

"Turn Us Again"

When God's People Need Renewed

Psalm 80

The superscription connects this psalm to worship of Israel, as all the psalms "to the chief Musician" do. Its musical direction was "upon Shoshannim-eduth," a term that likely refers to a known tune or style of performance. Though the exact meaning is uncertain, the title reminds us that this cry for restoration was not merely private for Asaph personally — it was meant to be sung and heard by the people of God together.

The repeated refrain (vv. 3, 7, 19) gives us the heart of this psalm: *"Turn us again...cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."* This psalm is a plea for restoration, for renewed favor, and for God's saving intervention. This refrain guides the various segments of the psalm.

I. THE CRY TO THE SHEPHERD (VV. 1-3)

A. The Shepherd of Israel addressed (v. 1a)

1. This psalm appears to pick up where the previous one ended, again setting before us the Lord and His people in shepherd-flock imagery.
2. *"Give ear"* — a poetic way of asking God to hear their prayers.
3. *"O Shepherd of Israel...thou that dwellest between the cherubims"*
 - a) *"O Shepherd of Israel"* speaks first of Jehovah Himself, but finds its fullest fulfillment in Christ, the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, and the

Chief Shepherd—showing that He was, is, and always will be God.

John 10:11

¹¹ I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

Hebrews 13:20

²⁰ Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

1 Peter 5:4

⁴ And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

b) *"Thou that dwellest between the Cherubims"*

- (1) This would have reminded them that the One to whom they were praying was Jehovah (1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15).
- (2) The mercy-seat imagery ultimately finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and His once-for-all atoning work. In Romans 3:25, Christ is set forth as the *propitiation*, using the same Greek term that is translated "*mercyseat*" in Hebrews 9:5.

Romans 3:25

²⁵ Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

4. *"Thou that leadest Joseph as a flock"* — this is the ministry of the shepherd.

"Leadeſt" (לָהֲדֹת) — means to lead; to drive or guide a flock; to conduct or direct. The picture is not merely feeding sheep but guiding, governing, and protecting the flock.

This same shepherding concept appears again in the New Testament in the work of the pastor, who serves as an under-shepherd of the flock of God.

B. The plea for God to "shine forth" and save (vv. 1b-2)

1. *"Shine forth"* (נִפְאֵר) — reveal Yourself in power and glory; make Your presence known openly.
2. *"...Stir up thy strength, and come and save us"* (v. 2) — this is parallel to *"shine forth"* in verse 1 — the plea is that God would not remain hidden, but would reveal Himself in power and come to the aid of His people.

C. The first refrain: restoration requested (v. 3)

1. *"Turn us again"* (וְשׁוּבֵנוּ) — turn us back; restore us. It must be God's work. His people have wandered and are under His chastening hand, and they know that unless He mercifully turns them, they will remain where they are.

When God's children drift away from Him, they don't fix themselves by their own strength, but with the merciful work of God.

Lamentations 5:21

²¹ Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.

Jeremiah 31:18

¹⁸ I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself *thus*; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed *to the yoke*: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou *art* the LORD my God.

2. "*Cause thy face to shine*" — the prayer is for God to turn toward them in favor and mercy. We need that same prayer today.
3. "*And we shall be saved*" — initially, this is speaking of national deliverance of Israel from the attack of the enemy, but the principle is still precious for the believer today. When God's people are in distress, chastening, or spiritual weakness, their hope is still in the restoring favor of God.

II. THE CHASTENING OF THE FLOCK (VV. 4-7)

A. God's anger felt (v. 4)

1. "*O LORD God of hosts*" (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת) is not merely a formal title, but the psalmist's appeal to the covenant God ("LORD") who rules over all powers ("God of hosts").
2. "*How long wilt thou be angry with the prayer of thy people?*"
 - a) "*How long*" — this is a common question found in the poetical books where faith is being tested. The title of God here shows that this is still a prayer of faith.
 - b) Notice it doesn't say "angry with thy people," but with the "prayer of thy people". The psalmist

mentions God's anger against their "prayer" to show how deep the estrangement feels: the people are praying, yet God's displeasure still seems unremoved, so even their cries appear to find no immediate relief.

- c) We must never assume that the mere act of praying, apart from repentance, humility, and God's restoring mercy, automatically removes the Lord's chastening hand.

That does not mean prayer is wrong; it means that sin, chastening, and divine displeasure affect the communion of God's people with Him.

