

God's Guidance of His People in Spite of Their Unfaithfulness

By Dr. Gary Crampton

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Psalm 78
Preached on: Sunday, February 6, 2011

Reformed Baptist Church of Richmond
14401 Beach Road
Chesterfield, VA 23838

Website: www.rbrichmond.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/rbcr

...Bibles to Psalm 78. If you are still open there that is great. What I would like to do this afternoon is to introduce this Psalm and so some work that I hope will help us in understanding more about the psalms, the superscriptions and the persons that are named in those superscriptions. And then, again, do a very, very basic brief overview of this psalm and two weeks from now, God so willing, I would like to come back and spend a good deal of time looking particularly at the first eight verses. So I am going to ask you, please, if you will, in the next two weeks to read through this psalm. It is the second longest psalm in the entire Psalter, 119 being the longest, but it is... I think it is very instructive. I think it will help us immensely and we are going to particularly focus in, God so willing, here in two weeks or three weeks, whatever it is, on the responsibility of the parents and the responsibility of the children and see what a task is set before us here and how many have not followed the lead of this particular introduction.

It was just this past week that I read an article by a man from a Christian perspective that said that within the Church... Now I... this is what I have read, that the Church... and I am talking about the orthodox Church is losing over 50 percent of the children to the world. He said even up to 90 percent in some cases. Now that sounds excessively high to me, but if that is even close to true, what a tragedy that is, children being lost to the world from Christian homes. It could be the parental failure. It could be the children's not just listening, following, running in the way that they have been taught. It could be a number of things. But whatever it is, that is a tragic number if it is even close to correct. That is a very, very sad thing.

And when we come back, God willing, again, I want to look at some of these responsibilities, hopefully helpful reminders as to how we can deal with this.

Again, Psalm 78.

By way of introduction, Psalm 78, the second longest psalm in the Psalter. In the Hebrew text it has 77 lines, 77 lines in the Hebrew text. In the English version and in the Septuagint, both, 72 numbered verses, but the Hebrew that number seven which comes up again and again and again in the Scriptures is there.

As Bill Morgan pointed out earlier and I do hope you appreciate the good work he is doing here in introducing the psalms as we read through it and talking about the various aspects of them. He doesn't just read them to us, he explains certain things about them and that is very commendable.

But he said earlier that a Maschil—and that is... this is called a “Maschil of Asaph,”¹—is particularly a teaching or a didactic psalm. Now all of the psalms, of course, teach us. All of them are for that purpose, but this Maschil, this form of psalm is particularly applicable to the teaching ministry. And this reads also of Asaph.

Now the Hebrew for... and let me say this again. I have said this a number of times from this pulpit and that podium. The superscriptions are part of the Word of God. That is being attacked very strongly in some circles today, even in the orthodox Church. But in the Hebrew text the superscriptions are part of or the entirety of verse one. It is part of the Word of God and we need to understand it. We can learn from that.

I am not talking about here the New American Standard superscription which, in my Bible reads this, “God’s guidance of his people in spite of their unfaithfulness.” That is precisely what this psalm is about, very, very well stated. But it is not inspired. It is not part of the Word of God, see?

But a Maschil of Asaph, that is part of the Word of God. And we need to understand that.

Well, who is Asaph? Asaph... And in the Hebrew... Let me come back a minute and interrupt myself. This can read, “A Maschil of Asaph,” or “for Asaph” or even “by Asaph.”

In other words, Asaph might have written this psalm or he might have put it into the Psalter it having been written by someone else.

We know in 1 Chronicles chapter 16 that David wrote a psalm, gave it to Asaph and Asaph put it into the Psalter. So that could very well be what happened here. This was not written by David I can assure you of that because this was written after the monarchy divided.

But Asaph was one of three Levitical choir directors from the family of Levi. Levi had three sons, Kohath, Merari and Gershom. And from these three families David, 1 Chronicles chapter six, during his kingship he formed these choirs and choir directors.

This, by the way, is one of the reasons why we here do not believe that it is proper to have a choir. A lot of churches have choirs and that doesn't make them unorthodox or anything like that, but in the Old Testament the songs were sung by the Levites. All the musical instruments were played by the Levites, the Levitical order. It is passed away. In the New Testament we are a kingdom of priests. Every... the whole congregation is the

¹ Psalm 78:1.

choir. And we don't have musical instruments. We have a reason for that as well. But the whole of the congregation is the choir in the new covenant administration.

