

Psalm 78

Psalm 78:1–72

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Introduction: Psalm 78 is the first Psalm of those which I will teach at the end of the book of Exodus. This was written by Asaph, who lived during the time of David and Solomon. Asaph takes the facts of history and interprets them; believers with doctrine can often interpret the trends of history. This Psalm will examine the rebellious generation which left Egypt; the great deeds which God did in their behalf, and their response. Then it will look backwards at the exodus itself and the signs performed by God in order to take Israel out of Egypt. The hearer of this Psalm, by implication, is to be forewarned of repeating the previous mistakes of his ancestors. The hearer is to be motivated to obey and to worship God because of the acts of kindness God has shown toward Israel and His power as demonstrated through His mighty acts. *Correspondingly, unfaithfulness is the more blameworthy because it contemptuously disregards all God’s wonderful acts in his people’s behalf.*¹

There is an overriding structure to this psalm which is easy to miss when slugging it out verse by verse. The key is that there is a rift between the northern and southern groups of Israelites, represented by Ephraim and by Judah. The psalmist will conclude that God has placed the authority in the hands of Judah through David, after comparing Ephraim to gen X, their spiritual ancestors. God’s Law was designed for all of Israel, which is part of the thrust of vv. 4–8. When we go through this carefully, you will see that, although a contrast is set up between Ephraim and Judah, that nothing is said clearly about a separation of the two nations, either prophetically or historically. The psalmist, as a student of historical events (Asaph was well-versed in the Pentateuch, as we will observe in his psalms), could see trouble on the horizon, although he is not at all certain of what it is beyond a schism. The strongest thing that Asaph would write was: [He \[God\] also rejected the tent of Joseph and He did not choose the](#)

¹ *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995; p. 859.

tribe of Ephraim, but He chose the tribe of Judah [and] Mount Zion, which He loved. Furthermore, He built His sanctuary like the high places, like the earth which He has founded forever. And He 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, and Israel, His inheritance (Psalm 78:67–71). So you see, it is possible that the psalmist wrote of a divided kingdom here, but it is more likely he wrote of an ongoing schism.

Finally, this Psalm will settle in on the day of Asaph and the choosing by God of the tribe of Judah to rule and David as the ruler of Israel. Since the bulk of this Psalm deals with the time of Moses, I felt this would be the appropriate place to insert its exegesis.

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Introduction

Literally:

A Maskil of Asaph:

Psalm 78:title

Smoother English rendering:

An instructive Psalm of Asaph:

The first line is the title of the Psalm, found in most Psalms in the original languages. The KJV places them in italics, which usually indicates that these words were not in the original languages. However, this is not the case with the Psalms. The superscript is a part of Scripture, often identifying the writer, the type of Psalm and even to whom the Psalm is dedicated to or addressed to.

The word *maskil* is obviously a transliteration which most people believe to mean *instructive*. It is very close to the word for *prudence, insight*. Thirteen of the Psalms are so labeled (Psalms 32, 42, 44, 45, 52–55, 74, 78, 88, 89, and 142). Asaph ben Berachiah of the family Gershon, was the head of the service of music under kings David and Solomon. He is mentioned in I Chron. 6:39 15:17 16:5 II Chron. 5:12 and was the author of at least twelve Psalms (Psalm 50, 73–83). Quite likely, these twelve were grouped together at one time.

It has been suggested that Asaph possibly lived until the period of the divided kingdom, as he mentions Ephraim (vv. 9, 67) and Judah (v. 68) in this psalm, the names of the two countries of the divided kingdom (the use of the name of *Israel* in v. 21 is insignificant because it is used in contrast with the name *Jacob*). Although the Northern Kingdom was named Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, Judah, but often the Northern Kingdom was indicated by calling it Ephraim (this is particularly true of the prophets Hosea and Isaiah). Or, it is suggested that someone in the family of Asaph wrote this psalm after the dividing of the kingdoms and attached the family name to it. Many excellent Bible teachers, including Barnes, subscribe to this psalm being written after the separation of the two kingdoms. However, the better explanation is that the rift between the northern and southern kingdoms preceded the break between them by several decades at least. You do not have a great unity between the two and then, suddenly, overnight, a division. This is something which requires time and Asaph, who could interpret past history, could also see historical trends and correctly interpret events current to his time period. The Northern kingdom always seemed to be more influenced by the outside world and heathenism. Their very position put them into closer contact with Moab, Ammon, Syria, Zobah, Bashan and Phœnicia. The Southern Kingdom was primarily in contact with Philistia, Edom and the Amalekites. Furthermore, Judah seemed to maintain a greater spiritual purity than did the Israelites in the north. When we enter into the book of the Judges, a time of great degeneracy, we will find that most of it deals with the tribes in the north and Judah will be rarely mentioned (primarily in chapters 1 and 15, along with four more scattered references). What we do know is that Asaph was an excellent student of history, often citing the events of the exodus and following to make his point. The student of history is often able to get a good read on current events as well. He observed an ever-growing schism between the north and the south and pointed out to the arrogant northern tribe of Ephraim that God chose both David to rule and Zion to be the mountain of His tabernacle.

The time during which this psalm was written, to whom it was written and the surrounding circumstances have a great deal to do with its interpretation. There are many reasons to believe that this psalm was written due to a split

in the kingdom, whether historical from the standpoint of the psalmist, or future from his observations. Ephraim is mentioned right out of the blue in v. 9 and then reminded carefully of the transgressions of their spiritual fathers, apostate Israel, during the time of the exodus. The conclusion is that God chose the tent of Judah, resulting in the leadership of King David (Vv. 68–70) and God did not choose Ephraim from out of Joseph (v. 67). As has already been discussed, the kingdom split did not have to already occur for this psalm to be written.

Psalm 77, also a psalm of Asaph, ends with Moses and Aaron shepherding Israel. Psalm 78 ends with David shepherding Israel. Psalm 79 ends with a tribute to God on behalf of God's people and the sheep of His pasture. Therefore, it would seem that these three Psalms were written together, or written to belong together.

It has been suggested that there were two different Asaph's who lived and composed music during this time period, but I really don't know how likely that is. I imagine it is possible, but both at the same time doing the same thing seems unlikely. The apparent problem is that some of these Psalms contain prayers from a later time (e.g., Psalm 74, 79, 83). And the explanation given is that these Psalms may have been composed or edited by his ancestors or by a counterfeit Asaph—that is, some writer who adds Asaph's name to his work to give it more authority. However, their content primarily concerns the dispersion of Israel, a theme of God's Word all the way back to Lev. 26. Therefore, it is not necessary that these Psalms be written during the dispersion of Israel but from the standpoint of one being in the dispersion of Israel. And, from the conservative point of view, we are told in the Bible that these psalms belong to Asaph; therefore, they are Asaph's.

Okay, now you may think that I am hedging. I would not allow Moses to write his obituary in advance but I would allow prophecy here. Why? The entire context of the end of Deuteronomy, including the fact that Moses gave the completed Law to the Levites prior to the end of Deuteronomy indicates that the remainder of that book was finished by someone else, although it clearly bears the signature of Moses in the blessing and in his song. Furthermore, the idea of Moses pre-writing his death is silly. It would not necessarily be read by anyone prior to his death and it is not a prophecy of great import. Moses was a man of great importance and he was the spiritual hero of the Old Testament. It is fitting that his book bear his obituary as a post script. However, his death is not important enough to prophesy. Prophecies concerning Messiah and prophecies concerning the future of Israel—these are the prophecies found throughout Scripture. And since the dispersion of Israel is not some hidden and obscure doctrine, the idea that a psalmist would write about it in advance is not atypical of Biblical prophecy. Many of David's psalms were prophetic. Therefore, we do not have to concoct some bizarre explanation concerning the psalms of Asaph when they become prophetic. This particular psalm will deal with the dispersion of Israel (vv. 59–64); it is unreasonable to suppose that someone had to append this portion later because Scripture in several places prior to this predicts the dispersion and then the regathering of Israel.

Prefixed to the name of Asaph, we have the lamed preposition, which usually means *to, for*; however, here, it means *belonging to, by*.² This is the common *by-line* of the majority of the Psalms. This identifies the writer of the Psalm. Asaph is identified by our Lord as a prophet in Matt. 13:35, where He quotes Psalm 78:2, further insuring its inspiration.

**Give ear, O my people my law ;
incline your ear to word of my mouth.**

Psalm 78:1

**Listen, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ear to the words of my
mouth.**

We begin with a call from Asaph to listen to what he has to say. He tells his audience to listen up. God, when quoted by Isaiah, uses the a similar approach: “Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness...Pay attention to Me, of My people; and give ear to Me, O My nation....Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live” (Isa. 51:1a, 4a 55:3a; also see Psalm 49:1). What they are to listen to is the word *tôwrâh* (תּוֹרָה) [pronounced *toe-RAW*], which is generally translated *law*, although it can mean *instruction, teaching, protocol*. Strong's #8451 and BDB #435.

² *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*; Hendrickson, ©1979, p. 512b.

In this context, it is Asaph speaking to the people. For the first two verses, it appears as though it could be God speaking or it could be Asaph speaking. However, in v. 3, Asaph mentions *our* fathers, making it clear that the speaker of this psalm is an Israelite and not God.

**I will open in a parable my mouth;
I will utter dark sayings out from
antiquity.**

Psalm 78:2

**I will open my mouth in a parable;
and I will utter dark sayings of old.**

The phrase *I will open my mouth* is a Hebraism means that the speaker will speak at length concerning a certain topic; or he will be speaking with great solemnity, liberty or freedom.³

Notice that this particular Psalm is set up to where each line is repeated with a slightly different emphasis or a furtherance of the thought of the previous line. This particular portion of this Psalm was prophetic of Jesus Christ. **All these things Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables, and He was not talking to them without a parable, so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world** (Matt. 13:34–35; Psalm 78:2). Some people become confused at a verse like this—they feel that the only reason Jesus Christ spoke in parables was to fulfill this verse. Not true; this was a part of God’s plan, prophesied a millennium previous; however, to fulfill Scripture was not the only reason for Jesus to speak in parables. There were things which He must keep secret from Satan, things which were revealed by God the Holy Spirit to some of His listeners, and things which make perfect sense to us today. However, as we have studied in the past, Satan entered into Judas in order to see that our Lord was crucified. He had no clue that God used his absolute evil as a part of His plan to bring salvation to us. Furthermore, Jesus spoke in parables so that he would not be publically executed for speaking too plainly about the Word. When Asaph opened his mouth in a parable, the word found in the Greek Septuagint was παραβολαῖς [pronounced *par-ah-bow-LACE*], which we transliterate *parable*. This is the word *mâshâl* (מָשָׁל) [pronounced *maw-SHAWL*] means *parable, proverb, discourse, memorable recitation, oracle*; which we studied in Num. 27 and Deut. 28. It is the same name of the book of Solomon called *Proverbs*. This word is not an exact equivalent to the Greek word *parable* (see I Sam. 10:12 I Kings 4:32 Psalm 44:14). Here, *mâshâl* refers to a *comparison* or an *analogy*. Strong’s #4912 BDB #605. What the psalmist will be doing is comparing the arrogance of the present-day tribe of Ephraim (present-day to his time period) to the arrogance disobedience of gen X during the time of the exodus. Asaph uses past history to interpret contemporary events.

What is uttered is *chîydâh* (חֵידָה) [pronounced *khee-DAWH*], which means *dark sayings, riddle, enigmatic or perplexing question or saying*. It is first found in Num. 12:8 and then not seen again until Judges 14:13–19 and then another half dozen times throughout Scripture. In the Psalms, we find this word only one other time: in Psalm 49:4. Strong’s #2420 (2330) BDB # 295. This is the second, but last, parallel to Psalm 49: **I will incline my ear to a parable; I will express my dark saying on the harp** (Psalm 49:4). Asaph was clearly a man of Scripture, as he peppered his songs with historical events revealed in Scripture and with a similar phrasing.

Throughout the Old Testament, we have passages which clearly refer to our Lord (Gen. 22 Psalm 2 16 22 40 102 Isa. 53), and we have occasional asides which we can see in retrospect speak of our Lord. There is not always a clear-cut distinction; however, in v. 2, we can look back and see that this was prophetic; however, during that time period, it is unlikely that they saw this verse in that way. This introduces another philosophical question: did the writers of Scripture know that they were writing Scripture and, when they prophesied, did they always recognize that they were prophesying? I think in our study of Moses, it was certainly clear to him when he took dictation from God, during the latter portion of Exodus, most of Leviticus and much of Numbers, that he was recording God’s Word. Duh. However, his historical accounts and narrative which he would weave throughout, he may not have seen as clearly inspired. In fact, it was not until Deuteronomy when I believe that it began to dawn on Moses that what he had prepared to say to Israel was God’s Word. I think that the same is true of prophecy; some authors fully realized what they wrote or spoke was clearly divinely inspired prophecy and others did not.

³ *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*; E.W. Bullinger; ©originally 1898; reprinted 1968 Baker Books; p 842.

Here, I do not believe that it was even clear to Asaph, the writer of this Psalm, that (1) he was writing Scripture; or, (2) that this particular verse was prophetic.

In my own writing, my attempt is to interpret each verse and each passage as accurately as possible. I examine the works done by men whom I greatly respect, I examine the original language, and I examine the immediate context, attempting to determine the intention of the author as clearly as possible. Even with all this, there are times, although damn few, where I will be in error. When writing, I do not know when this occurs. If I am lucky, I will read something which will cause me to revise my notes and to rethink my position. So just as I do not know when error creeps into my writing, the authors of Scripture do not always realize that they are writing Scripture; and those recording prophecy do not always recognize when they are being prophetic. As the NIV Study Bible points out, these teachings of Asaph have more in common with Stephen's teachings (Acts 7), than they do with our Lord's. That is, Asaph primarily studied previous Scripture and history and interpreted it more than he prophesied of events yet to come. Prophecy is not missing from his psalms; however, historical interpretation is his forte'.

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Instructions from Past Generations to our Children

**[Sayings] which we have heard so we
knew them;
and our fathers have recounted to us.**

Psalm 78:3

**The sayings which we have heard and
consequently learned;
sayings our fathers recounted to us.**

Again we have the repetition of thought. At some point in time, they heard these things and after hearing them so much, they learned them. This was doctrine taught to them by their fathers. We have an interesting change of case here: *we knew them* has a masculine plural suffix (*them*). However, when looking back to what *them* is, we find that *dark sayings* is a feminine plural and *parable* is in the masculine singular. What the masculine plural does is encompass both *dark sayings* and *parable*.

What their fathers do is the very interesting verb *çâphar* (ר פ ט) [pronounced *saw-FAHR*], which means, in the Qal, *to number* (Gen. 15:5 Lev. 15:13 23:16); in the Qal participle, it is often rendered *scribe* (II Sam. 8:17 II Kings 22:9–10), and in the Piel, it means *to recall, to recount, to declare* (Ex. 9:16 Judges 6:13 Job 15:17). Strong's #5608 BDB #707.

Now some people are sensationalists. They feel as though we should have modern-day prophets, those who have visions of Jesus, people speaking in tongues as a common occurrence, and that miracles should be a part of our everyday lives. This is because they read through Genesis and Exodus, but began skimming three-fourths of the way through Exodus, jumped into the New Testament, recognizing that there were certainly prophets in between, and into the gospels, where our Lord performs an almost uncountable number of miracles (John 21:25), and finally stops after reading the first dozen chapters of Acts and the book of Revelation. They never grasp that these were very special times in history; that these were isolated events in history, recorded **because** we see a more direct handling of events by God, recorded **because** of the miracles and the signs. But the catch is that most of human history is not filled with spectacular miracles. If you take roughly 6000-10,000 years of history and compare that to the 40 years of the exodus, the 30 year ministry of Elijah (I really don't know how long his ministry lasted; however, only a small portion of it involved miracles) and the few years of our Lord's public ministry added to the, say, 30 year early ministry of the Apostles, we are looking at very roughly 1% of all human history. Just because there were great signs and miracles for 1% of human history, this does not mean that we can conclude that we will see great signs and miracles throughout our lifetimes. Gideon was confused on that point. *Then Gideon said to him, "Pardon me, sir, but if Y^ehowah is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers wrote us about?"* (Judges 6:13a). So if Gideon, who lived only a couple of generations after the time of Moses, complained about the lack of miraculous activity in his immediate periphery, does it not make sense that perhaps we would be lacking in miraculous activity as well?

We will not conceal from their sons with respect to a later generation recounting praises of Y^howah and His strength and His wonders which He has done.

Psalm 78:4

We will not conceal from their children of a later generation a recounting of the praises of Y^howah And His strength and His wonders which He has done.

The first verb is *kâchad* (כַּחַד) [pronounced *kaw-KHAHD*] means *to hide, to conceal*; there are places where this verb has been translated *cut off* in many places (Ex. 9:15 || Chron. 32:21 Job 4:7 22:20), which might be better rendered *removed*. There already is a verb for *cut off*; since there should be a relationship between these meanings, the relationship is that when something is *concealed* it appears to be *removed*. Strong's #3582 BDB #470. The adjective which describes the generation is *'achârôn* (אַחֲרֹן) [pronounced *ah-kha-ROHN*] and it means *coming after, behind, later*. It is derived from a very similar verb. Strong's #314 BDB #30.

The phrase *their sons* is significant, inasmuch as distance is emphasized here. It is not a matter of a separate set of people or a different group of people in race, but with respect to time. That is, this is a poetic way of looking well into the future. What is not being concealed from coming generations is a recounting of the things which God had done on behalf of Israel. What we have here, as in several other places, is a hint of the Gentiles to come which will be a part of God's plan. Throughout the Old Testament, presented in a way which would be generally unknown to the reader of that day, are hints that God would come to the Gentiles, as He has in the Church Age. This does not mean that no Gentile was saved in the Old Testament; Gentiles continually heard of what God had done for Israel and believed and were saved. Even some, such as Rahab the prostitute, had an impact on God's plan.

The verb for *recounting* is the Piel participle of *çâphar* (צָפַר) [pronounced *saw-FAHR*], which was found in the previous verse. What is not to be hidden from succeeding generations is the retelling of the praises of God and of His strength and of the wonders which He performed. One of the great recurrent themes which we find throughout the Pentateuch is the spawning of questions by the rituals which were to be observed. That is, the children, who were positive toward doctrine, would ask why did they do this or that. "And it will come to pass when your children will say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' And then you will say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to Y^howah Who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He struck down the Egyptians, yet spared our homes.'" (Ex. 12:26–27a). "Only take personal responsibility and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen, and so that these things do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and to your grandsons." (Deut. 4:9). "Tell your sons about it, and your sons their sons; and their sons the next generation." (Joel 1:3; see also Ex. 10:2 13:8, 14 Deut. 6:7, 20–21 11:19 32:7 Job 15:18 Psalm 71:17–18 145:4 Isa. 38:19). This is exactly what Asaph is doing. He has studied the acts of God from previous generations and that has filled his soul to overflowing; and in these songs of his, he instructs us concerning God's workings in the past.

Then He established a testimony in Jacob and a Law He placed in Israel which [Law] He commanded our fathers to teach them to their sons.

Psalm 78:5

Then He established a testimony in Jacob and a Law He placed in Israel which Law He commanded our fathers to teach them to their sons.

