

Introduction: We have the privilege this spring to see several new families join, and to see God's covenant displayed in covenant baptism of many children! What a joy when God sovereignly places on these little ones the sign and seal of His covenant! May we appreciate the sovereign grace of God as it is applied to our children by His promise and by His Spirit, and may they grow to make strong and vibrant professions of faith! We turn therefore to Psalm 78 to take encouragement from Christ's work in the lives of His people – even in the youngest. Though so many rejected Christ as their Lord and Savior, Matthew could see that Jesus' "hiding" the truth from His foes through parables was actually a fulfillment of the prophecies about the Kingdom of God in Psalm 78:2.

Just as Matthew received assurance from the Psalms, we need God to address our many anxieties. We do not ask God to sporadically check on us; rather, we ask that He constantly continue His loving-kindness towards us, and that He remain ever mindful of us! Nor is this a selfish prayer, beyond what we should boldly expect to be answered. Jesus Himself, the omnipotent Son of God in our flesh, prayed with thankfulness that "His Father was always with Him". So let us never be ashamed of constantly beating out a path to His throne as we cry out to Him morning and night for His help. We therefore take a break from Matthew's Gospel for the next two weeks in order to learn anew how the Psalms help us find God in our trials and fears.

**Mon/Tues: read Psalm 78:1-6 and 2 Peter 1:16-21.** The first source of encouragement from the Psalms for this week has to do with the *effective application of the secrets of the Kingdom to us by the Spirit of God*. What good would it be for us to have a knowledge of doctrine and the history of the Bible if there were no one to impress these truths upon our hearts? Well, by the Spirit of God, these truths can live not only in our hearts, but in the hearts of our children's children, according to Psalm 78:6. In short, the power of God's Spirit to regenerate us through a living application to us of His word is the *first hidden secret of God's Kingdom, as that Kingdom's goals are announced to us in Psalm 78:1-6*.

But there may be some who object: "There is scarce a mention of the Holy Spirit in Psalm 78, so how can we say that His regenerating work is implied in this Psalm?" Well, the answer is in the description and calling of Asaph, the author of Psalm 78. What was his title, according to 2 Chronicles 29:30? He was a "seer", meaning one who was given inspired revelation, which he wrote down by the hand of the Spirit of God. In the same vein is Matthew 13:35, which identifies Asaph as a "prophet", meaning that he was "carried along by the Spirit of God" when he wrote down his words – even as Peter declares to be the case for all prophets according to 2 Peter 1:21.

Meditate and Pray: Let us learn this lesson about Asaph: his confidence that his teaching in Psalm 78:6 would be effectively passed on from one generation to the next resides in his knowledge that he was penning the very words of God, under the inspiration of God's Spirit. May the Lord likewise increase our faith and confidence in the Spirit's power to *apply to our hearts and those of our children* the very saving power of the Word of God, as we look to Him by faith. Use hymn # 59 to express this confidence in the Word of God, passed on to us from the Spirit-inspired prophets:

*Forever settled in the heav'ns,  
Thy Word, O Lord, shall firmly stand;  
Thy faithfulness shall never fail;  
The earth abides at Thy command.*

*Thy Word and works unmoved remain,  
Thine every purpose to fulfill;  
All things are Thine and Thee obey,  
And all as servants wait Thy will.*

*I should have perished in my woe  
Had not I loved Thy law divine;  
That law I never can forget;  
O save me, Lord, for I am Thine.*

*The wicked would destroy my soul,  
But in Thy truth is refuge sure;  
Exceeding broad is Thy command,  
And in perfection shall endure.*

**Weds/Thurs: read Psalm 78:1-10, Matthew 11:16-19 and Luke 7:33-35.** Jesus declares that His children will vindicate His teaching, so that His wisdom will be proved right by the wise actions displayed in the lives of His spiritual offspring (See Mt. 11:19 compared to Lk. 7:35). Thus Jesus displays His confidence in the life-changing power of His words, knowing them to be the very words of God.

In the same way, we are to have confidence that what Asaph says about the enduring power of God's word from one generation to the next, (Ps 78:6-7), will also take place as we teach our children the truths of God's word and Kingdom.