B. God's people filled with tears (v. 5)

1. Verse 4 reveals the reason for their misery — God's anger; verse 5 reveals the result of it — a life filled with tears.
2. This is not a passing moment of sorrow on their part. The terms "bread" and "drink" suggest what is regular, continual, and sustaining. Instead of joy and provision, their ordinary experience has become grief.

C. God's people laughed at (v. 6)

The psalmist is acknowledging that their national humiliation has not happened by accident. God has so withdrawn His protecting favor that His people have become an object of strife and scorn among their neighbors. Their enemies laugh because Israel appears forsaken and powerless.

The same God who had once hedged them about had now, in chastening, exposed them to reproach.

D. The second refrain: restoration requested again (v. 7)

1. The prayer is growing in urgency and weight from one refrain to the next — “*O God*” to “*O God of hosts*.” This verse emphasizes that the One who must restore them is the sovereign Lord over all powers. Their distress has deepened, but so has their appeal.
2. The deeper their trouble becomes, the higher their view of God must rise.

III. THE CONCERN FOR THE VINE (vv. 8-19)

A. The vine planted and prospered (vv. 8-11)

1. In these verses, Israel is pictured as a vine brought out of Egypt and planted by God in the promised land.
2. The emphasis falls on what God did for His people: He brought them out (v. 8a), drove out the nations before them (v. 8b), planted them (v. 8c), prepared room for them (v. 9a), and caused them to take deep root (v. 9b). Under His favor the vine spread and flourished (v. 10).
3. The point is clear — Israel’s strength and fruitfulness were never self-produced; they were the result of the gracious care of God.
4. The same principle remains true today: whatever fruitfulness God’s people enjoy is the result of His gracious hand.

B. The vine broken and devoured (vv. 12-13)

The contrast in these verses is dramatic and heartbreaking. The same vine God once planted and prospered now lies exposed and ravaged. The psalmist is showing what becomes of God's people when His protecting hand is withdrawn in chastening.

C. The prayer for the vine (vv. 14-16)

1. A prayer for God to return (v. 14a)

"Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts..."

The people who have been crying, *"Turn us again,"* now plead for God Himself to return. Their restoration depends entirely upon His renewed presence and favor — and it still does.

2. A prayer for God to regard the vine (v. 14b)

"Look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine"

a) The psalmist is asking God not to remain distant. He pleads for God to look upon their condition, take notice of their misery, and graciously intervene.

b) *"Visit"* (דָּרַךְ) does not mean a casual visit, but a divine intervention in mercy.

3. A prayer grounded in God's own work (vv. 15-16)

a) Their plea is grounded in what God Himself has done, not in what they deserve. They ask Him to look upon the vine because it is the vine His own hand planted.

D. The concluding plea for restoration (vv. 17-19)

1. The plea for God's hand upon His chosen one (v. 17)

In its immediate setting, this is a plea for God to strengthen the one appointed to lead and represent His people. Yet the language rises high enough that it also points us forward to Christ, the true Man of God's right hand, in whom the hope of God's people is finally secured.

Psalm 110:1

¹ The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

Hebrews 1:3

³ Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Hebrews 8:1

¹ Now of the things which we have spoken *this* is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;

2. The plea for steadfastness through divine restoration (v. 18)
 - a) "*So will not we go back from thee*" — this is the intended result of God's restoring work.
 - b) "*Quicken us, and we will call upon thy name*"
 - (1) "*Quicken us*" (קִיּוּנוֹ) — translated "revive us" in Ps. 85:6. Literally, give us life or make us alive. As used here, it indicates a renewal of strength.

- (2) *"And we will call upon thy name"* — their continued calling upon God depends upon His reviving grace.

3. The plea for full restoration (v. 19).

- a) The climax of the address — the psalm ends with the strongest form of the refrain.

- (1) V. 3 — *"O God"*

- (2) V. 7 — *"O God of hosts"*

- (3) V. 19 — *"O LORD God of hosts"*

- b) The psalm ends where its hope has always been — God must turn them, smile upon them, and save them.

Conclusion:

This psalm is the cry of a chastened people who know that their only hope is in the restoring mercy of God. The Shepherd who once led them, the Lord who planted the vine, and the God of hosts who rules over all power is the only One who can turn them again. And so, the psalm leaves us with this great lesson: when God's people are broken, their hope is not in themselves, but in the God who restores.