The first verb in this verse is the Hiphil imperfect of *qûwm* (קָוַם) [pronounced *koom*]. In the Hiphil it means, among other things, *to establish, to fulfill, to cause to stand* either a testimony, a vow, a commandment, or a promise (Gen. 6:18 17:7 26:3 Num. 30:14). In this verse, we find it rendered *established* (Owen), *raiseth up* (Young) and *set up* (*The Emphasized Bible*). Strong's #6965 BDB #877. The second verb is the Qal perfect of the very common verb *sîym* (סִיַּם) [pronounced *seem*] which means *to put, to place, to set*. Strong's #7760 BDB #962. The exclusivity of Israel is being stated here. God did not go to other nations to do His work; He went to Israel. This Law, which encompasses all revealed revelation, was to be taught from generation to generation.

**To the purpose that a later generation
will know;
[so that] sons being born will arise
and recount to their children.**

Psalm 78:6

**So that the next generation will know;
so the sons yet unborn might arise
and recount these things to their
children.**

What is continually emphasized in the Old Testament is the teaching of Biblical concepts to the following generations. The things which were done on behalf of Israel in removing them from Egypt and placing them in their land was an unprecedented involvement of God in the affairs of man. The miracles and signs and wonders were phenomenal; so phenomenal, that thousands of generations later, their existence is denied by some because they have never seen such miracles and cannot imagine these things occurring. **They will come and they will declare His righteousness to a people who will be born that it has been completed** (Psalm 22:31).

**And they will place their confidence in
Elohim
and they will not forget the deeds of El,
but they will keep [or, guard] His
commandments.**

Psalm 78:7

**And they will place their confidence in
Elohim
and they will not forget the deeds of
God,
but they will keep and guard His
commandments.**

In the literal portion of this translation, I have followed the lead of Rotherham to indicate that there are two words translated *God*. What they are not to forget is *ma'ālîyl* (מַעֲלִיִל) [pronounced *mah-a-LEEL* or *mah-ga-LEEL*] and this word, always in the plural, means *deeds, practices*. It is a nonjudgmental word which can stand for evil practices (1 Sam. 25:3 Psalm 28:4 Isa. 3:8 Hos. 9:15) or for good deeds (Psalm 77:12 78:7). However, this word is used much more often in the former sense than in the latter. Strong's #4611 BDB #760. **"Then watch yourself, so that you do not forget Y^ehowah, Who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."** (Deut. 6:12; also see Deut. 8:14). The emphasis here is not upon the creation works of God but his acts and deeds on behalf of Israel.

One of the areas wherein the Israelites fell was that they did not carefully preserve God's Word. They created the Mishna and the Talmud, which increased the burden of the Law upon themselves. **"You will not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor will you take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of Y^ehowah your God which commandments I command you."** (Deut. 4:2; see Deut. 5:1, 29). **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and know that I am with you always, even to the end of the age."** (John 28:19–20).

**And they will not be like their fathers
a generation stubborn and rebellious
a generation whose heart was not
caused to be stabilized
whose spirit was not faithful to God.**

Psalm 78:8

**And they will not be like their fathers
a stubborn and rebellious generation
a generation whose heart was not
caused to be stabilized
whose spirit was not faithful to [or,
reliant upon] God.**

The modifier of generation is the Qal active participle of *çârar* (רָרָר) [pronounced *saw-RAHR*], which means, as we saw in Deut. 21:18, *stubborn, willful, headstrong*. This word is often found in conjunction with *mârâh* (מָרָה) [pronounced *maw-RAWH*], which means *rebell, rebellious*, (Deut. 21:20 Psalm 78:8 Jer. 5:23), indicating that they might be related, but they are probably not synonyms (Strong's #4784 BDB #598 for *mârâh*). Strong's #5637 BDB #710. Similar warnings are posted throughout Scripture: **"And do not be like your fathers, and your brothers, who were unfaithful to Y^ehowah God of their fathers, so that He made them a horror, as you see. And do not stiffen your neck like your fathers, but give a hand to Y^ehowah and enter His sanctuary which He has consecrated forever, and serve Y^ehowah your God, that His burning anger may turn away from you."** (II Chron. 30:7–8). However,

despite these warnings, Israel continually rebelled against God: “Know then that it is not because of your righteousness that Y^ehowah your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people. Remember—do not forget—how you provoked Y^ehowah your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have been rebellious against Y^ehowah. Even at Horeb, you provoked Y^ehowah to wrath, and Y^ehowah was so angry with you that He would have destroyed you.” (Deut. 9:6–8). “They have acted corruptly toward Him; not His children, because of their defect, but they are a perverse and crooked generation...and then He said, ‘I will hide My face from them. I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, sons in whom there is no faithfulness.’” (Deut. 32:5, 20). But it came to pass that anytime a judge died, they would turn back and they would act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and to bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways (Judges 2:19). “For this is a rebellious people, false sons, sons who refuse to listen to the instruction of Y^ehowah” (Isa. 30:9). “For I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people who walk the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, a people who continually provoke Me to My face.” (Isa. 65:2–3a; see also Ex. 32:9 Deut. 9:24 31:27). In the context of this psalm, Asaph is speaking to the rebellious tribe of Ephraim. He has brought up past historical events with which the tribe of Ephraim was familiar and he warns Ephraim not to make the same mistakes which plagued their ancestors.

What the heart was not was *steadfast* (Owens), *prepared* (Young), *fixed* (Rotherham), *loyal* (NIV) or *put right* (the alternate NASB rendering). Obviously, we have a lot of differing opinions here. The verb is the difficult verb *kûwn* (כּוּן) [pronounced *koon*] and it appears to mean *erect (to stand up perpendicular)* and by application, *to establish, to prepare, to stabilize*. Here, it is found in the Hiphil perfect, which would indicate to me that *stabilized* would be the most likely rendering (the Hiphil is the causative stem). Strong’s #3559 BDB #465. How is a heart caused to be stabilized? With Bible doctrine taken in daily. This world is designed to knock you flat on your ass and the only thing which can help you to withstand the attack of Satan’s demon legions and the doctrines of demons is God’s Word. There is no other way to be stabilized. Barnes writes: *They yielded to any sudden impulse of passion, even when it led them to revolt against God. This is as true of sinners now as it was of them, that they take no pains to have their hearts right with God. If they did, there would be no difficulty in doing it. It is not with them an object of desire to have their hearts right with God, and hence nothing is more easy or natural than that they should rebel and go astray.*⁴

What the spirit was not was the Niphal (passive) perfect of *’âman* (אָמַן) [pronounced *aw-MAHN*], which means *faithful, confirmed, certain, lasting, steadfast, dependable, trustworthy, entrusted, reliable*; This verb acts very similar to our verb *to be* along with a predicate nominative. Strong’s #539 BDB #52. The soul which rejects God’s Word results in a human spirit which is no longer faithful to God and no longer dependant upon God. The Psalmist David cried out, *Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me* (Psalm 51:10).

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God’s Provision for Israel During the Exodus; Israel’s Rejection of God

**Sons of Ephraim,
equipped shooters of a bow;
they will turn back in a day of battle.**

Psalm 78:9

**Sons of Ephraim,
having been properly armed as bow-
men,
they turn back in the day of battle.**

To some, it appears as though we are now in a new topic or a new paragraph. As if suddenly the Psalmist begins speaking of the tribe of Ephraim. Even Keil and Delitzsch write: *[verse 9]...comes in now in the midst of this description, is awkward and unintelligible.*⁵ However, that is not the case. The intention of the psalmist was to contrast the rebelliousness of gen X with that which God expects, and to convict those who are beginning to move

⁴ Barnes’ Notes, Vol. IV, book 2, p. 294.

⁵ Keil & Delitzsch’s *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. V, p. 524.

towards rebellion in Israel. Here, Ephraim is one of the largest of the tribes and the chief tribe in rebellion, although this message is not exclusively for Ephraim. Ephraim stands in for any of those who are in rebellion to God's plan. God's plan held for the house of David to rule over Israel and for tabernacle to be in Zion. Those who objected to that were in opposition to God. In fact, it would later become common to refer to the ten tribes in the north or to Northern Kingdom as Ephraim (Isa. 7:2, 5, 8–9, 17 11:13 28:1) as opposed to Judah in the south.

Recall that Ephraim is one of the two sons of Joseph, one of the greatest of the patriarchs. His other brothers sold him into slavery and God exalted him above all his brothers. Our Lord Jesus Christ was born into this world, seemingly into slavery, but God glorified Him above all His brothers. **But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God, He might taste death for every one** (Heb. 2:9). And one would expect from a man so great that his ancestors would be great as well, but this was not the case. Ephraim and Manasseh were both rebellious tribes, the former often became synonymous with the Northern Kingdom, which stood in rebellion against Judah, the Southern Kingdom, wherein was Jerusalem. The specific rebellion of Ephraim was unknown in the time of Moses, but recall that this psalm was written long after the time of Moses, prior to the separation between the north and the south; however, there were certainly signs of this in Solomon's day (a kingdom is not a unified whole one day and split into two the next; there are always precipitating factors).

It is difficult to know when to place the teaching of the various psalms. The political situation found during the time of this psalm is somewhat different than the time of Moses. Israel has been established as a kingdom for 500 years at the time that Asaph wrote this psalm. However, even though we have a kingdom unified under David and remaining together during the reign of Solomon, still there are indications of division. Ephraim is chosen by the psalmist Asaph to illustrate the rebellious heart. The reason that I am teaching this immediately following Deuteronomy is that most of the subject matter is based upon the exodus and that which transpired soon thereafter. However, some of the exegesis must be based upon the events which took place during the life of Asaph. To get a better feel for the events which took place during the time of the psalmist, we would examine the early portion of I Kings (the reign of Solomon) and the books of Hosea and Amos, who were both prophets to the Northern Kingdom. Ephraim does not represent all of Israel but illustrates those who are rebellious towards God in Israel—the unbeliever and the believer who has become apostate. **It is not as though the Word of God has failed, for they are not all Israel who are from Israel** (Rom. 9:6).

There are a couple of words we need to get right here first: we have the Qal active participle masculine plural construct of *nâshaq* (נָשַׁק) [pronounced *naw-SHAK*], a verb which is translated *to equip, to arm* when found in the Qal participle (I Chron. 12:2 II Chron. 17:17 Psalm 78:9*). However, it consistently means *to kiss* when found elsewhere (Gen. 27:27 31:28 Ex. 4:27 Psalm 2:12). Even BDB has trouble with this. Perhaps we could render this *in close contact with*. Strong's #5401 BDB #676.

The next word is the Qal active participle, masculine plural construct of *râmâh* (רָמַח) [pronounced *raw-MAW*], which means *to cast, to shoot*. With the word *bow*, BDB suggests *bow-shooters, bowmen*. Strong's #7411 BDB #941.

Just what exactly does this mean? The tribe of Ephraim was generally not known for cowardice in battle—not during the time of Moses and not during the times of David and Solomon. They were not known to go into battle and then to suddenly change their minds. However, during the time of the judges, they did not completely expell the indigenous population from their land (Judges 1:27, 29). However, this is not the key to the interpretation of this verse. The psalmist is speaking metaphorically here of a spiritual battle for which God equipped Israel (in context, Ephraim), a spiritual battle Israel deserted.

Let's apply this to us: we, as believers in Jesus Christ, have been given divine operating assets. We are not left in this world to function on our own. However, when we reject God's Word, we are just like warriors who have the armaments and the equipment, but run in retreat instead. We have the assets to function in this life; however, when we reject Bible doctrine, we act as if we have nothing and no way to protect ourselves.

**They did not guard a covenant of God
and they refused to walk in His Law.**

Psalm 78:10

**They did not guard their covenant with
God
and they refused to walk in His Law.**

God's covenant was with all of Israel, with all twelve tribes, and those who favored a separation were in opposition to God's Word. **The psalmist during his time period is speaking of Ephraim, as representative of that which is rebellious in Israel.** Asaph, in a parable, or in an analogy, continues to compare the rebellious exodus group with Ephraim. During the time of Moses, this would have been gen X, which, for a generation of believers, was one of the lamest groups of people ever. In general, this looks toward any generation which rejects God's Laws. And the most horrible discipline imaginable awaits the person negative toward God's Laws: **Yet Y^ehowah warned Israel and Judah, thorough all His prophets and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the Law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets."** However, they did not listen, but they stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in Y^ehowah their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers, and His warning with which He warned them. And they followed the emptiness and became empty, and they pursued the nations which surrounded them, concerning which Y^ehowah had commanded them not to imitate. And they forsook all the commandments of their God...so Y^ehowah was very angry with Israel and He removed them from His sight and none was left except the tribe of Judah...and Y^ehowah rejected all the descendent of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them out of His sight...Then the king of Assyria carried Israel away into exile to Assyria and placed them in Halah and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, because they did not obey the voice of Y^ehowah their God, but they transgressed His covenant, even all that Moses, the servant of Y^ehowah, commanded; they would neither listen to it nor would they do it (II Kings 17:13–16a, 18–20 18:11–12). "And they came in and took possession of the land, but they did not obey Your voice or walk in Your Law; they have done nothing of all that You commanded them to do; therefore, You have made all this calamity come upon them. Observe the siege mounds have reached the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans who fight against it, because of the sword, the famine, and the pestilence; and what You have spoken has come to pass; and observe, you see it." (Jer. 32:23–24; see also Jer. 11:8 44:10, 23).

**Then they forgot His doings
and His wonders which He had caused
them to see**

Psalm 78:11

**Then they forgot His doings
and they forgot His wonders which He
had shown them**

Gen X, witnesses to great and incredible miracles, when faced with a little pressure, completely forgot these things. It was as though God had never done them. Ephraim, in context, had been taught of all the works which God had done on behalf of Israel, and they simply forgot. Asaph will now enumerate those great works, the parting of the Sea of Reeds, the leading of the Israelites by a cloud in the day time and a pillar of fire during the night, the water brought forth two times out of the rocks (or, cliffs), the bread from heaven and the quail which God brought down. No nation before or since has had such an incredible range of miracles performed on their behalf.

**In the sight of their fathers
He had performed wonders
in land of Egypt, in a field of Zoan.**

Psalm 78:12

**In the sight of their fathers
He had performed wonders
in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.**

This verse begins with the preposition neged (נֶגֶד) [pronounced *NEH-ged*], which means *that which is conspicuous, in the sight of, opposite to*. Strong's #5048 BDB #617. Zoan is a city in Egypt associated with the Hyksos settlement of Avaris, which is near the coast of the Mediterranean between the eastern fingers of the Nile.⁶ Gen X, which observed these miracles, are the fathers of all subsequent generations. "But they, our fathers, acted

⁶ Scriptural references: Num. 13:22 Psalm 78:43 Isa. 19:11 30:4 Ezek. 30:14.

arrogantly. They became stubborn and they would not listen to Your commandments. And they refused to listen. And they did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You performed among them. So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. However, You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate; slow to anger and abounding in grace. And You did not forsake them.” (Neh. 9:16–17).

V. 9 spoke of the sons of Ephraim, and now in this verse we are speaking of gen X. Actually, the context is still the sons of Ephraim, who had forgotten all that God had done on behalf of their fathers, who are gen X (both their biological ancestors and their spiritual ancestors). These things which the sons of Ephraim had forgotten, will be enumerated by Asaph.

**He divided a sea,
then caused them to pass through it
and so He caused waters to stand like a
heap.**

Psalm 78:13

**He divided the sea,
then caused them to pass through it
and He caused waters to stand like a
heap.**

The Hiphil imperfect of 'ā^bvar (אָבַר) [pronounced *aw-BAHR*], which means *to cause to pass over, to cause to pass through, to pass, to go over*. Strong's #5674 BDB #716.

The Psalms testify to this incredible miracle. **Then Moses stretch out his hand over the sea; and Y^ehowah swept the sea by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. And the sons of Israel entered the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters a wall to them on their right hand on on their left** (Ex. 14:21–22). The idea here is that the waters were piled up into a mound on both sides of the Israelites as they passed through.

**Then He led them with a cloud by day
and all of the night with a light of fire.**

Psalm 78:14

**Then He led them with a cloud in the
day
and He led every night with the light of
fire.**

And Y^ehowah was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. He did not remove the pillar of cloud by day nor did He removed the pillar of fire by night from before the people (Ex. 13:21–22). One of the things which Christians desire, supposedly, is God's will for their life; should they make a left turn or a right turn, should they shop and HEB or at Krogers, should they change to this job or that job. The fact of it is, when you live in the Word, there is very little that you need by way of guidance. Bible doctrine and God the Holy Spirit guide you quite well. If you have little concerns, should you do this or that, then that generally means that you have not been living in the Word. Now here was a generation that God had guided every step of the way and it didn't seem to make any difference whatsoever. There are those of Christendom who desire to see signs and miracles in their lives so they know that it is of God (as though a puny sign or miracle means that); and this Psalmist points to a generation who sign so many miracles and had such careful guidance that they knew what they were supposed to do every step of the way. God gives us tremendous guidance in His Word and most of us ignore that. We either have no interest in His Word or we disobey it.

One of the many things which I have not seen yet in a commentary is the reason for the cloud. Most people assume that the cloud was for guidance. That was only part of its function. They were often in desert area, although it was not necessarily barren throughout as it is today. The cloud provided some relief by way of shade from the sun, as we read in Psalm 105:39: **He spread a cloud for a covering and a fire to illumine by night**. The cloud was God's visible presence to the Israelites, always there to let them know that He was with them. There were occasional clouds in the Egyptian sky, but not as often, and certainly not every single day.

Then He divided rocks in the wilderness and caused them to drink abundantly as bursts of water.

Psalm 78:15

Then He divided rocks in the wilderness and caused them to drink abundantly from great bursts of water.

Most books have this picture of this little rock with a hose-sized stream of water coming out of it and three or four Israelites hanging around in line for a drink. We had two million thirsty Israelites and their animals who could have stood in line for a drink. This was no little fire hydrant of water which came forth out of the rocks but the word used here is the plural of *t^hhôm* (תְּהוֹמִים) [pronounced *t^e-HOME*] and it means *a surging mass of water, either a sea or a subterranean water-supply*. In the plural it means *bursts of water*. The same word is used for the *abyss, the primeval oceans, the vast depths*. Strong's #8415 BDB #1062. This is followed by an adjective which is used as an adverb. The reason we know the adjective does not apply to *t^hhôm* is because the noun is in the feminine plural and the adjective is in the feminine singular. This adjective is *ra^bv* (רַב) [pronounced *rah^bv*] and it means *many, much, great*. Strong's #7227 BDB #912. Like all that God provided, the Israelites received far more than they needed.

