

Psalm 80: God's face shining upon us



Psalm 80 (79) (Mode 3. 3....12 / 4.....271)

This psalm was composed at a time of national military disaster in the northern kingdom, a disaster interpreted as a sign of God's punishment. The occasion may have been the collapse of Samaria (721BC). There are also echoes of the Philistine victories over Saul.

Note mention of the Ark (verse 1) and 'right hand'(verse 17). Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin ('son of the right hand').

The psalmist is pleading with God to turn back to his people in love. 'Then we will never turn back from you'(verse 18).

The first key image in the psalm is the shepherd. God is called 'Shepherd of Israel'(verse 1; compare Psalm 23) – the only time this is used as a title for God.

A Christian reading thinks of Jesus:

‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep’(John 10:11).

‘Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?’(Luke 15:4).

You were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls’(1Peter 2:25).

The second key image is the vine (verse 8).

Compare Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:2-5; Jeremiah 2:21; 12:10;
Ezekiel 17:5-10; 19:10-14.

Again we think of Jesus:

He will come and give the vineyard to others'(Mark 12:9).

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower'(John 15:1).

Listen, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead the flock of Joseph.
Shine forth from your cherubim throne,
upon Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.

O Lord, stir up your might!
Come now and save us!

*Restore us, O God;
let your face shine on us and we will be saved.*

The cover of the ark was guarded by (1Kings 6;
Ezekiel 9-10; 2Kings 19:15; 2Samuel 22:11).

Lord, God of hosts, how long
will you frown on your people's plea?

‘When you stretch out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers, I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes;
cease to do evil, learn to do good;
seek justice, rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan, plead for the widow’(Isaiah 1:15-17).

For food you give us weeping,
an abundance of tears for our drink.

You make us the taunt of our neighbours
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.

‘My tears have been my food day and night,
while people say to me continually

‘Where is your God?’(Psalm 42:3)

‘I eat ashes like bread,

and mingle tears with my drink’(Psalm 102:9).

Restore us, O God;

let your face shine on us and we will be saved.

You brought a vine out of Egypt.
To plant it you drove out the nations.
Before it you cleared the ground.
It took root and spread through the land.

The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches.
It sent out its branches to the sea,
its shoots even to the Euphrates.

‘You brought them in and planted them on the
mountain of your own possession, the place, Lord,
that you made your abode, the sanctuary, Lord, that
your hands have established’(Exodus 15:17).

Then why have you broken down its walls?

It is plucked by all who pass by.

It is ravaged by the boar from the forest,
devoured by the beasts of the field.

‘What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down’(Isaiah 5:4-5).

‘I planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock. How then did you turn degenerate and become a wild vine?’(Jeremiah 2:21)

Turn again, O mighty God, we implore,
look down from heaven, and see.

Visit this vine and protect it,
the vine your right hand has planted.

They have burned it with fire and destroyed it.
May they perish at the frown of your face.

Let your hand be upon the one you have chosen,
the one you have given your strength.
And we will never forsake you again.
Give us life that we may call on your name.

‘Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid,
for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will
help you, I will uphold you with my victorious
right hand’(Isaiah 41:10).

*Restore us, O Lord God;
let your face shine on us and we will be saved.*

God's face shines upon us through the eyes of Jesus.

'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father'(John 14:9).

'He is the reflection of God's glory'(Hebrews 1:3).

'While Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white'(Luke 9:29).

'It is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'(2Corinthians 4:6).