But you read of, in 1 Chronicles chapter six Asaph is one of these choir directors. Heman and Ethan and Ethan is probably one and the same person with Jeduthan, each one of them representing a family group of Levi.

Asaph has 12 psalms attributed to him. Either he wrote them or put them into the Psalter. You will find them in Psalm 50 and then Psalms 73 through 83. These are the 12 Asaphian psalms. It is debatable why 50 was segregated. Don't know. But, in other words, we do know that Asaph was... is in the superscription of Psalm 50 and then Psalm 73 all the way through 83.

The order of the psalms is not inspiring. The psalms are inspired but the order is not. There were different orders. In fact, in different Hebrew texts they are in different orders, but the psalms themselves are inspired, but not necessarily the order in which they are found, you see, is what I am saying here.

Now we do know there is a psalm one and two. We are told that in the New Testament, but this psalm... in their final composition, in their final editing work done, the... there are five books of psalms, probably because there are five books of Moses.

This psalm was very probably written after the kingdom divided. Now with Saul and David and Solomon, Israel had what is called a united kingdom, 12 tribes, one united kingdom, but because of Solomon's sin after his monarchy, the kingdom divided.

1 Kings chapter 12, Rehoboam and Jeroboam, Rehoboam in the south, Jeroboam in the north. Ten tribes were in the north, a tragic thing at that point, a tragic breaking of Israel, if you will. Ten tribes in the north and in the south two tribes, Judah and then as the land was parceled out, Simeon had his land rights within Judah's territory. So you had Judah and Simeon and yet Benjamin is right on the borderline, right on the borderline. So part of Benjamin was in the... went to the south and part went to the north.

So you will see Benjamin is with Judah in a lot of different places in the Old Testament. So you read of Benjamin there as well.

Of course the kings came through the line of Judah as we... as Bill Morgan had read for us just a little bit earlier.

It is interesting that the second verse of this psalm, "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old,"² those exact words are ascribed to Jesus Christ in Matthew chapter 13 when he goes in to where Matthew groups these parables for us and so we see he is the ultimate fulfillment of this in his parabolic ministry and we also see that he is the ultimate speaker in this psalm as he is the ultimate speaker in the entirety of the Word of God.

² Psalm 78:2.

Now if you notice in verse nine of the psalm it speaks of the sons of Ephraim. The sons of Ephraim were archers equipped with bows, yet they turned back in the day of battle.

Ephraim was the main tribe in the north. Joseph, you remember, had two sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Ephraim was the main tribe so sometimes Hosea's prophecy, Amos' prophesy you read of the northern tribes and they are called Ephraim, sometimes Joseph. We see that in this psalm.

The northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC due to their sin. Twenty kings, all of them wicked and God took them away. The southern kingdom lasted another 150 years, 586, 587 BC. They fell to Babylon, but they also had 20 monarchs, 20 of them. But they lasted another 150 years past the northern kingdom.

I am mentioning this for a reason I will get to in just a few moments. But here you see when it refers in verse nine to the sons of Ephraim turned back, this is speaking of the northern tribes. So we have here the monarchy already divided.

And so, as an outline for the psalms and, again, the main focus of this psalm, as stated in the New American Standard Bible, "God's guidance of his people in spite of their unfaithfulness." That is a very, very proper analysis of what this psalm is about.

For those of you using the New King James version they say, "God's kindness even to rebellious Israel."

God is kind. God is merciful even when Israel and Israel here is referred to the nation itself, ok, because it can be confusing. Jacob/Israel is the entirety of the 12 tribes and yet after the division the northern tribes are referred to as Israel or Ephraim and in the south you have Judah. So that can become confusing.

It is confusing in this psalm a little bit, because after the introduction you find in verses one through eight which tell us about parental responsibility and the responsibility of the children as well, after it goes through this introduction stressing over and over the importance of parents teaching, teaching, teaching, teaching, teaching, teaching their children their Word of God.

And, parents, I hope to God you are taking that seriously. Don't let us lose our children. And for you children, your responsibility is here as well. You are being taught. You know. You have been taught, most of you, these things. If you turn away, your judgment will be even greater, because you know these things. You have been taught these things.