Rock is in the plural here because there were two instances of no-water for both generations of Israelites, gen X and the Generation of Promise; one each. Both failed the test, and Moses failed the last test. **“Look, I will stand before you there upon (or against) the rock at Horeb; and you will strike the rock, and water will gush out of it, that the people may drink.”** And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel (Ex. 17:6). You will recall the analogy. Jesus Christ is the rock and He stood upon or against the rock and Moses brought down his staff one time on the rock. Moses was told to strike the rock with the same staff that he used to strike the Nile **in judgment** (Ex. 17:5). So this striking speaks of the striking down of Jesus Christ on the cross by God the Father in judgment for our sins—He died once for all mankind. And out from Him gushed living waters. **“If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’”** (John 7:37b–38).⁷ This is why when the situation presented itself again, Moses was not to strike the rock. **By this we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all** (Heb. 10:10). Our Lord had been judged once for our sins; now Moses only had to speak to Him to produce the water of life. **And Y^ehowah spoke to Moses, saying, “Take the rod and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You will thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and cause the congregation and their beasts to drink.”** So Moses took the rod from before Y^ehowah, just as He had commanded him; and Moses Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, **“Listen now, you rebels, will we bring forth water for you out of this rock?”** Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water gushed forth abundantly,⁸ and the congregation and their beasts drank. But Y^ehowah said to Moses and Aaron, **“Because you have not placed your confidence in Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, you will not, therefore, bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.”** (Num. 20:7–12). **Christ entered into the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption** (Heb. 9:12b). **But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God** (Heb. 10:12). How do I know that this is what was symbolized? Through gobs and gobs of study. However, even Paul tells us: **And all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ** (1 Cor. 10:4).

⁷ I don't know where this is found in Old Testament Scripture, however.

⁸ The intention of Moses was to split the rock open by force to allow the water to come out. God needed for him to only speak to the rock. Now there is another lesson to be learned here, one for those who are married. Moses screwed up; he did not do as God instructed. However, God still brought forth water from the rock. God is faithful. Now, in your marriage, I realize that your husband is a no-good so-and-so; do you realize that this does not necessarily keep you from being blessed? He can strike the rock all that he wants to, and water will still gush out on your behalf. Another believer's failure does not necessarily mean that your life has suddenly been thrown into spiritual disaster.

**Then He caused rivers to come out
from cliff
And He caused waters to flow down like
the rivers.**

Psalm 78:16

**Then He caused a river of water to
come out from the cliff
And He caused waters to flow down like
the rivers.**

The first word used for *rivers of water* is the masculine plural, Qal active participle of *nâzal* (נָזַל) [pronounced *naw-ZAHL*], which means to *flow, trickle, distill, drop*. However, in the Qal active participle plural, this is a word used for the waters of the Nile in Ex. 15:8. So the water is flowing out of this rock like a river. Strong's #5140 BDB #633. We have three phrases in the past verse and a half which describe an incredible amount of water coming out of the rock. **He opened the rock and water flowed out; it ran in the dry areas—a river!** (Psalm 105:41).

**So they caused [themselves] to still
continue to sin towards Him
to provoke [the] Most High in the dry
place.**

Psalm 78:17

**But they kept continuing to cause
themselves sin towards Him
to provoke the Most High in the dry
place.**

The meaning of this verse is fairly easy, but the translation is difficult. First we'll see how others have done it:

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	Yet they went on still to sin against Him by provoking <i>and</i> rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness—in the land of drought.
<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	But again once more sinned they against him, Resisting the Most High in a land of drought.
KJV	And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness.
NASB	Yet they still continued to sin against Him, To rebel against the Most High in the desert.
NIV	But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High.
Owen's Translation	And they added still to sin against him rebelling against the Most High in the desert.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	And they add still to sin against Him, To provoke the Most High in the dry place.

The verb is *yâçaph* (יָצַח) [pronounced *yaw-SAHPH*] means *to add, to augment, to continue to do a thing*. Here, we find this in the Hiphil (causative) stem, which can assume even a reflexive sense; i.e., **they caused themselves to continue to sin**. Strong's #3254 BDB #414. This is followed by the adverb *still* and the infinitive of the verb *to sin*. However, we do not have the preposition against here, we have the prefixed preposition *lâmed*, which is a directional preposition, meaning *to, for, towards, in regards to*.

The second line begins with the infinitive of *mârâh* (מָרָה) [pronounced *maw-RAWH*], and it means *rebell, rebellious, provoke, provoking*. Strong's #4784 BDB #598. The location of their provoking is *tsîyyâh* (צִיָּיָה) [pronounced *tzee-YAWH*] and this is a word found in Job (24:19 30:3) and in the Psalms (63:1 78:17 105:41 107:35) and in some of the prophets, but never in any book previous to Job (i.e., with respect to the English ordering of the Old Testament). This word means *dry place*. Strong's #6723 BDB #851.

It did not matter what great miracles they saw. In the midst of a desert, God caused enough water to appear from a rock to water all of them and all of their animals, yet they continued to sin against Him as if in a dry area, as if God made no provision for them. **God empathized with Israel's affliction. And the angel of His presence delivered them. In His love and in His grace, He redeemed them and He lifted them and carried them all the days of old. However, they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit** (Isa. 63:9–10).⁹ **While it is said, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me." For who revolted when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?** (Heb. 3:15–17 Psalm 95:7). *If...[God] had simply stopped that*

⁹ Contextually, this verse does not refer to the exodus generation; however, it is the same principle.

*miraculous supply of water they must have perished. But sinners forget how dependent they are on God, when they sin against him. On what can they rely, if he withdraws from them, and leaves them to themselves?*¹⁰

**So they tested God in their heart
to request food for their soul.**

Psalm 78:18

**So they tested God in their heart
to request food for their soul.**

The word for *meat* in the KJV is actually *food*; they were tired of manna and wanted some variety. Imagine the variety of food that they would have received had they believed God and prayer to Him in fellowship? At the end of this verse, some translators had a tough time, so they gave their interpretation of this verse by translating the last word as *for their appetite* (Owen), *for their lust* (Young), *to their desire* (NASB); the NIV quotes the last line as *by demanding the food they craved*. This might be the sense of what occurred, but the Psalmist is much more subtle in his approach.

True rebellion begins in the heart and they test God in their thinking. Then we have the quite interesting phrase, **to ask for food**. Generally speaking, we would not see something like this as inherently sinful. What is the big deal? They hungry and they ask God for food. However, this proceeds from their rebellion against Him, from their disbelief in Him. We can grasp this easily if we think of us asking for God to provide us with something which is sinful (like praying to God for crack). However, they are merely asking for food. So what is the problem? They are completely out of fellowship. **And the whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the sons of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by Y^ehowah’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” Then Y^ehowah said to Moses, “Observe, I will rain bread from heaven for you.”** (Ex. 16:2–4a). **And the rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, “Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, but now our soul is dried up. There is nothing for our eyes except this manna.”** (Num. 11:4–6). They sinned against God in the desert, they tested Him, they provoked Him, they did not trust Him. **“You will not put Y^ehowah your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.”** (Deut. 6:16). It doesn’t matter how legitimate their requests are, they are asking for these things from the source of their old sin natures. You can ask for milk for your baby and if that request proceeds from your old sin nature—that is, you are out of fellowship—then this is a request from your lusts. God hears only two prayers from the person who is controlled by his old sin nature: the prayer expressing faith in Jesus Christ and any prayer when you confess your sin to God. Now I have heard some people say, *no, God hears all of our prayers; He is much greater than you make Him out to be*. Get a grip. I know that God is omniscient. Certainly He hears everything we say; however, our prayers are not responded to in grace if they are offered out of fellowship. God provided food and meat for this degenerate generation despite their *prayer* and not because of it. God, not me, has set up a certain protocol when it comes to prayer. He has simple mechanics which He has set up for us to follow. **If I regard iniquity in my heart, then Y^ehowah will not hear me** (Psalm 66:18). I believe that it is time that we examined the **Doctrine of Prayer—not finished yet!!**

**So they spoke against God;
they said, “Can God spread a table in
the wilderness?”**

Psalm 78:19

**So they spoke against God;
they said, “Can God spread a table in
the wilderness?”**

So to understand what has gone on: God has rescued this people from Egypt; he has given them water to drink in the midst of drought. So rather than, while in fellowship, request from God food, they, while out of fellowship, test God, and remark to one another, saying, “If He’s God, let’s see Him set a table for us!” **“Let Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!”** (Mark 15:31b). The placement of the quotation marks are a matter of interpretation. Their desire for food was not out of faith, but out from doubt. This verse is the equivalent to saying, “God cannot provide for us food in this desert!” And many liberal theologians have

¹⁰ Barnes’ Notes, Vol. IV, book 2, p. 296.

agreed with them since those days. One of the reasons the Pentateuch is doubted is because some theologians do not believe that God could have provided for two million people in the wilderness.

Now, recall what David said: *You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies. You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows* (Psalm 23:6). David came to God in fellowship and gen X mumbled to themselves in doubt and in lust. The reversionistic believers in the desert test God by asking themselves if God can set a table in the wilderness; the Psalmist answers this question in the next verse.

**Look, he struck a rock so water gushed out
and torrents overflowed;
Can He also give bread?
Can he provide meat for His people?**

Psalm 78:20

**Now, listen, he struck a rock so water gushed out
and torrents overflowed;
Can He also give bread?
Can he provide meat for His people?**

Notice that the Psalmist lumps together several different occurrences in the desert together. There were two no-water episodes and at least two times when Israel complained about either the lack of food or the lack of variety of food in their diet. It was all the same scenario—Israel complained among themselves or to Moses and Aaron from a rebellious soul while out of fellowship. God graciously provided for them.

Israel's Complaints and God's Provisions	
The Israelites	God
The people grumble to Moses about the lack of bread in the wilderness (Ex. 16:2–3).	God gives them manna from heaven and instructions in gathering it (Ex. 16:4–27).
The people grumble among each other against Moses concerning a lack of water (Ex. 17:1–3).	God provides water for them through the agency of Moses, who strikes the rock once (Ex. 17:5–6).
The Israelites complain to Moses that they are sick to death of manna, and recall the variety of foods which they recall in Egypt (Num. 11:1–6).	God provides them with quail and He disciplined them with a plague (Num. 11:31–33).
The Israelites complain about a lack of water (Num. 20:3–5)	God provides water for them (Num. 20:11)

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Notice how these incidents progressed. This Israelites had seen god's provision for them in war and protected them from the Egyptians. So they desire water, and God provided. Then they murmured that maybe God just wasn't powerful enough to provide bread; and God was. Then they complain about the meat—implying that they have raised the stakes and that God cannot provide meat for them.

Here, in this verse, the Psalmist answers the impertinence of gen X by pointing out what God has done. We don't have meandering streams overflowing, but we have torrents of water rushing over their embankments. They were in the midst of a drought land and God has caused the waters for that area to overflow and to gush and to provide for two million people and their herds and flocks. The Psalmist concludes this verse with rhetorical questions. The thrust of this verse is that God can provide these things.

**Therefore, Y^ehowah heard [this]
He was then furious
and fire was kindled against Jacob
and also anger went up against Israel;**

Psalm 78:21

**Therefore, when Y^ehowah heard this
He became furious
and He kindled a fire against Jacob
and also His anger mounted against
Israel;**

There are ways to approach God and ways not to. It is not a matter of *working* God or strapping it on God. It is a matter of a set of mechanics which He requires. We are certainly to let our requests be known to God; however, we are to do this while in fellowship. When we approach God out of arrogance and from the source of our old sin nature, we do not reach Him. The arrogance and audacity of Israel caused nothing except for His anger to grow against them (that is an anthropopathism, of course).

It suddenly strikes me that some of you may not know what an *anthropopathism* is. This ascribes to God a feeling or an emotion or a characteristic which is not a part of His true character or essence. However, this ascribed characteristic helps spiritual babies understand the actions of God in the context of their own humanity. In other words, God is not angry with Israel as God does not possess the emotion anger. However, the actions of God which are observable by finite man approximate those of a man filled with anger. It helps us grasp the works and deeds of God by short cutting the actual characteristics which are involved, which are decidedly more complex. The simple Bullinger definition is *the ascription of human passions, actions, or attributes to God*.¹¹ An anthropopathism is often used as shorthand to explain a particular instance of God's discipline, for instance. That is, it is much easier to say that God was angry and therefore sent acts of discipline to Israel. **Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of Y^ehowah; and when Y^ehowah heard, His anger was kindled, and the fire of Y^ehowah burned among them and consumed those in the outskirts of the camp** (Num. 11:1). The closely related *anthropomorphism* ascribes to God human features which He does not possess (e.g., hands, eyes, etc.).

We often have more subtle, but still incorrect approaches to God today. I know a woman who believed that the baptism of the Holy Spirit today was a separate, ecstatic experience and her reasoning was this: she approached God in prayer and in sincerity, asking Him to give this to her if it were correct. What was the problem? After well over a decade of being a Christian, she did not even know how to get into fellowship. Her prayer, like the prayers of most charismatics, was performed while in the flesh. Furthermore, we are not given any historical instances in Acts or any mandates in the epistles to approach God and ask for the Holy Spirit.¹² The only time that the believer was to ask for the Holy Spirit was in the Age of Israel, Jesus told his disciples to ask God for the Holy Spirit (which they did not). In case you did not realize, when you are out of fellowship and praying, you are either praying to yourself or your prayers are being heard and answered by demons.

**Because they did not believe in God
and [because] they did not trust in His
deliverance.**

Psalm 78:22

**Because they had not faith in God
and [because] they did not trust His
deliverance.**

It is quite unfortunate that vv. 21–22 are separated, because v. 22 continues the thought of v. 21. God is furious with Israel because of her unbelief. After seeing more miracles than any people has ever seen, they have no faith in God. This should read: **Therefore, Y^ehowah heard [this]; He was then furious and fire was kindled against Jacob and also anger went up against Israel because they did not believe in God and [because] they did not trust in His deliverance** (Psalm 78:21–22). **“And in the wilderness where you saw how Y^ehowah your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked, until you came to this place. But for all this, you did**

¹¹ *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*; E.W. Bullinger; ©originally 1898; reprinted 1968 by Baker Books; p 871.

¹² Since a very small percentage of believers from the Age of Israel were indwelt by the Holy Spirit, when the Holy Spirit came to all believers, those who were believers from the Age of Israel had not yet received the Spirit. For them it was a separate experience. However, in these instances, you had to be born-again prior to the the recorded experience of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2 and you had to be alive during the period of time following Acts 2.

not trust Y^ehowah your God, the One Who goes before you on your way, to seek out a place for you to encamp, in fire by night and cloud by day, to show you the way in which you should go.” (Deut. 1:31–33). **And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unfaithfulness** (Heb. 3:17–19). We have no idea as to the personal depths of degeneracy that we can sink to due to our old sin nature. We have not a clue in this regard. Most of us are so self-righteous and/or so personally naive that we do not realize how inherently evil we are. God has given us case history after case history of His interaction with other men to indicate how depraved and unbelieving man can be. This exodus generation had seen a plethora of miracles, yet, for all that, did not believe God. If you think that all you need is some sign from God, some miracle, and then you would believe, then you are kidding yourself. You can't help but read the gospels and notice the incredible number of miracles performed by our Lord, yet He was faced with an astonishing amount of disbelief. Miracles are not the key; volition is.

**Then He commanded skies above
and doors of heavens He opened;**

Psalm 78:23

**Then He commanded skies above
and He opened the doors of heavens;**

Recall in v. 20, the psalmist remarks can god provide water and food and meat? In these verses, Asaph answers that question from the testimony of history. Despite the unbelief of the Israelites and their testing of God, God still opened up the heavens above for them and provided them their food.

Opening the Doors and Windows of Heaven		
Immagery	Passage	Verse
The opening of the doors of heavens	Then He commanded skies above and doors of heavens He opened then He rained down upon them manna to eat and the grain of heavens He gave them.	Psalm 78:23–24
The windows of heavens were opened	On the same day, all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the windows of the heavens were opened, and the rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights.	Gen. 7:11b–12
Opening of the windows of heaven.	“Bring the entire tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says Y ^e howah of armies, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need.”	Mal. 3:10

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The concept behind opening the doors or windows of heaven is a direct intervention of God into the lives of the people on earth.

**Then He rained down upon them manna
to eat
and the grain of heavens He gave
them.**

Psalm 78:24

**Then He rained down upon them manna
to eat
and He gave to them the grain of the
heavens.**

Throughout, you will notice that the Psalmist is saying the same thing twice, with just a slightly different take on it. Despite the fact that they were testing God out of unbelief, God still gave them manna and sustained them until He took each one of them out of this life under the sin unto death. As has been mentioned before, this manna sent by God from heaven which provided for these Israelites life is analogous to the initial coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

into this earth. “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it stands written, ‘He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.’” Jesus therefore said to them, “Point of doctrine that I make to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world...I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger and he who believes in Me will never thirst.” (John 6:31–33, 35b).

**Man ate bread of mighty ones;
He sent provisions to them to satiety.**

Psalm 78:25

**Man ate bread of angels;
He sent provisions to them in great
abundance.**

We do have some differences of opinion on this verse:

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	Everyone ate the bread of the mighty—man ate angel's food; God sent them meat in abundance.
<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	The food of the mighty each one did eat, Nourishment sent he them to the full;
KJV	Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full.
NASB	Mid eat the bread of angels [lit., mighty ones]; He send them food [or, provision] in abundance.
NIV	Man ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	Food of the mighty He hath given to them. Venison He sent to them to satiety.

The first word is the construct of *bread*; and the bread that they eat is the bread of *mighty ones*; which, could be interpreted, by Psalm 103:20, as angels. This same word is applied to *ordinary man* (Judges 5:22 Lam. 1:15 Jer. 46:15), to animals (Psalm 22:13), to princes (Psalm 58:31), to nobles (Job 24:22). Strong's #47 BDB #7. The verb *to eat* follows this and then the subject *man*. The food of angels, or mighty ones, could refer to the kind of food provided for original angelic creation prior to the fall of a third of them. Although the Septuagint, the Latin Vulgate and Luther all agree, we are still speculating here.

Then we have tseydah (תַּיִדָּה) [pronounced *TSAY-dah*] and this means *provisions taken on a journey*. We find this word in Gen. 27:3 42:25 45:21 Ex. 12:39 Joshua 1:11 9:11 Judges 7:8 20:10 I Sam. 22:10 Psalm 78:25* Strong's #6720 BDB #845. The verb is the common word for *sent* in the 3rd masculine singular, Qal perfect. We again have the lamed preposition and the word sô^bva' (שׁוּבָה) [pronounced *SOH-vahg*], which means *satiety, abundance, satiation*. It is the act of being satiated. Strong's #7648 BDB #959.

**He causes east wind to journey in the
heavens;
and He led out [or guides] in His
strength south wind.**

Psalm 78:26

**He caused the east wind to journey
through the heavens;
and He leads out in His strength south
wind.**

The verb used here is one which denotes pulling up the stakes of a tent and moving out. This is in the Hiphil stem, so the winds are caused to pull up stakes and journey through the heavens. Strong's #5265 BDB #652. The second verb means *to lead, to guide to a watering place*. Strong's #5095 BDB #624.

The picture here is that of a God Whose power extends over nature and the greatest powers of nature. The Bible both informs us of the miracle and the way in which the miracle was accomplished. Somewhere, off who knows where, were a huge number of quails which God had kept alive in vast numbers. Then He caught these birds up in great winds and brought them to the Israelites and deposited them in the midst of the camp. The south wind brought them up from where they had migrated to and the east wind blew them over to the Israelites encampment. The parallel passage from Num. 11:31–32 reads: *Now there went forth a wind from Y^ehowah and it brought quail from the sea, and let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits [i.e., 36 inches] above the surface of the ground. And the people rose all day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered the least gathered 110*

bushels) and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. What is interesting is that both versions of this event have details which are missing from the other. In the historical account from observation, Moses records the height of the birds flight pattern and the amount that each person collected (and likely each person who collected did so for a rather extended family). In this examination from several centuries after the fact, Asaph tells the direction of the winds. Because this is inspired by God the Holy Spirit, we know that this account is accurate.

