving shepherd as they were earlier in the psalm. Now the psalmist depicts the Israelites as a vine. Although the word vinedresser is not used, it's certainly implied that God is the vinedresser who cares for his vine in every way.

This section depicts God's loving care of the Israelites when he brought them out of Egypt in the past and then settled them into the Promised Land of Canaan: "You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it." (vs. 8)

As we look further down this section, we see God caring for his people and then the people growing and flourishing. The vine takes "deep root and filled the land," in Verse 9. In verses 10-11 "the mountains were covered with the shade of the vine ... the branches spread out to the sea and its shoots to the River."

The language of vine and vineyard are well attested in the Old Testament. For example, when Jacob blesses Joseph in Genesis 49:22, he promises that Joseph will be a "fruitful" or "flourishing vine." (See also Isaiah 27:2-6; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 15:1-8; Hosea 10:1). Israel is depicted in the Old Testament as God's vine that he has planted, pruned and nourished.

When we come to the New Testament, we hear these words from Jesus in John 15:1: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser." We also learn that God is at work "pruning" so that those who are truly in the vine — i.e., those who are "in Christ" — will continue to bear fruit.

Jesus states it this way: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit for apart from me you can do nothing. ... If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:5, 10-11)

May we never tire of reflecting on the truth that our glorious salvation is a free gift from God. In this country we have recently celebrated Thanksgiving, and the advent season is upon us.

As Christians meditate on the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ and anticipate the second advent, may we continue to live as thankful and joyful people to the glory of God. No matter what we may face in life, Christians have so much to be thankful for!

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