

Youth Teaching Resources

September 20, 2020



A Prayer List for Today

Psalm 119:33-40—"Teach Me, Lord"

Psalm 103:1-13—"Forgive Me, Lord"

Psalm 78:1-7, 34-38—"Convict Me, Lord"

Psalm 25:1-9—"Deliver Me, Lord"

www.nurturingfaith.net

Subscribe to *Nurturing Faith* to access the core Bible content for this lesson.
Find links and videos related to this lesson.

“Convict Me, Lord”

Psalm 78:1-7, 34-38

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

Choose people throughout history that have influenced who you are as a person and post about them across your social media platforms.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip “That’s My Mission” from *Saving Private Ryan*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize it to the best of your ability, and facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) Why does everyone want to know his background?
- 2) What is his background?
- 3) How does his background influence who he is as a soldier?
- 4) How will being a soldier impact his future?
- 5) How does our past inform us about today?
- 6) How do stories of our faith help inform our personal faith of today?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading Psalm 78.1-7,34-38. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony’s commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) How is this psalm a riddle?
- 2) Why does the psalmist want the people to learn from the past?
- 3) What deeds does the psalmist say they can tell of the future generations?
- 4) Why did the psalmist believe they were one generation away from paganism? Were they correct? Are we one generation from paganism? Explain.

Information *continued*

- 5) What cycle have the people of Israel had with God? What does the psalmist have to say about this?
- 6) How did Israel survive this continual cycle?

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the “Digging Deeper” portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) What historical accounts are in this psalm?
- 2) When was this psalm written? Why is that important?
- 3) What genre of song would you describe this psalm as?
- 4) How is hearing part of teaching?

You may also want your group to discuss “The Hardest Question” if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as “The Hardest Question”: Does God kill without cause?

Transformation

Conclude your session by introducing the Social Media Challenge for the week:

Choose people throughout history that have influenced who you are as a person and post about them across your social media platforms.

After introducing the challenge, allow students to share some of the people who have influenced who they have become today.

Close with a prayer thanking God for the cloud of witnesses that have come before us and helped us to be the people we are today.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Oops—Those who keep up with the Revised Common Lectionary texts might wonder why we’ve chosen a portion of Psalm 78 rather than one of the official Psalm readings for “Proper 20,” which would have been Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45 or Psalm 145:1-8.

I could suggest some thematic reason for this, but here’s the truth: when working through the lectionary to determine this year’s sequence of lessons, I didn’t notice that the liturgical texts for “Holy Cross Day” were listed between those for the 15th and 16th Sundays after Pentecost. As a result, the text I chose was from the “Holy Cross Day” readings rather than from the readings for September 20.

Since our *Nurturing Faith* sequence published well in advance, I thought it best to stick with the published text rather than switching. It fits thematically with other texts of the season.

For some unclear reason, the lectionary text includes vv. 1-7 and 34-38, cutting sections off in the middle. We will consider vv. 1-8 and 32-39.

A historical psalm—Like Psalms 105, 106, and 136, Psalm 78 reflects on events from Israel’s remembered history as a vehicle for speaking to present and future needs. The history is not a carefully researched and objective matter, as we think of in modern Western history writing. Rather, as elsewhere in the Bible, it is confessional, reciting traditions that have proven memorable and instructive for Israel’s benefit.

The psalm’s bones—Psalm 78 moves back and forth through Israel’s history in attempting to teach an important lesson for Israel’s future. The psalm is lengthy, and shifts constantly between themes of God’s provision, judgment, and grace on the one hand, and Israel’s stubborn rebellion and forgetfulness on the other.

The psalm defies a neat or simple outline. The one presented below, suggested by R. J. Clifford, sees the structure as an introduction followed by two “recitals” that follow roughly the same order (from “In Zion and David a New Beginning: An Interpretation of Psalm 78,” in *Traditions in Transformation*, ed. Frank Moore Cross [Winona Lake: Eisenbraun’s, 1981], pp. 121-41; cited by Marvin E. Tate in *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco: Word Books, 1990], p. 287).

Introduction: vv. 1-11

First Recital:

Wilderness events: vv. 12-32
gracious act (vv. 12-16)
rebellion (vv. 17-20)
divine anger and punishment (vv. 21-32)
Sequel: vv. 33-39

Second Recital:

From Egypt to Canaan: vv. 40-64
gracious act (vv. 40-55)
rebellion (vv. 56-58)
divine anger and punishment (vv. 59-64)
Sequel: vv. 65-72

Digging Deeper *continued*

When was it written?—The psalm looks back on Israel’s history, but from what perspective? How far back was the psalmist looking? Some have argued that the psalm may have been written as early as the 10th century BCE, the time of Solomon, though others date it as late as the post-exilic period. The psalm does not specifically mention the division of the kingdoms after Solomon or the destruction of the Northern Kingdom (referred to in the psalm as “Israel” or “Ephraim”) in 722 BCE, but the vocabulary of the psalm seems to presume it. It is likely, then, to have been written in Judah sometime after Israel was conquered by the Assyrians.

Psalming the Blues—Years ago, when I was a pastor, recalling that Israel’s psalms were actually songs, I sought to communicate the message of Psalm 78 by recasting it as a traditional blues song. Just imagine a sort of “Mississippi Blues” beat in the background ...