**Then He rained upon them like dust
flesh
and like sand of seas, winged birds.**

Psalm 78:27

**Then He rained flesh upon them like
dust
and winged birds, like sand of seas.**

The number of birds involved here is beyond our imagination. For hundreds of years, there was a place where God had a game preserve which He tended, and which produced millions of birds. He knew that in the future, He would bring these birds to Israel. We have no realization of how much God has done on our behalf in eternity past. Here Israel, as out of fellowship, as whining unfaithful degenerates, called for meat, and God rained meat down upon them as if it were rain. The number of birds which God gave them is totally beyond human comprehension. God had several wild preserves wherein he kept these birds (and, as you will recall from the plagues, a huge number of locusts) and He went to these places and drew upon His collection.

**Then He caused them to fall in the
midst of their camp;
all around their tents.**

Psalm 78:28

**Then He caused them to fly low right in
the midst of their camp;
all around their tents.**

Nâphal (נָפַל) [pronounced *naw-FAHL*] means *to fall, to lie, to die a violent death, to be brought down, to settle, to sleep deeply*. Strong's #5307 BDB #656. Most of us have been to restaurants or stores where we see fesh lobsters and fresh fish swimming around in an aquarium prior to being eaten for dinner. It was the same thing here; all these birds, fresh from God's game preserve, were brought over to the Israelites, and then they were caused to fly in a low enough pattern for any Israelite to just reach out and take one.

God does miracles in a way which we might find surprising. God could have immediately created these birds and then dropped them onto the camp of the Israelites. He did not do this. These birds were already a part of the world. God merely gathered them and deposited them with the Israelites. The principle which is taught is that God can do any type of miracle and can act in our behalf at any time. In fact, He has the provisions set aside in order to rain down upon us blessings. All we have to do is to be ready to receive these blessings. And notice that these Israelites did not have to go out anywhere to obtain these blessings; God brought the blessings right to their front door, so to speak.

**So they ate and then they were greatly
satiated;
and their craving, He gave to them.**

Psalm 78:29

**So they ate and until they were
completely satiated;
furthermore, God gave them what they
craved.**

In v. 25, we had the noun for *sated*; here we have the verbal cognate. Also in this verse we have the noun *ta'avâh* (תַּאֲוָה) [pronounced *tah-av-WAW*] is *a desire, a wish, a craving, that which is desired*. Strong's #8378–8379 BDB #16. This noun is modified by the 3rd person masculine suffix. Whatever this generation desired, despite their continued rebellion against Him, God gave them. The parallel passage reads: **“And say to the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you will eat meat; for you have wept in the ears of Y^ehowah, saying, ‘Oh that someone would give us meat to eat! For we were well-off in Egypt.’ Therefore, Y^ehowah will give you meat and you will eat. You will eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for an entire month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you; because you have reject Y^ehowah who is among you and you have wept before Him, saying, ‘Why did we ever leave Egypt?’ ‘ ‘ (Num. 11:18–21).**

In situations like this, God makes a point. Here we have a generation of believers who saw incredible signs and wonders, and yet, they were an incredibly faithless generation—so much so that God simply removed them from history.

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God's Great Anger Against Israel

**They had not been estranged from their
craving;
while their food in their mouth;**

Psalm 78:30

**Yet, even before they had been
completely satiated;
while yet they still had food their
mouths;**

V. 30 is another one of those verses which is translated several different ways:

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	But scarce had they stilled their craving, and while their meat was yet in their mouths,
The Emphasized Bible	They had not turned away from what they had longed for, Yet was their food in their mouth.
KJV	They were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths,
NASB	Before they had satisfied their desire, While their food was in their mouths,
NIV	But before they turned from the food they craved, even while it was still in their mouths,
NRSV	But before they had satisfied their craving, while the food was still in their mouths,
Owen's Translation	But before they had sated their craving still their food in their mouths;
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	They have not been estranged from their desire, Yet <i>is</i> their food in their mouth,

As has been pointed out, three of the translations which I depend upon were intended to be translations. They were *let the chips fall where they may, this is what the Bible says*. The other *translations* which I use tend to be commentaries and tend to interpret the verse. This is not necessarily a bad thing; however, there are times when they add in words and thoughts which are not there. In this verse, there is no *but*. It begins with the negative and the 3rd person plural, Qal perfect of זָוַר (זָוַר) [pronounced *zoor*], a verb which is rarely used as a verb, but is found more often functioning as an adjective or a substantive as a verb in the Qal participle form. We have seen this word three time prior to this passage: Ex. 29:33 30:9, 33. In two of these passages, it refers to a *stranger, unauthorized personnel*. Now, as a verb, this means *estranged, separated, disengaged, alienated, sequestered*. However, we only find this used as a verb four times in the Qal imperfect (Job 19:13, 17 Psalm 58:3 78:30)¹³ and in the Niphal twice (Isa. 1:4 Ezek. 14:5). Strong's #2114 BDB #266. This is followed by *their craving, their desire*; which we have already seen in the previous verse. So literally, this reads **they were not separated from their craving**. The second line begins with the word *still, yet, when*. This is followed by the very simple phrase **their food in their mouth**.

This brings up an interesting concept of human nature. We observe it in our own cats and dogs. A cat or a dog who is normally fed dry food and then given real meat turns into a different animal. In fact, even you, as the master, if you try to snatch the food away, you will be growled at and perhaps even bitten. The animal could be given far more food than it could possibly eat and it would still behave that way. This is how the children of Israel appeared to God. They were in a fit of intense food lust and as God observed this, He became increasingly angry with them (this is an anthropopathism, of course).

¹³ It's not found in the Qal perfect; it is mostly found in the Qal participle.

**And nose of God rose up against them
Then he executed [a death sentence]
against their fattest ones
and He caused the young men to bow
down [in death].**

Psalm 78:31

**And God's anger arose against them
so he executed the choicest men with
the sin unto death;
and He caused the young men, in the
prime of their lives, to fall down in
death.**

Again, we have a variety of opinions here:

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	The wrath of God came upon them and slew the strongest <i>and</i> sturdiest of the, and smote down Israel's chosen youth.
<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	When the anger of God mounted against them, And he slow of their vigorous youths, And the choice young men of Israel caused he to bow down in death.
KJV	The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen <i>men</i> of Israel.
NASB	The anger of God rose against them, and killed some of their stoutest ones [lit., among their fat ones], And subdued the choice men of Israel.
NIV	God's anger rose against them; he put to death the sturdiest among them, cutting down the young men of Israel.
NRSV	The anger of God rose against them and he killed the strongest of them, and laid low the flower of Israel.
Owen's Translation	And anger of God rose against them and he slew the strongest of them and the picked men of Israel laid low.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	And the anger of God hath gone up against them And He slayeth among their fat ones, And youths of Israel He caused to bend.

This verse begins with the wâw conjunction, although only two translations of this group acknowledged that. The next word will surprise you; it is the construct of 'aph (אֶפֶס) [pronounced *ahf*], which means *nose, nostril* (Gen. 2:7 3:19 7:22 19:1 24:47). We have translated this *face, brow*, and several other things. However, as we sometimes find in the Hebrew, a part of the body can stand for a particular emotion, and 'aph seems to correlate well with the substantive *anger* (Gen. 27:45 30:2 39:19 44:18). The idea is then when a person was angry with you, the tilt of his head revealed his nostril or nose as being the most prominent feature. Strong's #639 BDB #60. The tilt of the head is seen in this verse; **the nose of God rose up against them.**

The second line begins with the wâw consecutive (*then, so, and so*) and the 3rd person singular, Qal imperfect of the verb for *kill, slay, execute*. This is followed by the vêyth prefixed preposition (*in, into, against, by*) and the masculine plural of *mish'man* (מִשְׁמָנִים) [pronounced *mish'-MAHN*], a word which means *fatness*; however, we would see this word as meaning *choicest*. See Gen. 27:28, 39 Psalm 78:31 Isa. 10:16 17:4 Dan. 11:24*. Strong's #4924 (& #8080) BDB #1032. Already, you can see that the literal rendition of this verse is much different than you would have expected.

The third line begins with another conjunction. Then we have the plural construct of *bâchûr* (בְּחֹרִים) [pronounced *baw-KHOOR*] and it means *choicest young men, men in the prime of their lives, the flower of youth, the quintessence of adult life*. Most of the time, this is simply rendered *young men* (Deut. 32:25 Judges 14:10 Ruth 3:10). Strong's #970 BDB #104. The main verb for this phrase is the Hiphil perfect of *kâra'* (כָּרַעַע) [pronounced *kaw-RAH* or *kaw-RAHG*], which means *to cause to bow down in death* (II Sam. 22:40 Psalm 17:13 18:14 78:31) or *to cause to bow down in grief* (Judges 11:35). In the simple form of the verb, it means *to bow down* often in worship. Strong's #3766 BDB #562. The point of this is that these are the men who would be expected to fight off any attacks of illness. Certainly the weak, the older ones and the feeble would succumb to disease; however, God punished the young as well and their relative strength was not an issue.

While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of Y^ehowah was kindled against the people, and Y^ehowah struck the people with a very severe plague (Num. 11:33). Zophar, when speaking to Job,

almost predicted this: “When he fills his belly, God will send His fierce anger on him and He will rain it on him while he is eating.” (Job 20:23). God’s judgement against Israel would seem harsh to some. We might think that we could witness all of these signs and we would be caused to be great heroes of the faith. Don’t kid yourself. The two generations which observed the most and the greatest signs, gen X and the generation of our Lord’s day, were largely negative toward His Word, which is the greatest negative in the life of a believer. Without the Holy Spirit indwelling and filling you and without God’s Word in your soul, we have no spiritual life; we are merely taking up space on this earth.

**In all of this, they still sinned
and they did not believe in His
wonders.**

Psalms 78:32

**Despite all this, they continued to sin;
furthermore, they did not believe in His
wonders.**

This verse begins with the *vêyth* preposition (*in, with, into*), followed by the construct of the word for *all* and the demonstrative adjective *this*. When this reads that **they did not believe in His wonders**; it is actually God in Whom they did not place their trust. Recall, when Moses interceded on behalf of his people, God said, “How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst? I will strike them down with pestilence and I will dispossess them.” (Num. 14:11b–12a). The intention was for them to dispossess the Canaanites. However, severe judgment and great miracles do not always cause a man to place his faith in God. Miracles are not an automatic cause of faith. **But though He [Jesus] had performed so many signs before them, they were not believing in Him** (John 12:37).

**So He brought to an end in a breath
their days;
and their years in terror**

Psalms 78:33

**So He brought their days to an end in a
breath;
and their years He brought to an end in
terror**

What I often look for is for Owen’s, Young and Rotherham to agree on a verse. Then I don’t get into the language portion of things. However, disagreements abound with this verse:

The Amplified Bible

Therefore their days He consumed like a breath—in emptiness, falsity and futility—and their years in terror *and* sudden haste.

The Emphasized Bible

So he ended in a breath their days, And their years, in a sudden terror!

KJV

Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble.

NASB

So He brought their days to an end in futility [lit., vanity, a mere breath], And their years in sudden terror.

NRSV

So he made their days vanish like a breath, and their years in terror.

Young’s Lit. Translation

And He consumeth in vanity their days, And their years in trouble.

You may wonder why I use some translations and not others. Generally speaking, if two or three translations cover the varying renderings of a verse, then I don’t always include all of those translations. And if every translation but one or two has got it wrong, I often like to list them all (the ones in my possession anyway).

This verse begins with the *wâw* consecutive (previously called the *wâw* conversative); this is usually a continuation of thought in a somewhat linear fashion. The verb is the 3rd person masculine singular, Piel imperfect of *kâlâh* (כָּלָה) [pronounced *kaw-LAWH*], which means *to complete, to bring an end to, to finish* (Piel meanings). Strong’s #3615 BDB #477. Then we have the phrase *in a breath*; and this is followed by the masculine plural of *days* with a 3rd person masculine plural suffix. I bring all of this out so that you know that *bring to completion* is not in the passive stem, nor is the word *days* the subject of the sentence. The literal rendering of the first line of this verse is: **And so He brought to an end in a breath their days**. Relative to eternity, the time took to wipe out this degenerate people was sudden and almost inexplicable.

When it comes to a verb where one is missing, we often supply the word *to be* or we use the verb in the context. Here we use the verb *brought to an end*, even though it does not occur a second time. So it reads, **and He brought to an end their years in terror**. The degenerate generation X was removed from history by God, even though they had seen the great number of His personal miracles. **“As I live,” says Y^ehowah, “just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will certainly do to you. Your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me...In this wilderness, they will be destroyed, and there they will die.”** (Num. 14:28b–29, 35b). And although they left Egypt in great pomp and circumstance, under mighty miracles and the hand of God, they spent their last years in the desert, just a few miles from the Land of Promise, dying in the desert after a life of futility, believers who part in the plan of God was meaningless save as an example to others.

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God’s Restraint Despite Their Reversionism

**When He killed them, and they sought Him;
and they turned back and looked diligently [for] God.**

Psalm 78:34

**When He killed them, they sought Him;
then they turned back and looked diligently for God.**

This is the next generation of believers. V. 34 begins with the general interrogative participle *’im* (אִם) [pronounced *eem*], which means *if*; however, when followed by a verb in the perfect tense, it almost has the meaning of *when*.¹⁴ Strong's #518 BDB #49 This is followed by the verb *to kill* in the perfect tense. The *wâw* conjunction behaves like a *then* with the *if* and could be ignored if the translation *when* for the interrogative is used. The next verb is the 3rd person plural, Qal perfect of *dârash* (דָּרַשׁ) [pronounced *dah-RAWSH*], which means *to seek, to make inquiries concerning, to consult, to inquire*. This word is used often for man *seeking or making inquiry* of God (Gen. 25:22 II Kings 8:8 Psalm 105:4). Strong's #1875 BDB #205. We add the word *him* because of the 3rd person masculine suffix. God had to get to a point to where He would execute by the sin unto death many of the reversionistic believers; then those who were still alive would seek Him. We have seen the principle again and again that those who are blessed phenomenally with material things often have no interest in God; and those who have been placed into pain and suffering turn to Him. In this situation, things became even more pronounced; if they did not turn toward God, then they died.

The next verb means *to turn back*; it is in the 3rd person plural, Qal perfect, so it means *they turned back*. This is a reference to turning back to God. The last verb is the Piel perfect of *shâchar* (שָׁחַר) [pronounced *shaw-KHAHR*], which means *to seek early, to look for diligently*. Strong's #7836 BDB #1007. The final word in this verse is God. Again, it took severe discipline in order for the Israelites to turn to God.

What happened historically was this: the Generation of Promise were affected by their fathers, generation X, and they certainly made the same sort of mistakes, sometimes following their fathers into sin. This is almost unavoidable. However, whereas generation X continued to sin, their sons repented of their sins; they turned back and toward God. **And Y^ehowah sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people so that many people of Israel died. So the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned because we have spoken against Y^ehowah and you; intercede with Y^ehowah that He may remove the serpents from us.” And Moses interceded for the people.** (Num. 21:6–7). God had to bring severe punishment upon Israel often in order to gain their attention and repentance: **“For I will be a lion to Ephraim and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away, and will carry away and there will be none to deliver. I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face. In their affliction, they will earnestly seek Me.”** (Hosea 5:14–15). For the Generation of Promise, the discipline had a positive effect upon them. For generation X, *it was, however, a temporary and hollow, not a deep and real reformation. This often occurs. In times of affliction, in sickness, in bereavement, in the loss of property, men become serious, and express a purpose to repent and to turn to God. A deep impression seems to be produced*

¹⁴ *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*; Hendrickson, ©1979, p. 50.

on their minds, to last, alas! Only as long as the hand of God rests upon them. Resolutions of repentance are formed only to be forgotten when the affliction is removed, and when the days of prosperity against return.¹⁵

**Then they remembered that God their
Rock
And God Most High their redeemer.**

Psalm 78:35

**So then they remembered that God is
their Rock
And God the Most High is their
redeemer.**

When the Israelites began to see their own killed, then they recognized that God was their Rock—their stability; and that God the Most High had purchased them out of slavery. Throughout the Old Testament, there are analogies to the Christian life. We, as believers, survive in a world of death. All those around us are dying. Jesus Christ, our Rock, has paid for us; He has redeemed us; He has purchased us out of slavery. Just as Y^howah God redeemed the Israelites out of slavery to Egypt, we too have been purchased out of slavery with His blood. Furthermore, in our purchase, we often receive of the worldly goods, just as Israel received from Egypt. However, their great blessing was in the Land of Promise, analogous to our eternal rewards, which far exceed the earthly prosperity which we receive.

“The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just. A God of faithfulness and without injustice. He is righteous and upright.” (Deut. 32:4). Y^howah is my Rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God my Rock, in Whom I take refuge; He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold (Psalm 18:2). “In Your grace, You have led the people whom You have redeemed. In Your strength, You have guided them to Your holy habitation.” (Ex. 15:13). Remember your congregation, which You purchased in past times; which You redeemed to be the tribe of Your inheritance; [remember] Mount Zion, where You have dwelt. (Psalm 74:2).

**Then they beguiled Him with their
mouth
and with their tongue they lied to Him.**

Psalm 78:36

**Then they beguiled Him with their
mouth
and with their tongue they lied to Him.**

The first verb is the Piel imperfect of *phâthâh*, which appears to be a rather difficult verb to deal with. BDB gives its means variously as *to be simple, to be open minded, to be enticed, to be deceived* (Qal stem); *to be enticed into, to be deceived* (Niphal); *to persuade, to entice, to seduce, to deceive* (Piel); and *to be deceived, to be persuaded* (Pual). The KJV gives as wide a variety of meanings to this word, even allowing for the participle to be rendered *silly ones* and *flattereth*. I think that we could live with *to entice* (through whatever means are necessary), *to beguile*. Strong’s #6601 BDB #834.

Thieme used to refer to this as *strapping it on God*; being a religious phony. We see this with unscrupulous men who use whatever means possible to seduce women. Some of those who were concerned about all of those who died the sin unto death around them, became religious phonies; pretending to worship and to seek God, when their heart was far from Him. The deceitfulness of Israel continued throughout their history. “And Y^howah heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and Y^howah said to me, ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken. Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and that they would keep all My commandments always, that it would be well with them and with their sons forever!’ “ (Deut. 5:28–29). “But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked. You have grown fat, thick and sleek. Then he forsook God Who made him and he scorned the Rock of his salvation.” (Deut. 32:15). **And He [Jesus] said to them, “Correctly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it stands written, ‘This people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.’ “** (Mark 7:6 Isa. 29:13). **Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit (Psalm 34:13). Then Y^howah said, “Because this people draw near with their mouth and they honor Me with their lips, but they have removed their hearts far from Me and their reverential fear for Me consists of tradition learned.” (Isa. 29:13). Their professions were false and hollow. Those professions were the mere result of affliction. They were based on no principle; there was no true love or confidence at the**

¹⁵ Barnes’ Notes, Vol. IV, book 2, pp. 299–300.

foundation. Such professions or promises are often made in affliction. Under the pressure of heavy judgments, the loss of property, the loss of friends, or the failure of health, men become serious, and resolve to give attention to religion. It is rarely that such purposes are founded in sincerity, and that the conversions apparently resulting from them are true conversions.¹⁶

As a slight point of literary interest, this v. 36 is the exact middle verse of the 2527 verses of the Psalms, according to the *Masora*.¹⁷

**And their heart was not established
with Him
and they were not being true to His
covenant.**

Psalm 78:37

**And their heart was not established
with Him
and they were not being true to His
covenant.**

The first verb here is the Piel participle of *kûwn* (כּוּן) [pronounced *koon*], which means *erect (to stand up perpendicular)* and by application, *to establish, to be stabilized*. Strong's #3559 BDB #465. The key is not what a person says or does but what is on the inside. The key in the Christian way of life is what occurs in the mind; and so it was with the individual believers in Israel. As David cried out from his sin, **Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me** (Psalm 51:10–11).

