

Psalm 80

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Christ Church - Moscow, ID

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INTRODUCTION:

In Advent we get to look back on the earnest expectation of Israel for the coming of the long-promised messiah. We see this longing in the numerous prophecies explicitly promising the Coming One and the numerous types, figures and shadows that point to Christ. This longing is also seen in the prayers and psalms of Israel who formalize that longing in the liturgy found in the Law, prophets and Psalms.

Advent readings are normally drawn from the prophecies predicting and promising the coming of Christ, yet the cries of Israel in their darkest times provide a wonderful treasury of texts that give us insight into the longing of Israel for their Messiah. Psalm 80 is one such text.

CONTEXT (vv.4-6; 12-13; 16):

God is judging Israel. Note how God is the active agent in all the hardship and trouble Israel was experiencing

STRUCTURE:

vv. 3, 7 and 18 give the psalm its structure. This is a repeated refrain that lengthens each time it appears. The refrain echoes the Aaronic Blessing of Numbers 6:22-27.

THIS REFRAIN LEAVES THE PSALM HAVING 3 SECTIONS:

Section 1 (vv.1-3) – Introductory plea for help

Section 2 (vv.4-7) – Expression of dismay at God’s current dealings with his people

Section 3 (vv.8-19) – Can be split in 2 – vv.8-13 recalling God’s dealing with Israel (past (8-11) and present (12-13)); vv.14-19 Plea for God to reverse the current distress and act on their behalf.

v.14 echoes the refrain but is not the refrain. This ‘word play’ highlights the verse – you expect the refrain but get something different and so it makes you listen more attentively (or should do!) to the verse and what follows.

v.15 and v.17 are parallel verses. v.15 refers to Israel. v.17 to a representative of Israel who is central to the Psalm's longing and hope.

LUKE 1:76-79:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.



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