

LESSON 9

PSALM 78

PSALM 78: SACRED HISTORY SPEAKS

This psalm is the first true historical psalm that appears in the Book of Psalms. These psalms recount the checkered life of Israel for the purpose of teaching valuable lessons to the reader. Of the five distinctly historical psalms (78; 105; 106; 114; 136), this is the longest and the most detailed psalm.

The main, dramatic event around which these capsules of the past are clustered is the exodus, the supreme miraculous deed of God in the Old Testament concerning Israel. Because the record of Israel's life is given to provide instruction, the psalm is often designated a "didactic" ballad or song. The writer surveys Israel's adventures with God from the exodus to the division of the kingdom. His presentation is more topical than chronological. Without adhering to the Old Testament timeline, his discussion follows the order of the exodus, the plagues, and the occupation of Canaan.

Bearing a uniqueness that is rare among most of the psalms, the content gives a strong clue regarding the date of its writing. The writer favors Judah, the southern kingdom, over the northern kingdom of Ephraim (see vv. 67–72). This fact points to a date following the division of Solomon's kingdom when Jeroboam led the northern tribes into rebellion and apostasy.

The writer invites his hearers to listen to the warnings that arise from the past failures of the chosen nation. The writer goes farther than saying, "Those who are ignorant of history are doomed to repeat it." He says, "Those who do not *take to heart* the lessons learned from history are doomed to repeat them." One can know history and not apply the implications of it.

The writer puts his psalm into a form similar to that of Deuteronomy. Thus, at its heart, the reader confronts a powerful sermon that is drawn from Israel's past.

1. How is this psalm similar to Psalm 77?
2. What does the writer say is the purpose of this psalm?

3. How could remembering their history help the Israelites?
4. Why do we need to be reminded of the Israelites' history?
5. When we turn our backs to God, what can happen?
6. What does God sometimes do to bring us back to Him?
7. What are the negative traits of the Israelites' "fathers" (v. 8)?
8. How can we protect ourselves from the sins mentioned in this psalm?
9. How can we guard our hearts from committing some of the sins we see in this psalm?
10. What should we teach our children according to this psalm?
11. Which aspects of God's character are emphasized?
12. Where do you see examples of God's power?