The second verb is the Niphal perfect of *'âman* (אָמַן) [pronounced *aw-MAHN*], which can mean *to be confirmed, to be faithful, to be true; to be certain, to be dependable, to be trustworthy, to be entrusted, to be reliable*. The Niphal is generally the passive stem; however, this is not its only use. The Niphal can describe an action which is in progress or development, calling for the use of the additional English word *being*. Strong's #539 BDB #52. **The counsel of Y^ehowah is for those who reverentially fear Him and He will make them know His covenant** (Psalm 25:14).

**And He, [being] compassionate,
covered over iniquity;
and He did not destroy them
and He multiplied to a turning back of
His anger
and He did not stir up all of His fury.**

Psalm 78:38

**But He, full of compassion, covered
over their iniquity;
furthermore He did not cause their
ruination
and He repeatedly restrained His anger
and He did not arouse His intense fury.**

God is described with the adjective *rachûm* (רַחוּם) [pronounced *rah-KHOOM*]. The first verb is the Piel imperfect of *kâphar* (כָּפַר) [pronounced *kaw-FAHR*] and it literally means *cover, placate, pacify*. This word is first used Gen 6:14 where the verb cleanly means *to cover [with pitch]*. When God *kâphar's* sin or iniquity, He covers over the sin or iniquity. In the Old Testament, forgive could be too strong of a word, as Jesus Christ had not entered into history yet. Therefore, the temporary covering over of a sin allowed for a future permanent disposition of sin. Strong's #3722 BDB #497. God's covering of our iniquity was the result of His compassion for us. **Then Y^ehowah passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "Y^ehowah, Y^ehowah God, a compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in grace and in truth, who preserves grace for thousands, who lifts up iniquity, transgression and sin, yet He will by no means leave unpunished."** (Ex. 34:6–7a). **"For Y^ehowah is slow to anger and abundant in grace, forgiving iniquity and transgression."** (Num. 14:18a). God waits and looks for opportunities to be gracious to us. Therefore, Y^ehowah waits to be gracious to you and therefore, He waits on high to have compassion on you. For Y^ehowah is a God of justice. How blessed are all those who wait for Him (Isa. 30:18).

¹⁶ *Barnes' Notes*, Vol. IV, book 2, p. 300.

¹⁷ Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. V, p. 527.

Shâchath (שׂחַח) [pronounced *shaw-KHAHTH*] means *to go to ruin*. Here, it is in the Hiphil, so it means *to cause one to go to ruin, to spoil, to ruin, to corrupt, to destroy*. The connection is that when one causes the ruin of a land, they destroy it. Strong's #7843 BDB #1007.

The third line is translated in several similar ways, hiding its construction.

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	Yes, many a time He turned His anger away;
<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	Yea, many a time turned he back his anger,
NASB	And often He restrained [lit., turned away] His anger,
NIV	Time after time he restrained his anger,
NRSV	...often he restrained his anger,
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	And hath often turned back His anger,

There are two verbs in this line, and the main verb is translated as an adverbial phrase. It is the verb *râbâh* (רָבַח) [pronounced *raw^b-VAWH*] and it means *to become much, to become many, to multiply, to increase in population and in whatever else*. Strong's #7235 BDB #915. The second verb is the Hiphil infinitive construct of *shûb* (שׁוּב) [pronounced *shoo^b*]; which means *to turn back, to return, to turn around*. In the Hiphil (the causative) stem, it can mean *to be caused to turn back*. Strong's #7725 BDB #996. You can see why most translators opted for a less literal word-for-word rendering.

You will notice the structure of this verse; which is why four lines were grouped as opposed to two. The first and third lines are stated with a negative and the second and fourth lines are stated with positives. God held back on what the Israelites deserved. *You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people and You have covered all their sin. You have withdrawn all Your fury and You had turned away from You burning anger* (Psalm 85:2–3).

**Then He remembered that they [are]
flesh;
a wind going and it does not return.**

Psalm 78:39

**Then He remembered that they are but
flesh;
a wind passing through which does not
return.**

The personal pronoun in the Hebrew either emphasizes the person referred to or it takes the place of the absolute status quo verb *to be*. So rather than having the 3rd person masculine plural, Qal perfect of *hâyâh*, instead we just have the 3rd person plural pronoun *hêmmâh* (הֵמָּה) [pronounced *haym-mawh*]. Strong's #1992 BDB #241.

Job called upon God to recall that he was but flesh. *“Remember now, that You have made me as clay and would You turn me into dust again?”* (Job 10:9). *For He Himself knows what we are made of; He is mindful that we are but dust* (Psalm 103:14). *God remembers this when he thinks of men, and he deals with them accordingly. He is not harsh and severe, but kind and compassionate. To man, a being so feeble,—to the generations of that race, so transitory, so soon passing off the stage of life,—he is ever willing to show compassion. He does not make use of his great power to crush them; he prefers to manifest his mercy in saving them.*¹⁸

Throughout Scripture, we are constantly reminded of the wistfulness of our lives, the relatively short time that we spend upon this earth, that we are so minuscule in relation to all that is around us. Here we are a wind which passes through and does not return. The next few statements are directed at that one-tenth of a hundredth of one percent: if the Bible supported the notion of reincarnation, the wind would pass through again and again. *But, as for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over, it is no more; and its place acknowledges it no longer. But the grace of Y^ehowah is from everlasting to everlasting on those who reverentially fear Him, and His righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep His covenant and who remember His precepts to do them* (Psalm 103:15–18). *Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away* (James 4:14). In fact, let’s examine quickly the **Doctrine of Reincarnation—not finished yet!!**

¹⁸ *Barnes’ Notes*, Vol. IV, p. 301.

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Israel's Rebellion Despite the Great Works of God Against Egypt

How often did they rebel against Him in the wilderness? and grieve Him in desert?

Psalm 78:40

How often did they rebel against Him in the wilderness? And how often did they they grieve Him in the desert?

The beginning of this verse is difficult; in Owen's Bible, it appears as though we have the kaph preposition (*like, as; or possibly, that, when*), the definite article (which I don't see), and the interrogative m^âh (מַה) [pronounced *maw*]; the preposition is in question. However, BDB comes to the rescue and identifies this word as *how many, how much, how often*. Strong's #4100 BDB #553. It would be reasonable to continue the interrogative to the next line.

The rebelliousness of the exodus generation was incredible. God had provided for them in every way and their lives were filled with rebellion against Him.

God's Response to Israel's Rebellious Acts		
Scripture	Act of Rebellion	God's Action
Ex. 5:20–6:9	Israel complains to Moses of the additional hardships which they have had to face since Moses began to interfere in speaking to Pharaoh.	God delivers Israel out of Egypt anyway.
Ex. 14:4–30	Israel whines to Moses because Pharaoh's army is approaching them and they fear that he will kill them.	God buries Pharaoh and his army under the sea.
Ex. 15:22–25 In year one, prior to Mount Sinai.	The people grumbled to Moses because the waters at Marah were too bitter to drink.	God had Moses throw a tree (possibly a branch) into the water and the water became sweet.
Ex. 16:2–21 In year one.	The people grumbled at Moses because they were hungry.	God provided them with manna.
Ex. 17:1–7 In year one.	The people quarrel with Moses because they are thirsty.	God provides them with water which comes out of a rock which Moses strikes.
Ex. 32:1–14 While Moses was on Mount Sinai.	While Moses was up on Mount Sinai, the people below talked Aaron in to casting a golden calf idol.	God was ready to destroy them all, but repented due to the intercessory prayer that Moses made on their behalf.
Num. 11:1–3 On route from Mount Sinai to the Land of Promise.	The people complain about adversity in general. The people cry out to Moses over this discipline and Moses prays to God.	God sends fire to consume them in judgment. God removes the plague of the fire.
Num. 11:4–33 Two years out of Egypt.	The people complain about a lack of meat in their diet. They stood in their doorways weeping and carrying on.	God sends them an incredible abundance of quail and inflicts the sin unto death on many of them by a plague.

God's Response to Israel's Rebellious Acts		
Scripture	Act of Rebellion	God's Action
Num. 13:31–14:39 First time the Israelites enter the land.	Moses sends out spies to examine the Land of Promise. The majority report suggests that the indigenous population is too strong for them to oppose. The people cry all night over this.	God threatens to wipe every single last one of them out and begin anew with Moses. Moses intercede with prayer on their behalf and God allows some of them to live. However, His promise was to strike many of them dead in the wilderness by the sin unto death. Those who brought in the majority report are killed in the wilderness.
Num. 14:40–45 As above	The people recognize their sin against God and go up against the Canaanites and the Amalekites in the land.	They are sorely defeated and pushed back into the desert.
Num. 16:1–40 Two years out of Egypt	Korah and 250 leaders of the house of Israel rebel against the leadership of Moses because he did not bring them into the land.	God destroys them with an earth quake (which swallows Korah and his house) and lightning (I think) is brought in to destroy the 250.
Num. 16:41–50 Two years out of Egypt	Korah sympathizers grumbled about the way that Korah and his leaders were killed, blaming Moses for this.	God brought a plague into the congregation and began to waste them.
Num. 20:1–13 Thirty-nine years out of Egypt	Second no-water incident; the Israelites assemble themselves before Moses and Aaron to complain.	God tells Moses to speak to the rock but he strikes it twice instead with his staff. God still provides water for the people but holds Moses accountable.
Num. 21:4–9 As above	The people just start to complain about the journey, the lack of water, the monotony of their food. They spoke against both God and Moses.	God sends them serpents which strike them and kill them. He also has Moses make a bronze serpent, a way of escape, that if they look toward it, they will be delivered.
Num. 25:1–18 As above	The people fall into idolatry with Baal of Peor.	God instructs Moses to execute those who had joined themselves to Baal of Peor. When Phinehas pierces an Israelite and a Midianite woman with a spear, the plague was checked.
Summary: what we have is failure after failure of the Israelites in the desert combined with the forgiveness and the grace of God, who provided again and again for His people in the desert, despite their faithlessness and failure.		

Many times He delivered them; they, however, were rebellious in their counsel and so sank down in their iniquity. Nevertheless, He looked upon their distress when He heard their cry and He remembered His covenant for their sake and relented according to the greatness of His grace (Psalm 106:43–44; see also Psalm 107:11–21). For forty years I loathed that generation and said that they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know My ways. Therefore, I swore in My anger, truly they will not enter into My rest (Psalm 95:10–11). Paul warns us: **and do not grieve the Holy Spirit—God, by Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption** (Eph. 4:30).

**Then they turned again and so they
tested God
and the Holy One of Israel they placed
boundaries around.**

Psalm 78:41

**Then they turned again and so they
tested God
and they limited the power of the Holy
One of Israel (through their unbelief).**

In vv. 38–39, God was compassionate toward the Israelites, but they continually would turn against Him and test Him and they would provoke Jesus Christ. The last verb is a difficult one, being rendered *provoked* but maybe *pained* (Owens), *limited* (Young), *caused sorrow* but possibly *set the limits* (Rotherham), *pained* (NASB), *vexed* (atypical Old English rendering for the NIV), *incensing* (*The Amplified Bible*) and *limited* (KJV). The problem is that this verb, *tâwâh* (תָּוַוּ) [pronounced *taw-WAWH*] occurs only here and in I Sam. 21:14 and Ezek. 9:4*, where it is generally rendered *to make a mark*. Strong's #8428 BDB #1063. However, we have several similar words. There is a similar noun which means *mark* (Job 31:35 Ezek. 9:4, 8*); Strong's #8420 BDB #1063. Another similar noun means *boundary* (Gen. 49:26); Strong's #8379 BDB #1063.¹⁹ What ties all of these things together is the visible boundary or visible mark used to denote something; often a boundary. Therefore, the verb can mean *to make a mark*; but it can also mean *to place boundaries around, to limit*. What has occurred here is that they have limited the power of God; they have set boundaries upon how much God can do; and all of these determinations are made from the standpoint of unbelief. “Certainly, all the men who have seen My glory and My signs, which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, will, by no means, see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor will any of those who spurned Me see it.” (Num. 14:22–23). “You will not put Y^howah your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.” (Deut. 6:16).

**They did not remember His hand
a day when He redeemed them from an
adversary.**

Psalm 78:42

**They did not remember His power
during the time He redeemed them
from their adversary.**

As we have seen many times, *hand* is synonymous with *power*. For by their own sword, they did not possess the land and by their own arm, they did not deliver them. But Your right hand and Your arm, and the light of Your presence for You did favor them (Psalm 44:3). The reason that that gen X tested God, the reason that they placed limits upon His power is that they did not keep in their memories the thing which He had done on their behalf. Continually, God did miraculous things which would eventually give them release from Egypt; however, Israel, as we have documented with the previous chart, was so hard-hearted that these things made little or no difference. “But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly; they became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments. Furthermore, they refused to listen. And they did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You performed among them. So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in grace; and You did not forsake them.” (Neh. 9:16–17).

One of the unfortunate aspects of covering a book in such detail is that we lose the ebb and flow of the text. What is said here in v. 42 complements what was said in v. 39: So He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind which passes and does not return...they did not remember His strength, the day in which He redeemed them from their adversary (Psalm 78:39, 42).

**[A day] when He set in Egypt His signs
and His miracles in the fields of Zoan.**

Psalm 78:43

**During the time He displayed His signs
in Egypt
and during the time He performed His
miracles in the fields of Zoan.**

We have some interesting phrasing here. The verb in line one of this verse is the Qal perfect of *sîym* (סִיַּם) [pronounced *seem*], which Owen translates *wrought*, NASB *performed*, and NIV *displayed*. We have already seen

¹⁹ In *Barnes' Notes*, Vol. IV, book 2, p. 302, Barnes comes to quite the same conclusion as to the meaning of this word.

back in v. 5 that this means *to put, to place, to set*. Strong's #7760 BDB #962. We are used to thinking of God's signs as being 100% miraculous; i.e., the frogs and the locusts just suddenly appeared. However, the wording in the Bible seems to indicate that these things didn't appear right out of thin air, as in being created out of oxygen molecules, but were mediately created—that is, there is every indication that God had a locust farm somewhere, a quail farm somewhere, etc. Don't misunderstand—we are not saying that God could not have chosen to create, say, several billion locusts out of thin air; HE CHOSE NOT TO! That is the point. So what he did is not just perform His signs in Egypt, He placed them there. Now, why, when God could more easily create several trillion locusts, did He grow them instead on some location over a period of several years, and then designed the wind currents to bring them into Egypt when Moses called for them? God did it this way because He knows the end from the beginning, the first from the last. Nothing happens which surprises God. Satan does not come up with some devious plan where God sees what's going on and exclaims, "Holy shit, I didn't think he'd come up with that. I'd better do a miracle, and pronto!" Everything has been laid down in advance to the finest detail. God generally cures us from illness mediately; He provides for our financial needs mediately; He provides for our emotional stress and suffering mediately. This is because He knew in eternity past what our problems would be and provided for these in eternity past. For those who don't know what I am saying, God is not caught by surprise by our circumstances; He knew what would happen billions of years ago and He made provision for it. He does not need to suddenly perform some miracle in order to meet the problems and disasters of our lives—I know that some preachers urge you to pray for a miracle; we don't have to pray for miracles. God knows our problems and has known them from eternity past. He has made provision for them. You can pray for God's will to be done, for Him to solve certain problems, etc. etc., but you don't need to pray for a miracle. Nothing in your life has caught Him off-guard. He knew you would be fired from your job for reading the Bible all the time and harassing other employees with your incorrect recitation of the gospel; He knew that you would smoke for thirty years and develop serious lung problems as a result; He knew that you would get out of fellowship for fourteen months and become such a royal pain in the butt, that your wife has left you, took your children and moved to another state. God knew about all of that and, if you're still alive, He still has a plan for your life, right where you are, right as you are. None of these things caught Him off-guard and He does not need to necessarily conjure up a miracle because of the mess you have made of your life in order for you to play a part in His plan. What you need is to rebound and to get a lot of God's Word in your soul. What is miraculous is that God knew all of this in eternity past; He knew what a total loser you have been for the majority of your life, and He still has a plan for your life to take you right where you are, right as you are and he will do something of import with your life.

What got us off on this tangent? Just a simple verb in the Hebrew which has been mistranslated in the Bible that you are using, whose correct translation gives us a clue as to how God operates and how our prayer life should be structured. This is one of the reasons we so thoroughly examine the language of God's Word. So God did not simply perform these miracles in Egypt; He placed them there, He set them there, He displayed them there. He planned for these events in eternity past and the angels observed as off in some other part of the world, that God had this locust farm where He had been breeding trillions of locusts. All of angelic creation, both the elect angels and the demons observed this locust farm and wondered, *what the hell is God up to now? What is the deal with all these locusts?* Everything which God does has a purpose. And you do not need to pray for a miracle!

Zoan is a city in Egypt, probably located within the fingers of the Nile up near the Mediterranean, and closely associated with Tanis (they are possibly two different names for the same city. It is possible that we are looking at the pre-Hyksos designation and the post-Hyksos designation of that particular area. Zoan was originally a harbor town; however, the Nile has deposited so much mud and debris in the Med, that the shore line has gone further out into the Mediterranean. Zoan was the capital of the Hyksos dynasty during the time of Joseph. G. J. Chester described this city today as *a small hamlet of mud huts in a sandy waste*. The things which survive that age and still remain or have been excavated are a black granite sphinx, statues from the Hyksos age, a red sandstone figure of Rameses II, and obelisks of granite.²⁰

²⁰ Most of this information came from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; Hendrickson Publishers, ©1956, Vol. IV, pp. 3153–3154, which makes reference to Chester's *Mem. Survey Western Palestine*, Speical Papers, 1881, pp. 92–96.

Then He turned to blood their Nile streams and they could not drink their flowing waters.

Psalm 78:44

Then He turned their Nile streams to blood so they could not drink from their own rivers.

The disagreement of translations here appears to be with the waters. The first word is $y^{\circ}ôr$ (י אֵר) [pronounced $y^{\circ}ohr$] means *stream, Nile stream, canal*. Strong's #2975 BDB #384. The second word is the present active participle of $nâzal$ (ל נָזַל) [pronounced *naw-ZAHL*], which means *flow, trickle, drop, distill*. It refers to the waters of the Nile as well. We will render it *flowing waters*. Strong's #5140 BDB #633. The first verb is $hâphak^{\circ}$ (ה פָּחַק) [pronounced *haw-FAHK^{\circ}*], and it means *to turn, to change, to overturn, to change into*. Strong's #2015 BDB #245. Properly speaking, there is only one real river in Egypt and that is the Nile. However, it has several branches leading off from it into the sea, as well as many man-made canals coming off from it.