*Well the Lord looked down on Israel, didn't like what God saw—
There were Hebrews down in Egypt making bricks without any straw—
so the Lord called out to Moses, and sent him to Pharaoh,
With plagues upon the land he said “Now let my people go,”
God brought them out of Egypt, and set the people free,
but soon they turned their hearts away and chose idolatry,
they give me the blues—I got the Israelite blues—
I got the idolizin' compromisin' ugly livin' Israelite blues . . .*

*They were traveling through the desert, and they had no food to eat,
No water they could drink or even cool their blistered feet,
so the Lord sent bread from heaven, and quail upon the wind,
and water from a rock so that they all could drink it in,
but the more the Lord had blessed them, the more they all complained,
you'd think they wanted caviar and rocks filled with champagne,
they give me the blues—I got the Israelite blues—
I got the fussin' cussin' sinnin' grinnin' wicked men and willful women blues . . .*

*God brought them 'cross the Jordan, into the promised land.
He delivered every enemy into the army's hand,
but they soon forgot the One who had given victory,
they acted like the Canaanites and worshiped every tree,
they gave their hearts to Baal and their gifts to Asherah,
they failed to teach their children how to pray and love the law,
they give me the blues—I got the Israelite blues—
I got the idolizin' compromisin' ugly livin' Israelite blues . . .*

*Well the Lord gave up on Ephraim, but in Judah God did trust,
God gave the throne to David and said make it there or bust,
so now we have a kingdom, and our king is David's son,
we hope that he will lead us to be faithful to the One,
who brought us out from Egypt and who blessed us on the way,*

Digging Deeper *continued*

*we hope that we'll remember and we hope we will not stray,
but we get the blues—we get the Israelite blues—
we get the fussin' cussin' sinnin' grinnin' wicked men and willful women blues . . .*

Don't be shy: sing it for the class!

The making of a Maskil—The superscription to Psalm 78 labels it a “Maskil.” The term is derived from a Hebrew verb that means “to be prudent,” or “to ponder.” That is a fitting description of this psalm, which is designed to inspire meditation on how one should act in response to God's goodness, especially in the light of Israel's history. We would also do well to ponder its message.

Hear, and teach—Jews refer to the famous text found in Deut. 6:4-9 as the “*Shema*” (sh-MAH), after its first word, the imperative “Hear!” The faithful continue to recite this text and place tiny scrolls containing it inside ornamental *mezzuzahs*, which they attach to their doorposts. Orthodox Jews also follow v. 9 literally by placing certain scriptures inside small leather boxes (called phylacteries) and binding them to their upper arm and forehead when they pray.

Here's the text, from the NRSV: *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Does God kill without cause?

The hardest question relative to this psalm is unlikely to come from the lectionary's chosen text, but those who read through the entire psalm may be taken aback by vv. 30-31, which claim that God killed the best of the Israelites when they complained. When the people had complained about having only manna to eat, the text says, God sent flocks of quail, more than the people could eat:

*But before they had satisfied their craving,
while the food was still in their mouths,
the anger of God rose against them
and he killed the strongest of them,
and laid low the flower of Israel.*

How are we to understand this troublesome text? First, we note that in vv. 21-31 the psalmist is recounting the tradition found in Num. 11:1-35, with some embellishment. The Numbers account of a "great plague" is expanded with the statement that God intentionally selected the choicest Israelites to kill. Did God kill without cause?

If we return to Numbers 11, we find a similar account in vv. 1-3: when the people complained excessively, God became angry and "the fire of the LORD burned against them, and consumed some of the outlying parts of the camp" (v. 1b). When the people asked Moses to intercede, he prayed for them "and the fire abated" (v. 2b).

The next verse begins with a reference to certain "rabble among them" who "had a strong craving" and instigated a public cry for meat, recalling the finer fare they had enjoyed in Egypt. This raises God's ire, and is paralleled in Ps. 78:21-22, which says God was "full of rage; a fire was kindled against Jacob, his anger mounted against Israel, because they had no faith in God, and did not trust his saving power."

In both Numbers and Psalms, then, God was already angry at the people's faithlessness prior to sending enough manna and quail to stuff their gullets to bursting.

The judgment, in the form of a plague (according to Num. 11:33) that struck the strongest Israelites (according to Ps. 78:31), is thus to be understood as being in response to the earlier complaints, timed to coincide with the fulfillment of the people's demand for meat.

The collusion of deliverance and judgment seems harsh to modern ears, but made perfect sense to the teachers of Israel, who firmly believed that blessing or cursing followed tit for tat upon obedience or rebellion. Arthur Weiser observed that the account demonstrates "how closely God's grace and his judgment are related to each other" (*The Psalms: A Commentary*, trans. H. Hartwell, Old Testament Library [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962], p. 541).

The Hardest Question *continued*

Modern readers may still quail at the thought of God unleashing divine anger on the weak and complaining Israelites, but the ancients tended to attribute all things to God, plagues included. The teacher behind Psalm 78 was convinced that God had good cause to wreak havoc on a recalcitrant people, but also that judgment was tempered with compassion and grace (vv. 38-39).