This is no game, children. These are matters of everlasting consequence we are talking about, everlasting consequence.

After the introduction, verses nine through 16 explain how the northern kingdom has violated God's covenant in her unfaithfulness, failing to remember God's work throughout the history of Israel. And I am stressing that, throughout the history of Israel.

Because when you come to verse 17 all the way through verse 64 the psalmist then says, "This has been the entire nation's *modus operandi*."

They have always been unfaithful. Even after leaving Egypt they continued over and over and over and over to be unfaithful to God and yet God showed them mercy time and time and time again he showed them mercy. They regrouped, retrenched for a little bit and then they fell away. They regrouped and then they fell away again and again and again to the point where we read in verse 65 and following that God... drop down to verse 67.

"[God] also rejected the tent of Joseph..."³

That is the northern tribes.

"And did not choose the tribe of Ephraim."⁴

Do you see the parallelism there? Joseph and Ephraim. He rejected them.

But chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved. And He built His sanctuary like the heights, Like the earth which He has founded forever. He also chose David His servant, And took him from the sheepfolds; From the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him, To shepherd Jacob His people.⁵

This is David united kingdom, the head of the united kingdom during this time, but God took him, a shepherd boy to be his shepherd over his sheep Israel. It is just beautiful structure in this psalm, just absolutely marvelous.

"[He] took him from the sheepfolds; From the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him, To shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance."⁶

That is what God thinks about his people. You are my people. You are my inheritance. You are my sheep. The special relationship that God has with his people that he has with none other, just his people, just his people.

"So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, And guided them with his skillful hands."⁷

³ Psalm 78:67.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Psalm 78:68-71.

⁶ Psalm 78:70-71.

⁷ Psalm 78:72.

That is what David did, a man after God's own heart.

Now William Hendrickson points out, if you turn to 2 Timothy chapter two, please, 2 Timothy two, we have a somewhat similar teaching here in the new covenant documents. And I am going to read it for you.

Now many of you, I trust most of you are aware at least to some degree that in the pastoral epistles there are five trustworthy statements or sometimes called the faithful sayings. This shows us, by the way, does it not, that confessional statements were already part and parcel of the Church.

We have our London Baptist Confession. Confessional statements were being made even in the first century, you see, statements the church was using in summary of what the Bible teaches. And numerous passages in the New Testament would show us that, the importance of having confessions.

But here in verse 11 of 2 Timothy two this is the fourth of the trustworthy statements and we read this.

“It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him [that is Christ], we shall also live with Him.”⁸

Do you see that?

“If we died with Him...”⁹

If when he died we died in union with him, if we died with him, then we will also live with him.

When Christ was raised his people were raised with him. Everything we have, everything depends on our relationship with Jesus Christ. Everything depends on Christ. If we die with him, then we will live with him.

“If we endure, we will also reign with him.”¹⁰

But now the warning.

“IF we deny Him, He also will deny us.”¹¹

Did you get that, children? If you turn away from Christ, he will turn away from you.

“If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself.”¹²

⁸ 2 Timothy 2:11.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 2:12.

¹¹ Ibid.

He cannot deny his character.

Quoting William Hendrickson on this passage, “These verses show that loyalty to Jesus Christ and steadfastness even in the midst of bitter persecution are always rewarded by the privilege of living and reigning with Jesus Christ.”

What could be better than that?

“While on the contrary,” now here is the contrary, “denial and disloyalty are punished by being rejected by him who always remains faithful to his threats as well as to his promises. Because he is not able to do otherwise than keep his Word, he cannot deny himself, by denying his Word.”

That is just an excellent summary of what this psalm is all about. See, if we are faithful, God will take us into a heavenly kingdom.

Israel over and over even as they sinned God showed mercy. He shows mercy to us. He is showing mercy to some of you in this room right now who have still not reached out to him. And he has mercifully spared your life.

But there comes a time when it is too late and it is over. It is all over. He cannot deny himself. If you remain faithless, you are going to perish because he cannot deny his own character, his own Word.

And that is what we are reading about here.

Turn, if you will, to the book of Luke chapter 24. I want to focus here for the next few minutes on the importance of us understanding the need for parents and for all of us to understand what the Bible says about teaching—now, parents, listen please—about teaching our children the entire history of the work of redemption.