He turned their waters into blood, and caused their fish to die (Psalm 105:29). So Moses and Aaron did exactly as Y^ehowah had commanded. And he lifted up with the staff and stuck the water that was in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants, and all the water that was in the Nile was turned to blood. And the fish that were in the Nile died, and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. And the blood was through all the land of Egypt (Ex. 3:20–21).

He sent a swarm against them so it devoured them; and a frog so it ruined them;

Psalm 78:45

He sent a swarm of insects against them and the insects devoured them; and frogs and the frogs ruined them;

Whatever kind of insect attacked Egypt is represented by the masculine singular of the word $'ârôv$ (עֲרֹב) [pronounced *aw-ROH^BV* or *gaw-ROH^BV*], which means *swarm*; it is similar to the word for *mixture* and it comes from a word meaning *incessant, involved motion*. There were probably several kinds of insects here. Strong's #6157 BDB #786. Following this verb, we have the $vêyth$ preposition, which can mean *in*; but it also means *against*. The key is proximity. No Strong's # BDB #88. The plague of the great swarms of insects is found in Ex. 8:20–23 Psalm 105:31.

We get a feel for how the Hebrew works at times where here the word for *frog* is in the singular, as is the verb for *spoil, destroy, ruin*. The plague of the frogs is found in Ex. 8:1–6 Psalm 105:30. For those up on the plagues of Egypt, it is obvious that these are not being listed by Asaph in their entirety or in order.

The He gave their crops to the caterpillar and their labor to the [swarming] locust.

Psalm 78:46

The He gave their crops to the caterpillar and He gave their labor to the [swarming] locust.

The caterpillar is the larva state of the locust. The word literally means *devourer*. The *locust* is the flying, swarming state of this insect. The word found here for *labor* is related to the word for *hand*, as it is the result of working with their hands. This is found in Ex. 10:12–15 Psalm 105:34–35. The figure of speech here is called a metonymy; it is not actually their labor which the locust takes, but the fruit of their labor.

He killed their vines with hail and their sycamores with frost.

Psalm 78:47

He destroyed their vines with hail and He destroyed their sycamores with frost.

God wrought a terrible destruction upon the land of Egypt; unlike anything ever seen before in the history of mankind. The first verb is $hârag$ (ה רָגַ) [pronounced *haw-RAHG*] and it means *to kill, to slay*, and, occasionally,

to execute (Ex. 32:27 Lev. 20:15–16 Deut. 13:10). This word can refer to killing as a result of ruthless violence (Gen. 4:8, 14–15 12:12 20:11) or in war (Num. 31:7–8 Joshua 8:24), as a result of God killing an individual or a people (Gen. 20:4 Ex. 4:23). This word can be used for the killing of animals (Num. 22:29 Job 20:16) and it can mean *to destroy, to ruin* (Job 5:2 Prov. 7:26 Jer. 4:31). Strong's #2026 BDB #246. The word for *frost* is found nowhere else in Scripture. The Septuagint, Arabic and Vulgate all render the word *frost*; Gesenius renders it *ants*. The sycamore tree is a tree sensitive to temperature, flourishing in sandy areas and warm climates. They are killed by sharp frosts. Such a frost would be a miracle in Egypt.

This incident is covered in Ex. 9:22–25 Psalm 105:32–33. Interestingly enough, the hail killed men, beasts and plants in the historical account. Asaph here only mentions vegetation.

**He gave over their beasts to the hail
and their cattle to the thunderbolts.**

Psalm 78:48

**He gave their beasts over to hail-
storms
and He gave their cattle over to
lightning.**

Here is where context helps us with the meaning of these words. The last word is the masculine plural of *resheph* (רֶשֶׁף) [pronounced *REH-shef*], which is rendered *thunderbolts, lightning, burning flames, pestilent fevers*. Since most of this poem is set up where we have a repetition of thoughts or a parallel repetition or a similar situation, the first line deals with their animals and a phenomenon of nature, it would make sense that the second line would deal with their animals and a phenomenon of nature. Therefore, *thunderbolts* or *lightning* is perhaps the best rendering in this context. Strong's #7565 (8313) BDB #958.

**He sent a fury of His anger;
[as well as] wrath and indignation and
distress;
a deputation of angels of misery [or
calamity].**

Psalm 78:49

**He sent His fierce anger;
His wrath and indignation and distress;
He sent a deputation of angels of
misery [or calamity].**

The first two lines describe in general what God did toward Egypt. God's demands were simple: the Egyptians were to release the Israelites from slavery and to reimburse them for their time. With each successive negative response, God's discipline became greater and His miracles, often, more impressive. The entire world knew of this stand off between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt. Furthermore, they were observed by angels, a constant reaffirmed theme in Scripture. The word for *deputation* is built upon the word for *sent*; it would not be incorrect to render this word *a discharge, a sending of*. Moses wrote a similar stanza in his first song: **"And in the greatness of Your excellence You overthrow those who rise up against You. You send forth Your burning anger consuming them as chaff."** (Ex. 15:7).

The angels not only observed, but some took part in this attack upon Egypt. At this point in time, I am less clear as to how the angels are involved in the discipline of Egypt. I don't know that the details are spelled out. NIV explains: *The poet personifies God's wrath, indignation and hostility as agents of his anger.*²¹ However, I don't think this should be lost in poetic license but rather God allowing the demonic embassaries of Satan a little more free reign in their involvement in human affairs. As we have seen, the demons want nothing less than to become totally involved in our lives, to the point of possessing unbelievers and having control of their lives. And it does not matter if Satan's intentions are for *good*, if you will; the results are evil. I should clarify that statement somewhat. Prophecy tells us that God will, at some point in time, bring in the Millennium, a time of perfect environment. One of Satan's objectives is to beat God to the punch—to provide a Eden-like state of existence here on earth for mankind. The more doctrine that you have, the more ridiculous it sounds for Satan to have the power to bring this about; and the more futile it would seem for him to even attempt such a thing; however, the world is full of people whose intention it is, albeit deluded, to improve our environment.

²¹ *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995; p. 861.

Now let's become more specific about this verse. Although it is one of Satan's many plans to improve this world system, what is referenced by this particular passage is the most horrible of the plagues sent by God and that is the killing of all the first-born. Demons certainly receive some perverse pleasure in taking life, as some humans do, and apparently many of the lives taken were given over to demons for the execution thereof. As Barnes wrote: *This verse is designed to describe the last, and the most dreadful of the plagues that came upon the Egyptians, the slaying of their first-born; and hence there is such an accumulation of expressions:—anger,—fierce anger,—wrath,—indignation,—trouble. All these expressions are designed to be emphatic; all these things were combined when the first-born were slain. There was no form of affliction that could surpass this.*²² Barnes further levels the killing of the first-born on an angel because of Ex. 12:23 compared with Heb. 11:28, where a *destroyer* is said to have been dispatched to take the lives of the first-born. However, his take on the matter is not that these are fallen angels, but that it was a particular angel commissioned by God for this purpose. He is not an *evil angel* but an *angel of evil* or an *angel of calamity*.

**He leveled a path for His anger;
He did not keep back their soul from
death
and He delivered over their lives to the
punishment [of death] [or, pestilence].**

Psalm 78:50

**He leveled a path for His anger;
He did not spare them from death
but He delivered their lives over to the
final punishment.**

The first verb is a rarely used verb meaning *to make level, to make smooth*. Strong's #6424 BDB #814. This is followed by the word for *path, pathway*. Strong's #5410 BDB #677. God became so angry with Pharaoh (this is an anthropathism), that he just leveled out a pathway to make it easy to pour disaster after disaster into Egypt. In the ancient world, if you had to move things from point A to point B on a regular basis, then you leveled out a path from A to B to facilitate the movement of these items. Here, it was as though God had made a smooth pathway from heaven to Egypt, allowing Him to move in disaster after disaster into Egypt.

The next verb is the Qal perfect of *châsak* (כַּשַׁק) [pronounced *khaw-SAHK*^o] means *to withhold, refrain, to keep back*. Strong's #2820 BDB #362. You are looking at your Bible and thinking, *why do I even mention this?* Not ever translation has this particular rendering. So I do this for everyone. What God does not hold back is *their soul*. The last verb is the Hiphil perfect of *çâgar* (צָגַר) [pronounced *saw-GAHR*] which means *to deliver over* (the Qal sense is different). Strong's #5462 BDB #688. God poured out the discipline, and when their hearts were so negative as to reject Him entirely, God brought death upon their first-born.

Now, once and awhile you may run across the translation *But gave their beasts to the murrain* and so you might be wondering *whasupwizat?* Is it an alternate reading or an alternate translation? What God delivered over was the plural of *chayyâh* (חַיָּה) [pronounced *khay-YAWH*], which means *living thing, animal*. We have no little difficulty here. There are four different words assigned to one Strong's #. Now, occasionally we have homonyms, where the same word has one Strong's #, but then two different meanings (most often, however, they are related meanings, as we have seen). However, here we have four different words, found on pp. 311–313 of *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*. To make matters more difficult, the *New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance* lists these as one word like Strong does. This particular word is used most often for the life of animals (Gen. 8:17 Lev. 11:2, 27 Psalm 104:25); however, it can refer to *life* in general (Job 33:18, 20, 22 Psalm 143:2). In this case, the word refers to life in general, as God took the life of all the first-born, man and beasts. Strong's #2416 BDB #312.

We also have several words which are translated *plague*, depending upon your translation. The word found here, however, is *de^bver* (דֵּבֵר) [pronounced *DEB-ver* or *DEH-ver*], which is uniformly rendered *pestilence* in the KJV (with the exception of Hosea 13:14, which should read in part: **Where is your pestilence, O Death?**). Zodhiates gives the rendering *punishment from God resulting in death* rather than BDB's *pestilence, plague*. We find this word used continually with the word *famine*, albeit mostly by Jeremiah (II Chron. 20:9 Jer. 21:9 29:17–18 32:24 Ezek. 6:11). Furthermore, *famine* should be understood as corresponding more closely to *economic depression*

²² Barnes' Notes, Vol. IV, book 2, p. 304.

with an emphasis upon hunger. In glancing at the several passages, I would be apt to conclude that this is almost always *punishment from God resulting in death; often taking the form of a quick, fatal illness*. A strong case could be made for the rendering *sin unto death* for believers and *the final punishment* for unbelievers (obviously the final punishment in life). Strong's #1698 (and #1696) BDB #184.

Vv. 49–51 are all tied together; v. 51 is undeniably specific to the death of the first-born while the previous two verses allude to that, but could refer to, in general, all of the plagues. Notice when we place these together: **He sent a fury of His anger; [as well as] wrath and indignation and distress; a deputation of angels of misery [or calamity]. He leveled a path for His anger; He did not keep back their soul from death and He delivered over their lives to the final death. He caused all first-born to be struck down in Egypt; a first-fruit of strengths in tents of Ham** (Psalm 78:49–51). The sense, when read together, is that the emphasis of these three verses is the final plague and incidentally all that led up to this final plague.

**He caused all first-born to be struck
down in Egypt;
a first-fruit of strengths in tents of Ham.**

Psalm 78:51

**He caused all of the first-born to be
struck down in Egypt;
the first-fruit of the strengths in the
tents of Ham.**

The first-born are the first-fruits of the strength of Egypt, identified here as descendants of Ham. This is one of the most dramatic incidents of the Old Testament. What is found in this incident is the death of the first-born in close association with a Passover of those under the blood. Whereas, an Old Testament Jewish theologian may not have seen the significance of this, having the perspective of the New Testament makes its quite obvious that this is tied to the death of Jesus Christ, the first-born of God and that we, when we are under the blood, are passed over by God when it comes to our eternal punishment. **And Moses said, "Thus says Y^ehowah, "About midnight, I am going out into the midst of Egypt and all the first-born in the land of Egypt will die, from the first-born of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the first-born of the cattle as well. Furthermore, there will be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been and such as will never be again." Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said to them, "Go and take for yourselves sheep, according to you families, and slaw the Passover. And you will take a sponge of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and you will touch some of the blood that is in the basin to the top and the two doorposts; and none of you will go outside the door of his house until morning. For Y^ehowah will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the top of the door and on the two doorposts, Y^ehowah will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to strike you down." And it came to pass about midnight that Y^ehowah struck all the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of cattle. And Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead (Ex. 11:4–6 12:21–23, 29; see also Psalm 105:36 135:8 136:10). **For Christ our Passover has also been sacrificed** (1 Cor. 5:7b).**

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God Settles His People into the Land of Promise

**Then He caused His people to set out
like sheep;
then He guided them like the flock in
the wilderness.**

Psalm 78:52

**Then He caused His people to set out
as if they were sheep;
and He guided them like a flock in the
wilderness.**

The first verb is the Hiphil imperfect of *nâç'a'* (נָצַח) [pronounced *naw-SAHG*] which means *to pull up the stakes of a tent and to move out*. In the Hiphil stem, this means *to guide, to lead, to cause to set out*. Strong's #5265 BDB #652. The Israelites had been a nation of slaves for four hundred years; God caused them to pull up stakes and to move forward into the wilderness. He guided them just like sheep and their shepherd. One of the best-

known psalms reads: **The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the paths of righteousness for His name's sake** (Psalm 23:1–2). Liberal theologians who do not know Scripture, don't realize how powerful were many of the statements which our Lord made. **"I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep...I am the Good shepherd; and I know My own and My own know Me...My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand"** (John 10:11, 14, 27–28). Our Lord, if He was not God, made some incredibly blasphemous statements. Religious people took up stones to stone Him all the time because they recognized what He was saying. They recognized His statements as being blasphemous, if said by a mere man. When we find a few statements taken out of the Jewish context and couched in King James' English, we often don't recognize the force and the strength of these words. **Behold, Y^ehowah God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him. Like a shepherd, He will tend His flock; in His arm, He will gather the lambs and carry in His bosom. He will gently lead the nursing ewes** (Isa. 40:10–11). **For thus says Y^ehowah God, "Behold, I Myself will search out for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the dya when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down in good grazing ground, and they will feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares Y^ehowah God. "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment."** (Ezek. 34:11–16). **The Apostles themselves recognized the correctness of this analogy: For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls...and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory** (I Peter 2:25 5:4). And so no one confuses the Great Shepherd with God the Father, the writer of Hebrews wrote: **Now the God of peace, Who brought up from the dead the Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant, Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to Whom belongs the glory forever and every. I believe it** (Heb. 13:20–21).

**He caused them to be led in regards to
safety;
and they were not afraid;
and the sea covered their enemies.**

Psalm 78:53

**He caused them to be led in safety;
and they were not afraid;
and their enemies were engulfed by the
sea.**

Our Lord led the Israelites in beṭach (בטח) [pronounced *BEH-tahkh*], which means *security, safety*. Strong's #983 BDB #105. Rather than being preceded by the bêyth preposition, as we would have expected, it is preceded by lâmed, which is found a great deal in this Psalm.

In this verse we have a contrast between the Israelites, who were led in safety, and their enemies, who were engulfed by the sea. The word translated *overwhelmed* (KJV, Owens, NRSV, *The Amplified Bible*), *engulfed* (NASB, NIV), is the word kâçâh (כָּסָה) [pronounced *kaw-SAWH*] and it means *to cover, to clothe, to conceal*. In this context, *engulf* is a good rendering. Strong's #3680 BDB #491.

In the last line, the ordering is literally **and their enemies engulfed the sea**. Prior to *their enemies*, we have the untranslated mark of a direct object, making *sea* the subject of the verb, which, of course, also agrees with the verb in gender and number and person (3rd person masculine singular). To translate this in the same order of the Hebrew, I would have had to change the verb to a passive voice and added in a preposition prior to *the sea* where none was. Ex. 14:26–30 15:4–10 and Psalm 106:10–11 give us the corresponding historical narrative. Surprisingly enough, the longer coverage is given in the Song of Moses rather than in the text which he wrote.

**Then He brought them to the border
[or, territory] of His holiness
a mountain which His right hand had
acquired.**

Psalm 78:54

**Then He brought them to the border of
His holiness
to the mountain which He had acquired
with His right hand.**

You will notice that so far in this immediate we have had several different words for *lead* in this portion of this Psalm. In v. 52a, we have the Hiphil imperfect of *nâça'* (נָצַח) [pronounced *naw-SAHÇ*] which means *to pull up the stakes of a tent and to move out*. In the Hiphil stem, this means *to guide, to lead, to cause to set out*. Strong's #5265 BDB #652. In v. 52b, we have the Piel imperfect of *nâhag* (נָהַג) [pronounced *naw-HAHG*], which, in the Piel, means *to drive away, to lead on, to guide*. Strong's #5090 BDB #624. In v. 53, we have the Hiphil imperfect of *nâchâh* (נָחַח) [pronounced *naw-KHAH*], which means *to lead, to guide*. The Hiphil is causative, indicating that God caused the Israelites to be led by Moses. Strong's #5148 BDB #534. Finally, in this verse, we have the Hiphil imperfect of *bôw'* (בָּוֹא) [pronounced *bo*] which means, in the Hiphil stem, *to take in, to bring, to come in with*; and, with a direct object in the Hiphil, it means *to bring*. Strong's #935 BDB #97. What God brought them to was *qôdesh* (קֹדֶשׁ) [pronounced *koe-DESH*], which means *holiness, sacredness, apartness, that which is holy, holy things*. Strong's #6944 BDB #871.

The final verb in this verse is the Qal perfect of *qânâh* (קָנָה) [pronounced *kaw-NAWH*] and this means *purchase, redeem, buy, to get, to acquire*. Strong's #7069 BDB #888. This sets the scene for the reception of the Law at Mount Sinai and for the raised area of Jerusalem where the tabernacle would be kept, but essentially this refers to the entire land of Israel. **Why do you look with envy, O mountains with peaks, at the mountain which God has desired for His above? Certainly Y^{ehowah} will dwell there forever** (Psalm 68:16).

At this point, we leave the first five books of the Law and move into the period of Joshua and then the Judges. So the last several verses will be previews of coming attractions:

**Then He drove out before their faces
nations
and He caused them to fall in a roped-
off land—a possession
and He caused [the] tribes of Israel to
be settled in their tents.**

Psalm 78:55

**Then He cast out nations before them
and He dropped them in their
apportioned land given them as a
possession
and He caused them to be settled in
their tents, tribes of Israel.**

In this one verse, we cover the entire book of Joshua. God had chosen an area for Israel and dropped them into this area. He drove out from before them the indigenous nations. **You, with Your own hand, drove out the nations; and then You planted them. You afflicted the peoples and then You spread them abroad** (Psalm 44:2). In the old KJV, we have the word *heathen* rather than nations. Interestingly enough, the Hebrew does not have the same connotation as our word *heathen*—that is, there is no specific reference to religion by that word—which is why most translations use the word *nations* instead.

The second line is variously translated:

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	...and allotted their land as a heritage, measured out <i>and</i> partitioned;
<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	And allotted them, by line, an inheritance,...
KJV	...and divided them an inheritance by line,...
NASB	And He apportioned them for an inheritance by measurement,...
NIV	...and allotted their lands to them as an inheritance;
NRSV	...he apportioned them for a settlement...
Owen's Translation	...and he apportioned them by a measuring cord for a possession...
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	And causeth them to fall in the line of inheritance,...

