

## Psalm 78

This Psalm contains a criticism of "Ephraim" - **verses 9-11**. The section in Leviticus about priests abstaining from wine points to Isaiah's condemnation of the "drunkards of Ephraim."

See **Isaiah 28:1** - "Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim"

But Ephraim could also represent all of Israel:

See **Psalm 78:8** - "And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God."

**Psalm 78:2** - "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:"

dark = hidden

i.e. The story of the Exodus, which is in itself a parable of the redemption purchased by Christ on the cross. This remained a mystery until His incarnation.

- **Colossians 1:26** - "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:"

- **Romans 16:25** - "the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery concealed for ages past"

- **Colossians 4:3** - "the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains"

## Fathers and Children

**Psalm 78:3-8** - "Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God."

They "set not their hearts aright" - set = *kuwn* - to ready, prepare, establish, sometimes "to set your mind" to something

Same word used here:

- **Joshua 3:17** - "And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm (kuwn) on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan."

They had to have faith in the midst of a miracle happening all around them.

How do we "establish our hearts?" Christ has already done this:

- **1 Thessalonians 3:13** - "so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints."

- **Romans 16:25** - "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen."

The writer of the psalm was including himself among the "fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation."

**Psalm 78:9** - "The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle."

Or: "The sons of Ephraim (are like men) drawing slack bowstrings, who turn back in the day of battle."

The privileges of the first-born which belonged to Joseph (**1 Chronicles 5:1,2**) were assigned to Ephraim by Jacob (**Genesis 48:1**) Archery was a practice in which Ephraim excelled, so the image is apt.

This could refer to an incident during the occupation of Canaan recorded only in **1 Chronicles 7:21-22**, regarding death of two sons of Ephraim, "whom the men of Gath who were born in the land killed, because they came down to take their livestock."

But more likely is stands of Israel as a whole, who - after hearing the "evil report" from the spies - "refused to go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord" (**Deuteronomy 1:26**).

Possibly it could refer to the defeat when the Philistines captured the Ark (**1 Samuel 4:1**) - with another hint of the two sons of Eli who died there, a recollection of Nadab and Abihu. This was at a time when the Tabernacle was located in Shiloh, the area allotted to the Tribe of Ephraim. As the leading tribe of Israel, Ephraim failed during the whole period of the Judges to completely drive out the Canaanite tribes.

The Targum (strangely) says this was referring to a tradition of something that

happened even before the Exodus, because of Ephraim's pride:

Targum: "when they dwelt in Egypt, the children of Ephraim grew proud, they appointed the end (or term of going out of Egypt), and they erred, and went out 30 years before the end, with warlike arms, and mighty men carrying bows, turned back, and were slain in the day of battle;"

Another possibility is when Israel was routed by the Amalekites after God forbade them to go to battle (**Numbers 14:40**).

### **The Rebellions of the Children of Israel**

Despite God's miracles and protection in the Exodus and in the wilderness,

**Psalm 78:10-11** - "They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law; And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had showed them."

**Psalm 78:17-18** - "And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. And they tempted (tested) God in their heart by asking meat for their lust (soul - *nephesh*)."

The contrast is between Ephraim who tested God in their heart by unbelief - who caved and buckled in the face of adversity - and believers who can stand with their heart established by the Lord.

Human strength will always fail, but God's strength is made perfect in our weakness.