But here, alas, there can be disagreement – even among reformed brothers. I remember hearing of two such brothers disagreeing after one of them preached a sermon on ‘covenant succession’ or multi-generational Christianity, in which he touted the promises of Psalm 78:1-8. He cited this Psalm as proof that parents are guaranteed the assurance that their children will follow in the ways of faith set down for them by their parents – because Psalm 78:6 promises that faith will succeed from one generation to the next. The disagreeing brother pointed out that the rest of Psalm 78 is proof that covenant children do not always follow the faith of their fathers – consider Ephraim's apostasy as described beginning in Psalm 78:9ff! Ephraim turned away, despite the foundational faith of his grandfather Jacob, and father Joseph!

Meditate and Pray: We are indeed in deep waters of mystery here. Why is it that an Esau can turn away from God's inheritance given through parents like Isaac and Rebekah? How can sons of the high priest Eli refuse to heed their father? How can David raise Absalom, and discover later that he has raised a rebel against God? But let us take to heart the assurance of Genesis 18:25 – “The judge of all the earth will do right”. Even in the cases of inexplicable rejection of the faith, we can rest knowing that God's sovereign justice is perfect and impeccable. Who are we to talk against His judgments in our lives or the lives of our children?

**Fri/Sat/Sun: read Psalm 78:5-17, Psalm 80:1-7 and Psalm 37:23-24.** Are we then left with no real assurance as parents? Can our children turn away from the Lord as easily as the unbeliever who has never heard of God's sweet covenant promises? Well, before answering that question, let me say that it was hard to end the Bible notes yesterday on the perplexing question of disobedient children, who fall away from the covenant of grace. But fall away they did! As soon as Moses, Joshua and the other heroes of the desert generation died, the tribes of Israel, led by Ephraim, quickly turned away to the Baals – as Judges 2:10-16 clearly demonstrate.

But we are not left with the terrible rebellion of Ephraim in Psalm 78 and in Judges 2. Completely by surprise, Asaph – the very same man who prophesied the doom of Ephraim in Psalm 78:9ff, and the replacement of that prominent tribe with the royal tribe of Judah in Psalm 78:67-72, now intercedes in Psalm 80 for Ephraim and the lost ten tribes after their predicted doom has fallen! They are in exile! Lost to Assyria! Yet Asaph prays for them in their almost impenetrable darkness! What a picture of redemptive grace, as Asaph the priest prays for his lost brothers!

Meditate and Pray: Is this not reminiscent of our Lord in His pre-incarnate office in Zechariah 3:1-5, interceding for His people, polluted and stained with sin after the exile? Just as they were defiled by 70 years of exile, so Asaph prays for the same polluted people of God in Psalm 80! And what is the climax of his intercession for the 10 tribes in exile? Well, notice the refrain in Psalm 80:7: “Restore us, O God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved”.

There is our security! His hand holds onto ours even when our sins have taken us into exile! As Psalm 37:24 promises, our feet will never slip to our eternal destruction! Is that not what Peter himself experienced as he attempted in his own strength to walk on the Sea of Galilee? Though he began to drown in his own unbelief, how quickly did the omnipotent hand of the Son of God interpose, intervene, cleave the waves and find Peter? Then, immediately, Peter finds himself brought to safety in Matthew 14:32.

Meditate and Pray: Let us worship with a full assurance that, when we stumble, Christ’s hand is never too short to find us and rescue us from danger. May this give us a great calm even in the midst of the most difficult storms of life. Most important, may the Lord give us hope to pray even for lost ones, exiled because of their sin! Sing about Christ’s strong hand of salvation in this old Gospel hymn (# 631 in our Trinity hymnals):

*From every stormy wind that blows,  
From every swelling tide of woes,  
There is a calm, a sure retreat;  
'Tis found beneath the mercy seat.*

*There is a scene where spirits blend,  
Where friend holds fellowship with  
friend;  
Though sundered far, by faith they meet  
Around one common mercy seat.*

*Oh, let my hand forget her skill,  
My tongue be silent, cold, and still,  
This bounding heart forget to beat,  
If I forget the mercy seat!*

*There is a place where Jesus sheds  
The oil of gladness on our heads;  
A place than all besides more sweet;  
It is the blood bought mercy seat.*

*Ah, whither could we flee for aid,  
When tempted, desolate, dismayed,  
Or how the hosts of hell defeat,  
Had suffering saints no mercy-seat?*