As you can see, we have similarities and differences throughout. The verb is the 3rd person singular, Hiphil imperfect with a 3rd person plural suffix of *nâphal* (לָפַל) [pronounced *naw-FAHL*], which means *to fall, to lie*; this is the same word which we had back in v. 28 when God allowed the quail to fall at the feet of the Israelites. Literally, what we have here is **He caused them to fall**. I am not sure whether I can go for this rare rendering of *allotted to, apportioned*. Strong's #5307 BDB #656. Then we have the *vêyth* preposition and the word *chebel* (לְבַב) [pronounced *KHE^B-vel*], and it means *cord, territory, band*; actually, this has been given a myriad of renderings, but the idea is that this is a *rope* or *cord*, but it can also refer to *that which has been roped off or allotted to*. Strong's #2256 BDB #286. This is followed by the simple word for *inheritance*. **Saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion of your inheritance."** (Psalm 105:11; see also Joshua 13:7 19:51 Acts 13:19). The final phrase means that Israel would from then on live securely and safely in their own homes, no longer wandering throughout the desert wilderness, living on chunks of land which were not theirs.

God, for all intents and purposes, picked Israel up and dropped them down into their land. I have had this personal experience myself. One day, it seemed, that I lived in California, with no intention to move; and suddenly, I am picked up by God and dropped down into Texas, into an area which God had apportioned to me. When you take in doctrine, God's geographical will becomes less and less of an issue. That is, without doctrine, if you are religious, then you are constantly concerned, should you take a left turn or a right turn; and when taught by God the Holy Spirit, you just naturally are placed where God's perfect will wants you.

One of the things which you will find striking about the New Testament is there are few if any references to the Land of Promise, the inheritance of Israel. The reference to inheritance is more *spiritual*, if you will: **Also, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose Who works all things after the counsel of His will to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the good news of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit with reference to a promise; Who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the release of our assets, to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:11–14). Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy, has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, resulting in an inheritance, imperishable and undefiled and which will not decay, reserved in the heavens for you, who are guarded by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (I Peter 1:3–5).** This is because the Land of Promise is no longer an issue. Israel was facing imminent scattering and we were entering into a new dispensation, the Church Age, wherein we are not tied to some geographic boundary. Even in the book of Revelation, when speaking of the twelve tribes of Israel, no mention is made of the land (Rev. 7 21:12) and the only mention of Jerusalem is that of a heavenly city (Rev. 21:10). There are two reasons for that: (1) in the Church Age, we are primarily concerned with the body of believers known as the church and the church is not tied to an earthly inheritance. Israel is tied to an earthly inheritance but the church is not. (2) The book of Revelation deals with the rest of the prophecies of the end times which had not been covered before, as the fullness of the Church Age had not been delineated before. There will be activities occurring in Israel proper, but these things have already been covered in previous books; Revelation looks at the tribulation from a world view, whereas previous prophecies look upon the tribulation from the standpoint of Israel. The physical inheritance of Israel, points to our spiritual inheritance (which is also theirs), just as many of the actual historical events of the Old Testament were shadows of things to come.

In some seminaries and Bible colleges there is a theory called documentary hypothesis which teaches that Moses did not write the Pentateuch, but that much of it was produced centuries after the fact, weaving together bits and pieces of source documents called the *writings* of the Jehovistic and the Elohimistic authors along with the *writings* of the priestly tradition. I place the words *writings* in italics because at the time that Asaph wrote this history, those writings were not in existence yet. Somehow, Asaph was such an excellent student of history that he appears to have all of these writings at his disposal hundreds of years before they existed—that is, if documentary hypothesis is true. You see, most of these writings which were supposedly later wove together into the Pentateuch that we have today did not exist in the time of Asaph, but were oral traditions at best. To examine this from the method of Josh McDowell, we have a couple of different options. First, it is a fact that this psalm followed the life of the exodus generation generally in chronological order just as it is presented in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and

Deuteronomy.²³ We have two basic theories: (1) that documentary hypothesis is true, or (2) that Moses really wrote those four books in the historical context of his life. If documentary hypothesis is true, several hundred years after the death of Asaph, these documents were written and then they were **woven** together into what is the Pentateuch that we know today. That is, a few paragraphs from the Jehovistic writer would be recorded, then a few paragraphs from the Elohist writer, then maybe a few chapters of the priestly tradition would be thrown in. You see, they believe that the books of Moses were taken from several different sources materials which were then pieced together. That is, each book hypothetically had several different authors. However, we have Asaph recording the history of Israel in chronological order just as if he had studied the finished product of the Pentateuch even prior to the writing of the source material of the finished product. The other logical explanation is that Moses really wrote the four books of the Law and that is what Asaph used for his source material.

(3) Now, you might introduce a third possibility: what if Asaph wrote hundreds of years after he was supposed to have lived? Of what if he did not write this psalm, but some later person did and attached his name to it or just made up a Biblical-sounding name like *Asaph* and attached it to this document. If this was the case, then the main thrust of this psalm, that the ruling tribe of Israel was to be Judah and not Ephraim would be a moot point. This is the main argument of the psalmist and he would be giving it hundreds of years after it would have been important to his readers. You realize, I hope, that makes little sense.

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Because of Israel's Rebellion, God Disperses Them While under Great Discipline

**Then they tested, then they rebelled,
against God Most High;
and they did not keep His testimonies.**

Psalm 78:56

**Then they tested God and they
rebelled, against God Most High;
furthermore, they did not keep His
testimonies.**

Israel, throughout her history, was rebellious against God. She, as a nation traveling through the desert, rebelled against God several times, although this is not what this verse refers to. This verse then looks at the time of the Judges when every man in Israel *did what was right in his own eyes*. If you think that situational ethics and relative morality are new philosophies, we will find them covered in detail in the Book of the Judges. I Sam. 2:12–8:20 testifies to Israel's continued rebellion against God. The books of the prophets continually castigate Israel for her rebellion. The entire history of Israel was one of rebellion against God and a testing of God. God finally told them: **"And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim."** (Jer. 7:15).

At the end of this verse, the testimonies of God, at that point in time, were the testimonies of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Joshua.

**Then they turned themselves away;
then they behaved deceitfully and
faithlessly, like their fathers;
they turned themselves away like a bow
of deceit.**

Psalm 78:57

**Then they turned themselves away
from God;
and they behaved deceitfully and
faithlessly, just like their fathers;
they turned themselves away like a
deceitful bow.**

Çûwg (אָוּג) [pronounced *soog*] is a verb which means *to move away, to backslide*; in the Niphal, it means *to turn oneself away, to turn back*. Strong's #5472 (& #5253 & #7734) BDB #690. They returned to the rebelliousness of their fathers, to the behavior of gen X. The second verb is the Qal imperfect of *bâgad* (בָּגַד) [pronounced *baw-GAHD*] and it is usually rendered *to behave deceitfully, to act covertly, to act fraudulently, to act in bad faith, to*

²³ The plagues suffered by the Egyptians are not in exactly the same order as in the book of Exodus and Asaph combines the two *no-water* incidents.

behave faithlessly; to oppress, to afflict. However, I don't know that this communicates as well *to behave deceitfully and faithlessly*; also a good rendering of this verb. Strong's #898 BDB #93. The third thing which they did is the Niphal perfect of *hâphak*^e (הָפַק) [pronounced *haw-FAHK*^e], which means *to turn, to overturn*; in the Niphal, it means *to turn aside, to turn oneself, to change oneself, to turn against, to be overturned*. Strong's #2015 BDB #245. When they have turned themselves away like a deceitful bow, this is a bow which could break, which could come back on you, which could cause you injury. It was undependable. "But the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to observe My ordinances, by which, when a man observes them, he will live; they profaned My Sabbaths. So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness. But I withdrew My hand and acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations in whose sight I had brought them out. Also, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them among the lands because they had not observed My ordinances, but had rejected My statutes and they had profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were on the idols of their fathers. And I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live; and I pronounced them unclean because of their gifts, in that they caused all their first-born to pass through the fire so that I might make them desolate, in order that they might know that I am Y^ehowah. Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, 'Thus proclaims Y^ehowah Elohim, "Yet in all this, your fathers have blasphemed Me by acting treacherously against Me." ' " (Ezek. 20:21–27).

Hosea used a very similar vocabulary to the psalmist when he proclaimed: *They turn, but not toward the Most High. They are like a deceitful bow; their princes will fall by the sword because of the insolence of their tongue. This will be their derision in the land of Egypt* (Hos. 7:16). A deceitful bow was one which *could not be depended upon; a bow, one of whose arms was no longer or [was] more elastic than the other, so that the arrow would turn aside from its mark. The marksman would attempt to hit an object, and would fail.*²⁴

**Then they provoked Him to anger with
their high places;
and with their graven images, they
moved Him to jealousy.**

Psalm 78:58

**Then they provoked Him to anger with
their high places;
and they moved Him to jealousy with
their graven images.**

Both verbs here are in the Hiphil imperfect; the Hiphil is the causative stem—the Israelites caused God to be angry and caused Him to be jealous; the imperfect indicates continuous action. Much of this was the Israelites between the time of Joshua and the time of Samuel; as well as after the time of Solomon.

One of the recurrent blasphemies of Israel was to fall into idolatry. After having been delivered from Egypt and planted in the Land of Promise and after observing signs and wonders testifying to the power and the goodness of God, they continually chose to follow after idols and false religions. See Ex. 20:4 Lev. 26:1, 30 Deut. 4:25 5:8 32:16, 21 Judges 2:12 3:2 I Sam. 9:12 I Kings 3:2 12:31–32 14:9, 22 II Kings 16:4 17:32 II Chron. 33:17 Isa. 65:3 Jer. 17:3.

**God heard and then He became
furious;
then He completely rejected Israel.**

Psalm 78:59

**God heard about their apostasy which
made Him furious;
then He completely rejected Israel.**

The Psalmist has suddenly covered over a lot of time with Israel, moving in a few verses from the time of Joshua (v. 55) to the time of the dispersion (vv. 59–60). **For God will hear and He will afflict them—even the one who sits enthroned from of old, with whom there is no change, and who do not fear God** (Psalm 55:19). We have covered in the past the anthropopathism of the *wrath* of God (Num. 32:14 Lev. 26:28 Deut. 1:34 9:19 Psalm 106:40). If you did not grasp it the first time, let me quote Barnes: *This is language taken from the common manner of speaking among men, for language derived from human conceptions and usages must be employed when we speak of God, though it may be difficult to say what is its exact meaning. The general sense is that this conduct towards*

²⁴ Barnes' Notes, Vol. IV, book 2, p. 305.

them was as if he was angry; or was that which is used by man who is displeased.²⁵ We have also covered the rejection of Israel in great depth in the past. [Y^ehowah God has sworn by Himself, Y^ehowah God of the armies has declared: “I loathe the arrogance of Jacob and I detest his citadels; therefore, I will deliver up the city and all it contains. And it will be if ten men are left in one house, they will die.” \(Amos 5:8–9\).](#)

**He forsook His dwelling-place at Shiloh;
the tent where He dwelt among men.**

Psalm 78:60

**He forsook His dwelling-place at Shiloh;
the tent where He dwelt among men.**

In v. 60, we have a slight difference of opinion, where Owen opts for *dwelling*, Young for *tabernacle*, and Rotherham for *habitation*. *Mîsh^ekân* (מִשְׁכָּן) [pronounced *mish'-KAWN*], which means *dwelling place, tent, tabernacle*. Strong's #4908 BDB #1015. We need to examine the **Doctrine of Shiloh—not finished yet!!!**

Since the Old Testament is taught so infrequently, and in so little detail, that the parallels are often skipped over. Jesus Christ dwelt in Israel, in a temporary dwelling-place, just as He would in His incarnation when he would indwell a temporary dwelling place (his body) in Jerusalem. Jesus Christ would dwell among men again in His incarnation.

Some Old Testament theologians would have trouble reconciling this verse with [“Therefore, I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim.” \(Jer. 7:14–15\).](#) One the one hand, Y^ehowah is forsaking His dwelling place in Shiloh and on the other, He is casting Israel out of His sight. It actually ties together quite well. He removes His presence, and therefore, His protection, from the tabernacle, and Israel, unprotected, is cast out of the land by her enemies. What happened, as we will see, is that the Philistines, when at war with the Israelites, seized the ark, which was taken into battle by the Israelites for good luck, and brought the Ark into Philistine controlled areas, meaning that God's Presence had been removed from the tabernacle and the Ark (this is covered in I Sam. 4–7). The tabernacle was never erected again in Shiloh. Then God removed the Northern Kingdom, called Ephraim or Israel, under the 5th cycle of discipline. Recall that part of the historical context of this Psalm is the inferiority of Ephraim. And in the farther future, God casts all of the Israelites out of the land throughout most of the church Age. Also Jesus walked throughout Israel in His human body, but after His work was finished, He no longer dwelt in bodily form among man. A chart showing the movement of the Ark and the Tent of God may be found in I Sam. 10:3.

**Then He delivered His power to the
captivity
and His glory to a hand of a foe.**

Psalm 78:61

**And then He delivered His power to
captivity
and His glory to the hand of a foe.**

The *strength* and *glory* which were delivered into captivity was the ark of God. When the Philistines defeated Israel, they captured the ark of God and took it with them.

The Psalmist takes in the several dispersions as one; God's power and glory here on earth was Israel and He delivered Israel over to their enemy. This verse stands in stark contrast to: [My soul awaits in silence for God only. From Him is my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation. He is my Stronghold, I will not be greatly shaken \(Psalm 62:1–2\).](#) The primary difference is the relationship of Ephraim to God at the time of her dispersion and the relationship between God and David in Psalm 62. That is the key to the difference between those of us who have been delivered, both temporarily and eternally, and those who have rejected Jesus Christ. God is either or stronghold, or He delivers us over to captivity, into the hand of a foe. In this case, His power is given over to captivity and His glory is given into the hand of a foe. The nation Israel—Ephraim, in specific—is God's glory and His Power. Joseph was the great man out of the twelve sons of Jacob, and from him came the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. One would have expected them to be the leading tribes of Israel. However, this was not to be the

²⁵ *Barnes' Notes*, Vol. IV, book 2, p. 306.

case. Manasseh was always a loser of a tribe and Ephraim, although it began with Shiloh in her midst, lost the ark, the tabernacle and eventually the very land in which she dwelt.

Now, although this passage is not traditionally seen as Messianic, it definitely has Messianic parallels. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of the Universe, took upon Himself the body of a slave, the body of a man captive to this earth, forsaking the power and assets of His own Deity. **Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, although He pre-existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be a thing of profit to be held; but He emptied Himself of the proper function of deity taking the form of a slave, being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross** (Philip. 2:5–8). Jesus Christ placed Himself at the mercy of the Roman government and the mob of Jews, as He faced several trials, mostly illegal, both under Roman and Jewish law; and then He faced the ultimate degradation of the cross, taking upon Himself the penalty for our sins.

I should also mention that this portion of the Psalm, as throughout, is also written from an historical standpoint. The attack of the Philistines and the taking of the ark occurred in I Sam. 4, which precedes the reign of David and Solomon (and even Saul), which is the time during which Asaph wrote. So we are getting an historical perspective of the changing of the guard, as it were, from Ephraim as the spiritual leader and the spiritual center of Israel to Judah. This may not seem like that big of a deal, but this is also a matter of the correct interpretation of contemporary history. When living in the midst of a nation during great historical events, it often requires decades of historical perspective to correctly interpret the meaning and outcome of these events. Asaph, a great student of history and a man of doctrine, was able to see the shift of the spiritual center of Israel from Ephraim to Judah. When we study this portion of Scripture verse by verse, it will be obvious; however, to the people of that day, it wasn't always so.

**So He gave His people over to the sword;
on His inheritance, He vented His wrath.**

Psalm 78:62

**So He gave His people over to the sword;
on His inheritance, He vented His wrath.**

What the Israelite did in rejecting God caused God to reject the Jew. The Israelite was God's inheritance on this earth and God vented His wrath upon him. This historical event spoken of here was the war between the Philistines and Israel, which Asaph spoke of in retrospect and not in prophecy. **Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle and camped beside Ebenezer while the Philistines camped in Aphek. And the Philistines drew up in battle array to meet Israel. When the battle spread, Israel was struck down before the Philistines, who killed about 4000 men on the battlefield. When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has Y^ehowah defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of Y^ehowah, that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies. So the people sent to Shiloh, and from there they carried the arks of the covenant of Y^ehowah of armies, Who sits above the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. And it came to pass as the ark of the covenant of Y^ehowah came into the camp, that all of Israel shouted with a tremendous shout, so that the earth resounded. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, "What does the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" Then they understood that the ark of Y^ehowah had come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck down the Egyptians with plagues in the wilderness. Take courage and be men, O Philistines, so that you do not become slaves to the Hebrews, as they have been slaves to you; therefore, be men and fight." So the Philistines fought and Israel was struck down, and every man fled to his tent, and the slaughter was very great; for there fell of Israel 30,000 foot soldiers. Furthermore, the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died (I Sam. 4:1–11).** Obviously, the latter portion of this psalm covers material which we have not yet studied verse by verse.

Where Asaph approached this in retrospect, Moses approached it prophetically: “Y^ehowah will cause you to be defeated before you enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.” (Deut. 28:25).

**Fire consumed His young men
and His virgins are not praised.**

Psalm 78:63

**Fire consumed His young men
and His young women are not praised.**

The fire in this verse is not a literal fire. We are speaking of war time and, in this instance, are dealing with imagery. We had a similar wording in Num. 21:28: “For a fire went forth from Heshbon; and flame from the town of Sihon. It devoured Ar of Moab, the dominant heights of the Arnon.” (see also Isa. 26:11 Jer. 48:45). We are not speaking of a forest fire in either verse, but in the total destructiveness of war, which sometimes leaves a village as though it had been leveled with fire.

This is the word for *virgin*; however, what is meant is *young women*; in those days, the terms were almost synonymous. Because of tradition, most translations read something like *and His virgins had no wedding songs*. That is, in most of the translations of this verse it sounds as though maidens (or virgins) is the subject that the subject has a verb and that the verb has a direct object. However, *virgins* is the subject and all it has is the Pual perfect of the verb *hâlal* (לָלַחַל) [pronounced *haw-LAHL*], which means *to be boastful, to praise*. There is no direct object. It is a bit more complicated than that, but that’s as far as we will take it right now. Furthermore, the Pual is the **passive** of the Piel stem and often describes an accomplished state (as does the Piel). So here, the point that the psalmist is making is that the young women are not **objects** of praise or boastfulness. Strong’s #1984 BDB #237. Okay, just what does that mean? We live in a society where many men are misogynistic—that is, they hate women. Women today are exploited, raped, looked upon as inferior and weaker, and they are physically and emotionally abused. And, this abuse is often at the hands of the men who have promised to *honor and cherish them*. One of the reason we have so many women’s groups which are anti-male is in response to the horrible treatment which they and other women have received. Women are responders and when men treat them as trash, they will respond to that. And, although I am not prepared to argue this point, I believe that women can get along without males easier than males can get along without women. It is a lot more difficult for a woman to take her children and leave an abusive man and try to make it than it is for the man to simply move out. A woman who is forced to do that requires a lot more strength than the man does. The most marvelous thing in the world is young women, with their purity and dedication; however, under the severe national discipline, they do not receive any admiration or protection.