I am borrowing from Jonathan Edwards’ book title here. He preached a series, 30 sermons on this, *The History of the Work of Redemption*. And Edwards traced this history from Genesis chapter three all the way to the end of the book. And that is what happens in Psalm 78. Psalm 78 is stressing the importance of our children knowing how God had dealt with his people through what we would say today millennia of time. You see, he is always faithful. He is always faithful. But trace it from as early as Genesis three all the way through the end of the book, you see?

Our children have to know the importance of the entirety of this history of God’s work of redemption. And that is what at RBCR here starting very shortly, God so willing, we are going to be doing in the afternoon messages I am very much looking forward to it, a history of the work of redemption. We are going to start out by doing a brief overview, a very brief over of it and then we are going to take book by book by book by book and

¹² 2 Timothy 2:13.

showing you how God's covenant of grace is found, where Christ is in each of these books. It will take us years. I am serious, but we are going to, God willing, God so willing, we are going to trace this to show us all how this is one book and there is—as our confession says—there is a consent of all the parts of holy Scripture. There is a consent of all the parts of holy Scriptures. And our children need to know this as well as we need to know this so they see God has always been faithful. This is the way God works through redemptive history.

Luke chapter 24, this is what Christ is saying to the disciples that he met on the road to Emmaus. You remember they are walking along. They had hoped that Jesus was going to be the one to come and deliver them and yet he has been crucified and they are distraught as they are walking back to Emmaus, a seven mile journey from what I understand from Jerusalem.

And here is what we read in verse 25.

“And He,” that is Jesus.

Jesus approaches them, you may remember. And one of them Cleopas and the other companion which whoever that is, they give him a mild rebuke.

“Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?”¹³

They are talking to the Lord of glory, see, not knowing he is the Lord of glory.

And he says to them, beginning in verse 25:

“O [now watch] foolish men.”¹⁴

He doesn't say they are fools. But they are acting foolishly. Why?

“O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in [do you see that word?] in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.¹⁵

You see, what Jesus is saying here when they are... if you understood the Old Testament you would understand that Christ must suffer and then be glorified. If you understood the Old Testament you would realize Christ is in the Old Testament. [?] and they prophesied of his suffering. And he opened up to them the entirety of the Old Testament so that they could see him in the book.

¹³ Luke 24:18.

¹⁴ Luke 24:25.

¹⁵ Luke 24:25-27.

Verse 44. This is a period of time later.

“Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things.’”¹⁶ There it is. “...all things which are written about Me.”¹⁷ You notice that. Now this is all... at this time there is no New Testament, no New Testament. Christ has just been raised from the dead.

“These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in...”¹⁸

Now he divides for us here... This is... The Hebrew Bible is divided into three portions, the Hebrew text, the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms. Now in the Hebrew Bible they have the law, they have the prophets and then they have what they call the writings. The writings, the longest book in the writings is the book of Psalms. So what he is doing is summarizing here the entirety of Old Testament history. He is saying, “All things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”¹⁹

And who is the chief character? I am, says Jesus Christ. I am. I am that one, see. It is all about me. It is all about me.

Turn, if you will briefly, to chapter five of the book of John, one book over, John chapter five. John five beginning in verse 39:

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me.”²⁰

He says, “You are right. The Scriptures do speak of eternal life and they speak about me as the source of that life.”

Drop down to verse 45.

“Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses.”²¹

And, you see, they were right on Moses. They didn’t like what Christ had to say, but they liked Moses. They liked Moses. And he says, “The one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me.”²²

¹⁶ Luke 24:44.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ John 5:39.

²¹ John 5:45.

²² John 5:45-46.

You see, Moses' writing is about me. Me. This is Christ saying this.

“But if you do not believe...”²³

This last verse is one of the most astonishing statements in the New Testament.

“But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”²⁴

See how he is equating the words of Moses, the words of Christ? They are all God's words, all of them, from cover to cover, from Genesis all the way to the end of the book. This is one, one book.

The Bible, children of all ages, was written by approximately 40 authors in three languages—Hebrew in the Old, Greek in the New and Aramaic, some of the old is Aramaic, little bits of Aramaic in the New as well, scattered here and there—over a period of 1600 years, all of the authors from different backgrounds or most of them from different backgrounds. And yet, as one writer says here, “There is a remarkable unity of theme, of purpose, of plan and doctrine. So much so that it defies naturalistic explanation. Unquestionably there was a unifying Source, capital S o u... a unifying Source behind the composition. It is as though the Bible were a magnificent symphony that has been orchestrated by one supreme master conductor.”