Since I have made those remarks, I had better deal with the 1%—that previous paragraph is not meant to cause any woman to pick up her children and leave her husband, even though he is an insensitive jerk. Loyalty to the family bond works in both directions. You, as a woman, have surrendered your volition to that man. You have chosen him to be the one to father your children; you have chosen him to be the man to remain faithful to for the rest of your life; you have chosen him to be your lord and master. This was never a decision to be made lightly or in the heat of passion. There are darn few reasons for you to ever leave your husband and God gives you even fewer times to remarry.

For you young women who are not married—examine that man of your dreams carefully. Examine his old sin nature. He has one and if you haven’t discovered it many times over, then you should not even think about getting married. You need to know if you could live with that old sin nature. Furthermore, examine him as ugly and carrying an extra 70 pounds of fat. Would you still want to spend time with him? If not, then this is not your right man. The soul of your right man will be in your soul; not his body and not his face.

**His priests fell by the sword
and His widows did not lament.**

Psalm 78:64

**Their priests fell by the sword
and their widows did not weep for them.**

Let’s notice some significant differences between various translations:

JPS (Tanakh)	Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows could not weep.
NASB	His [or, <i>their</i>] priests fell by the sword; And His [or, <i>their</i>] widows could not weep.
NRSV	Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows made no lamentation.
REB	Their priests fell by the sword; and the widows among them could not weep.
The Septuagint	Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows shall not be wept for.
<i>Young's Literal Translation</i>	His priests by the sword have fallen, and their widows weep not.

In the Hebrew, this reads *His* in both lines; in the Greek, it reads *their*. Although I like Young's rendering, I cannot find a reason to choose it over the other renderings. None of the Bible translations which I use say anything about this difference of readings, so I only know what I see in my own Hebrew Bible and my own Greek Bible (neither of which offers an alternate reading except to one another).

The priests are God's particular representatives on earth in that dispensation and God allows for them to be killed by the sword in national catastrophe. **And the man said to Eli, "I am the one who came from the battle line. Indeed, I escaped from the battle line today." And Eli said, "how did things go, my son?" Then the one who brought the news answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines and there has also been a great slaughter among the people, and your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been taken."** (I Sam. 4:16–18). Eli was a priest and Hophni and Phinehas were his worthless sons (I Sam. 2:11–12; see also I Sam. 22:18). In the study of the books of Moses, we tend to lose sight of the fact that the priests are simply men who have foibles and weaknesses and can be removed by the sin unto death just like any other person. Eli apparently had enough problems with having unbelievers for sons.

Their widows, just as their priests, were those who belonged to the men of Israel. The men of Israel were those who had fallen in battle, along with their priests. There would be so much death that not even their widows would mourn them. There was just too much death and destruction to moan but one man. Another interpretation here would be that, the widows of Israel were as degenerate as the men. If they lost their husband, it was not the end of the world. There were other men in the land and they would simply find another.

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Y^ehowah Returns to Israel and Rules as David

**Then Y^ehowah awoke as from a sleep,
like a strong man shouting from wine.**

Psalm 78:65

**Then Y^ehowah suddenly awoke as if He
were sleeping,
shouting like a strong man from wine.**

This is an odd analogy, but what has taken place is that, insofar as the Jews are concerned, during this period of dispersion, it will be as though God is sleeping. The Israelites had this marvelous God Who took special care to be a part of their lives and suddenly, it was as though He no longer existed with respect to them. However, when He returns to gather them, His presence will be undeniable; His sudden return to their lives will not be an event which can be ignored, like a strong man shouting from wine. The analogy is both historical and prophetic. In looking back at the time of the judges, Israel had a sorry history of several hundred years. It was as though God was not in their lives at all. Then, with the advent of King David, a man who loved God and His Word, it appeared as though the nation Israel would recover and become great. However, after the reign of Solomon, and after the split up of the kingdom, Israel (Ephraim) and then Judah, were taken into captivity, and the period of captivity was as though God was not a part of their lives. However, immediately after their return to the land, there was not this great change in their relationship to God, as compared to the strong man who had just awakened who was shouting from wine. This we see when we enter into the tribulation. For the Jew who believes in his Scriptures, the Old Testament, what has occurred over the past 2000 years must be hard to fathom. They had this marvelous, intimate relationship with God, and suddenly, they are scattered throughout the world and for 2000 years, it is as though God never knew them. However, when He calls for them and gathers them during the Tribulation, that will be a dramatic moment.

The seeming non-involvement in the affairs of Israel is also a theme of the Old Testament. *But for Your sake we are killed all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. Arouse Yourself—why does You sleep, O Y^ehowah? Awake; do not reject us forever. Why do You hide Your face and forget our affliction and our oppression?* (Psalm 44:22–24). How many Jews read this verse during the holocaust? *“I have kept silent for a long time; I have kept still and restrained Myself. Now, like a woman in labor, I will groan; I will both gasp and pant. I will lay waste the mountains and hills and wither all their vegetation. I will make the rivers into coast lands and dry up the ponds...They will be turned back and utterly put to shame, who trust in idols, who say to molten images, ‘You are our gods.’ “* (Isa. 42:14–15, 17). *Arise, O Y^ehowah, in Your anger. Lift up Yourself against the rage of my adversaries and arouse Yourself for me. You will appoint judgment* (Psalm 7:6).

There are only a few prophecies which deal with Israel during the Church Age, and most of them are by way of historical trends. One of them is the Israelites being evangelized with Gentile languages. That is, God would speak to them in the languages of the Gentiles (Isa. 28). This began with the speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost which followed the ascension of our Lord and continues to this day with missionaries speaking in Gentile languages. Another trend of history, implied here, is a long period of silence from God in the life of Israel. For the Jewish race, all they have is their empty religion of laws and regulations—an attempt to be good and righteous, but never with the achieving of same. But they do not have God; they do not have Y^ehowah of the Old Testament. He appears to be sleeping.

One of the things which I have harped on in the reduced number of miracles that we see today. There are huge groups of believers who believe that there are diseases cured continually at their church and when they aren't, there is a problem with the sick person. They believe that God is performing miracle after miracle in their church, but in most cases, they are deluding themselves. The Israelites went for long periods of time without a lot of fanfare; as we saw, man's history has been roughly 1% times of great signs and miracles and 99% without these great signs and miracles. Verses like these testify to what appears to be God's inactivity—particularly to a person who has been out of fellowship for a long time.

Now for a bit of application. You, as a believer in Jesus Christ, may have noticed that there are times in your life when God does not appear to be active in your life; perhaps even for long stretches of time. Now I don't mean by way of a multitude of miracles, nor do I mean you don't *feel* close to God, but there just does not seem to be any indication that He is active in your life. Look at what the problem was for the Israelites. When God seemed to be gone from their lives, the problem was their own apostasy and idolatry. This doesn't mean that they were immoral or inactive in religious affairs; you can be very moral and very active in the realm of religion and be totally without God in your life. It requires being in fellowship (naming your sins to God) and growing by grace and by the learning of His Word. If all God expected us to know were a few precepts, then the Bible would be twelve pages long. However, there is a wealth of information to be found in His Word. Where I am right now in my present studies, I can't imagine finishing the entire Bible—and I am still ready to go back and re-do what I have already done. And this is after putting together thousands of pages of notes.

Now I can personally testify to this. I do this with hesitation, because God does not deal exactly the same way with every believer. I have always studied God's Word since I was saved. For the longest time, it was an hour a day. However, there were times I fell asleep, there were times that I didn't pay attention, and, unfortunately, there were times when the pastor didn't really teach much. And there were areas of sinful activity which I willfully engaged in, knowing full well that I was wrong and knowing full well that I had the ability to choose right over wrong in fellowship. During that time period, I had a limited amount of blessing from God. I was not cursed and I was not outside of His plan, but there were severe limitations upon my spiritual growth due to these several factors. When I finally made a decision to not flagrantly go against what I knew unequivocally to be God's will, the blessing increased in my life; and, when I fell, the discipline was intensified as well. My point is that I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God was participating in my life. Again, I say this with hesitation. I don't necessarily *feel* that God is more in my life now than He was before, although I have developed more of an emotion appreciation for that which is spiritual. And I can stand back from my life and observe that God has been closely involved in my life.

**And He struck down His adversaries
backward;
shame of everlasting He gave to them.**

Psalm 78:66

**And He struck down His adversaries
from behind;
He gave to them everlasting shame.**

The verb *âthan* (אָתַן) [pronounced *naw-THAHN*], means *to give, to place, to put, to set*. Strong's #5414 BDB #678. Since this is followed by *lâmed* (*to, for, with respect to*), we will go with the rendering *give*. Those who were enemies of Israel are faced with everlasting shame—they will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire.

So there is no confusion, people are saved eternally by believing in Jesus Christ. You do not lose your salvation by being anti-Semitic. However, you lose a great deal of blessing and you will one of those who suffers a moment of shame in your resurrection body. At the point in time referred to, which is at the return of Jesus Christ, anti-Semitism will a sign of disbelief in the Son of God.

I need also to key this verse into a specific historical point. Asaph does not speak in total generalities, but he has in his mind specific historical occurrences to which he is referring. When the Philistines captured the ark in their war against Israel, God's wrath came firmly down on them. **But when they arose early the next morning, they observed that Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of Y^howah. And the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands cut off on the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. Therefore, neither the priests of Dagon nor all who entered Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day. Now the hand of Y^howah was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and He struck them down with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories. When the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god." So they sent and gathered all the lords of the Philistines to them and said, "What will we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" and they said, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath." And they brought the ark of the God of Israel. And it came to pass, after they had brought it around, the hand of Y^howah was against the city with very great confusion; and He struck down the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them. So they sent the ark of God to Ekron and it came to pass as the ark of God came to Ekron that the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel around to me to kill me and my people." They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill me and my people." For there was an deadly confusion throughout the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. And the men who did not die were struck with tumors and the cry of the city went up to heaven (I Sam. 5:4–12).** What had happened here is that God struck them *from behind*. God went behind enemy lines and struck them down. Why Israel did not defeat the Philistines in the first place will be discussed when we get to I Samuel.

**So then He had rejected the tent of
Joseph
and he did not choose from the tribe of
Ephraim.**

Psalm 78:67

**So then He had rejected the tent of
Joseph
and he did not choose from the tribe of
Ephraim.**

Some people are thrown by this verse, thinking that it pops up out of nowhere. However, this is simply the point of this psalm—Asaph examines the history of Israel, taking from specific instances in chronological order, in order to make his argument that God has chosen the tribe of Judah to lead Israel and that those in rebellion in Ephraim are out of line. This is subtly done; Asaph doesn't hit the reader over the head with this. He points out back in vv. 9–12: **Sons of Ephraim, having been properly armed as bow-men, they turn back in the day of battle. They did not guard their covenant with God and they refused to walk in His Law. Then they forgot His doings and the forgot His wonders which He had shown them in the sight of their fathers He had performed wonders in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.** The continued failures of Israel are represented in their tribe, which is why God had chosen the tribe of Judah to lead all of Israel. Furthermore, the line of Jesus Christ does not proceed from the tribe of Joseph. We knew of Judah's dominance as far back as Gen. 49:10, when Jacob blessed his sons, saying, **"The scepter will not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until Shiloh comes."**

At the time that this Psalm was written, Ephraim looked back at the life of Joseph with great fondness because of his greatness. However, our Lord would not come from the tribe of Joseph. In fact, due to the apostasy of the tribe of Ephraim, God placed them under great discipline. “**And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim.**” (Jer. 7:15). Asaph is writing as an observer, seeing that God has shifted the pre-eminence from Ephraim to Judah and from Shiloh to Zion (Jerusalem).

**But He chose a tribe of Judah
the mountain of Zion, which He loved.**

Psalm 78:68

**But He chose the tribe of Judah
the mountain of Zion, which He loved.**

The historic notion of this verse is that Asaph has explained to his readers (listeners) that God would place His Presence in Judah. **Y^ehowah love the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob** (Psalm 87:2). However, as a point of prophecy, it is implied here and stated outright in many other passages that our Lord would come through the tribe of Judah. **For Y^ehowah has chosen Zion. He has desired it for His habitation. “This is My resting place forever. Here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision and I will satisfy her needy with bread. Her priests will I also clothe with salvation and her godly ones will sing aloud for joy. There I will cause the horn of David to spring forth. I have prepared a lamp for My Anointed One. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon Himself His crown will shine.”** (Psalm 132:13–18).

**He built His sanctuary like the high
places;
in the earth He has founded it for a long
duration.**

Psalm 78:69

**He built His sanctuary like the high
places;
in the earth He has founded it for a long
duration.**

I don’t fully grasp here why our Lord’s sanctuary is compared to the high places, except perhaps that it will be throughout the entire earth. The *high places* is usually associated with idolatry, these high places being found throughout the heathen nations. However, here, the sense is probably that it will be built in an exalted place, as on a high hill. The tabernacle and the temple were both erected as shadows which pointed toward Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. We who know this and have this information are enjoined by our Lord Himself to share this with the world. **“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and place it under the peck measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, Who is in heaven.”** (Matt. 5:14–16).

In the last line, most of your Bibles read *like the earth* or *as the earth*. However, in the Septuagint, the Syriac, the Vulgate and in two early printed editions, it reads **in the earth**. The difference between the two words is a k (כ) and a b (ב). Obviously, there is not a lot of difference in the way this looks, but a slight crease in the manuscript could change a *b* into a *k*.

The final word in this verse is *’ôwlām* (עוֹלָם) [pronounced *goh-LAWM*], which means *long duration, perpetuity, antiquity, futurity*. Strong’s #5769 (& #5865) BDB #761. Both Scofield and the study edition of the NASB identifies the sanctuary with the temple of Solomon, which was built in I Kings 6. At this time, I am not certain as to exactly when this psalm was written, but my guess is during the reign of David and prior to the building of the temple of Solomon. Barnes’ Notes concurs with this same time frame, and adds *it was not [built] on Mount Zion, but on Mount Moriah. The name Zion, however, was often given to the whole city.*²⁶ However, we have seen throughout this psalm that prophecy is implied, although not stated outright. The NIV study edition notes: *This...verse is subject to two interpretations: (1) the Lord built his sanctuary as impregnable as a mountain fortress and as enduring and unmovable as the age-old earth, or (2) the Lord built his sanctuary as secure and enduring as the heavens and the earth...and there manifests himself as the Lord of glory...even as he does in the creation.*²⁷ The earth is often

²⁶ Barnes’ Notes, Vol. IV, book 2, p. 308.

²⁷ The NIV Study Bible; ©1995; p. 862.

represented in the Bible as having been created a long time ago²⁸ and is representative of that which is long-lasting and stable.

**Then He chose David His servant
and took him from among folds of
sheep.**

Psalm 78:70

**Then He chose David His servant
and took him from among folds of
sheep.**

Again, the historical notion of this passage is that God chose David to rule over Israel and that David was a great ruler, despite (or, perhaps, because of) his humble beginnings. I Sam. 16 speaks of God choosing David as the ruler of Israel. **And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children? And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and, observe, he is tending the sheep." The Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not set down until he comes here." So he sent and brought him in. Now, he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And Y^ehowah said, "Arise, anoint him; for he is the one."** (I Sam. 16:11–12; see also II Sam. 7:8). Calling David His servant placed David right along side of Moses as a part of God's administration here on earth. Notice, that when God called David, David had no experience in politics and no background in people management. He was not a warrior nor had he been involved in big business. He was not in a royal line or in a dominant tribe. David had absolutely no claim to the throne, by background, vocation or lineage. He was a shepherd. However, God examines the inner man and chose David because David had character.

Application: you may feel as though you are going nowhere, that you have no prospects, the you are in a dead-end, entry-level position; however, the key is personal character. David had great personal character and God promoted him. You don't need to network, you don't need to constantly be looking for a better position; what you need to do is to develop your character. God can take care of the rest.

**From behind suckling ones He brought
him
to be a shepherd of, in Jacob, His
people, and in Israel, His inheritance.**

Psalm 78:71

**From behind suckling ones He brought
him
to be the shepherd of Jacob, His
people, and of Israel, His inheritance.**

The first line of this verse refers to the state in which David was called by God. He was out shepherding his family's sheep. **"Now therefore, thus you will say to My servant David, 'Thus proclaims Y^ehowah of armies, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be ruler over My people Israel." ' "** (II Sam. 7:8; see also II Sam. 5:2 I Chron. 11:2). Poetically, *in Jacob* and *in Israel* both refer to the place and the parallel words *people* and *inheritance* refer to the people. The meaning of this verse is that God brought David from possibly the lowest position in the land and elevated him to the rulership of all Israel. A poetic touch is that this remains couched in terms of shepherding language. There are two reasons for that: (1) first, it reveals the true nature and responsibility of a country's leader; and, (2) it describes our Lord's relation to us. **"And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah. For out of you will come forth a ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel."** (Matt. 2:6 Micah 5:2).

Another point of application is a little more subtle. David was called upon to shepherd God's people, Israel. People who desire to have positions of power and authority often want these positions because they think they can do it better than anyone else and they want to boss everyone around so they can show that they can do it better. Or they want this position so that they can work less, earn more and tell other people to do their work. This is completely the wrong way to interpret a position of power and authority. You are more beholden to those who are under your jurisdiction. It is your duty to watch out for them, to take care of them, to shepherd them. Your loyalties are to be toward those over whom God has placed you. Most people in management do a thoroughly sloppy, lousy job because they went into management for all the wrong reasons. Their motivation is all wrong. They want to rule when their priority should be to serve. Although our system of government has become entirely corrupt, along with

²⁸ It is my opinion that the earth was created perhaps millions of years before man and animal, if not billions of years previous.

most of those in government, the language is correct. A politician is a public servant who has dedicated his life to serving his constituents. The reality may be entirely different, but the vernacular is correct.

**Then He shepherded them according
to the integrity of His heart
and by understanding of His hands He
guides them.**

Psalm 78:72

**Then He shepherded them according
to the integrity of His heart
and by the skilfulness of His hands He
guides them.**

Again, as before, David's rule is set parallel to the rule of Jesus Christ. In both this verse and the previous, we have the verb *râ`âh* (רָעָה) [pronounced *raw-ĠAWH*] and it means *to shepherd, to pasture, to tend to graze, to feed*. Young translates this as *rule*, but I don't believe that really is the correct connotation. Strong's #7462 BDB #944. We also have the word *tôm* (תָּם) [pronounced *tohm*], and it means *completeness, integrity*. Strong's #8537 (& #8550) BDB #1070. This indicates that David took the throne out of service to his people, as God had required, and not for self-gain. The description of the hands of David is the word *t'ebûnâh* (תְּבוּנָה) [pronounced *t'voo-NAWH*], which means *understanding*. Strong's #8394 BDB #108. David's care and guidance of Israel was built upon his understanding.

As I have said, the key is character. Here the Bible testifies as to the character of David—the Bible testifies to the integrity of David's heart. David became the standard thereafter for how all kings were judged. **“And as for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David, saying, ‘You will not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’”** (I Kings 9:4–5).

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