That is very well stated.

As the London Confession says, again, there is a consent of all the parts of Scripture.

You know, one very interesting thing is that when you come to the book of Exodus in the book of Exodus Genesis is just concluded and the very first word in the book of Exodus in the Hebrew text—you don't see this in the English. In the Hebrew text, the very first word in the book of Exodus is “And,” A N D. It is a vav... “and.”

Well, you don't begin a book with “and.” You don't begin an essay with “and.” You don't believe a paper with “and.” Children, if you begin one of your papers like that, you had better have a good reason for it. Moses did.

Why? Because, you see, he sees Exodus flowing right from what he has finished saying in Genesis.

And... after the end, “And then these are the...”

And he goes on, right, right from there, from cover to cover, and, it is all the way to the end. This is God's book. And we read in the very first verse of the very first chapter of the very first chapter one of Genesis and verse one:

²³ John 5:47.

²⁴ Ibid.

“In the beginning God...”²⁵

And we know right from the get go of this book this is not a book about man’s accomplishments. This is a book about God. And cover to cover it is a book about God.

All the way to the end of Revelation chapter 22 and throughout it there is one theme that runs from cover to cover and that theme is that man is a sinner in the hands of a very, very angry God. And there is only one solution and that solution is Jesus Christ. He is the hero. He is the hero of this book.

I would like you to turn with me, please, to Psalm 78, if you are there, the very beginning of this, again, Psalm 78 and verse three as we prepare for the supper set before us here. In the supper, as you recognize, right in front of us here, the bread and the fruit of the vine is a visible sermon of what we have been talking about here, a visible sermon about Jesus Christ, his cross work, his crucifixion, his victory over all of the forces of evil in this world. And when the psalm writer speaks to the parents and to the children as well:

A Maskil of Asaph.

Listen, O my people, to my instruction; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old...²⁶

Now here is the verse:

“...Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us.”²⁷

He doesn’t just say, “Which we have heard...” We have heard it and we know it.

Now the Hebrew word here for “known” is the word יָדָע (yaw-dah’). It is a very strong word. It is used in different ways in the Old Testament to be sure, but it is the same word that we read of in Genesis chapter four—Adam יָדָע (yaw-dah’) Eve and she conceived.

Now Adam—and I am not trying to make light here. Please don’t mishear me. Adam just didn’t say, “Eve, how are you doing?” and they had a baby. There was real intimacy there, real intimacy.

And there has got to be intimacy here, too.

The people in this congregation have heard over and over, over and over you have heard. But do you יָדָע (yaw-dah’)? Do you יָדָע (yaw-dah’) the things we are talking about

²⁵ Genesis 1:1.

²⁶ Psalm 78:1-2.

²⁷ Psalm 78:3.

here? Do you know them? Are they your very own? Have you embraced them as your own? Have you reached out to this truth and taken hold of it like Peter who says...

Jesus says, "Do you all want to go away, too?" John six.

And Peter says, "Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life."

As pastor Bracket was telling us this morning if you know the truth and you know the Son, then you are [?].

It is our responsibility, parents, to teach, to teach, to teach the children. Children, it is your responsibility to hear it, to learn it and to יָדָע (yaw-dah') it, to claim it, to grasp it as your very own.

The Lord's supper which is set before us here is just that. It is the Lord's supper. It is the Lord's supper and it is for the Lord's people. It is for those people who have heard the truth of the Word of God and they know it. They love it. They have embraced it. They have יָדָע (yaw-dah') it. It is their Word and he is their Lord and he is their Savior.

Let's close with a word of prayer.

Our God, we thank you for your mercy. We thank you that you have not left us to ourselves in this world. Not only have you given us general revelation, but you have given us special revelation, this Word which opens up for us the truth about Jesus Christ from cover to cover in this book and him crucified. We pray, oh God, that you would work powerfully amongst us here at RBCR that we would not only know the truth, hear the truth, but we would know it and that truth would set us free. We ask these things in the matchless name of Jesus Christ who is the hero of this book. Amen.