

Dr. David Emanuel, Psalms of the Exodus,

Session 2: Psalm 78 - God Chose David

Podcast Audio Overview

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Hey everybody, welcome back. Are you ready to go deep with us today? Today we're going to be tackling Psalm 78. Okay.

Which is a pretty amazing psalm. Yeah. It's actually the second longest psalm in the whole Bible.

Wow. So we've got a lot to cover. Okay.

But we're going to find some surprises in this text, I think, even if you've been reading the Bible for a long time. I think so too. Our guide for this deep dive is a lecture by Dr. David Emanuel.

Oh, excellent. Who is an expert on Exodus Psalms? This is going to be good.

So this psalm isn't just like a straightforward retelling of the Exodus story. Right. It's structured differently.

Yes. Dr. Emanuel makes the point that, you know, the ancient writers weren't, like, obsessed with getting the timeline perfect. They were more focused on like the teaching the message.

I see. So it challenges us to kind of rethink how we even read these ancient texts. Oh, for sure.

It's not just like getting caught up in what happened, but like, why are they presenting it this way? Right. What's the author trying to get us to see? Exactly. To understand.

So what are some of the big ideas that jump out in Psalm 78? Well, Dr. Emanuel highlights two key themes. Okay. The first one is the emphasis on learning from history, especially from the mistakes that our ancestors made.

Yeah. It's like the psalm is saying, hey, pay attention, watch what happened before you so you don't do the same thing. Right.

Don't make the same mistakes. Exactly. Okay.

The second theme is a little more complex. Okay. It's about the selection of David and Judah, which represent the Southern kingdom, and then the rejection of Ephraim, who symbolizes the Northern kingdom.

Gotcha. And so this reflects kind of the political and theological shifts that were happening during that period of Israelite history. Okay.

So we've got learning from the past, and we've got the power dynamics of ancient Israel. Right. But then there's this part in Psalm 78 that I found really fascinating.

Yeah. It mentions a story about Ephraim's unfaithfulness. Okay.

On a day of battle. Okay. But this story isn't found anywhere else in the Bible.

Yeah. You've hit on something really important. Fact.

Yeah. This is a prime example of what scholars would call lost traditions. Oh, interesting.

These are ancient stories, beliefs, or practices that were passed down orally, but they never made it into the official text of the Bible. So it's like this hidden puzzle piece that we've found. Exactly.

That makes you wonder what other stories or details are out there that we just haven't discovered yet. I know. It's so cool.

It's a reminder that the Bible, while it's super important, doesn't necessarily contain everything from ancient Israelite thought and history. Right. Okay.

So let's talk about those Exodus miracles for a second. I mean, who doesn't love a good plague story? Right. But Psalm 78 describes them with, shall we say, a little more artistic license than we see in the book of Exodus or the book of Numbers.

I think what's important here is the way that the Psalm is using those familiar stories to really emphasize God's power. So, like, take the manna, for example. Okay.

Psalm 78 describes it as raining down from heaven. Okay. But if you look at Exodus, it says that it appeared on the ground like this fine, flaky substance.

So they're adding a little wow factor. Right. But why do you think the psalmist is embellishing these miracles in that way? It's not just about making a good story.

I think it's about highlighting the magnitude of God's power. I see. Like the awe-inspiring nature of what God was doing.

So it's like, hey, you think these miracles were impressive? Well, they were even more amazing than you can imagine. Exactly. Okay.

And speaking of manna, did you know that it was often referred to as angel food in ancient Jewish tradition? Wait, really? Yeah. So the Israelites thought they were literally eating food from heaven. Yeah.

And this concept of manna as bread of angels actually connects to a broader set of beliefs. Okay. It echoes the story of the prophet Elijah, who was sustained by bread given by an angel in the wilderness.

Right. And so it shows how these ideas about the divine realm and angelic beings were intertwined with the Israelites' understanding of their own history and their relationship with God. Okay.

So even something as simple as food. Right. Can have this deeper symbolic meaning.

Absolutely. Okay. So we've got these incredible miracles, but there are also some things that are missing.

Yeah. From Psalm 78. Right.

Like surprisingly. Yeah. Like the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Right. That whole event is missing. Yeah.

And that's not an accident. Really? It makes us ask, why would the psalmist leave out such a central event? Yeah. Like it feels like that should be front and center.

Right. Maybe the psalm's focus is less on the legal aspects of the Torah. Okay.

And more on the personal relationship between God and the Israelites. I see. Highlighting their ongoing struggles.

Okay. And the importance of learning from past mistakes. So it's like, look, you guys were messing up even before you got the 10 Commandments.

So let's focus on getting the basics right. Exactly. Okay.

So then there's this really jarring image of God awakening as if from sleep after the Israelites sin. Yeah. And I mean, that might seem a little strange to modern readers.

I can see that. But the concept of a sleeping deity wasn't uncommon in ancient Israelite thought. No, not at all.

So how does that work? I always thought God was supposed to be all-knowing and ever-present. Right. How can a God like that sleep? Yeah.

It's not about God literally taking a nap. Okay. This imagery is a way of expressing the idea that sometimes it seems like God is distant or inactive.

Okay. So it's like God's giving humans space to make their own choices. Exactly.

Even if those choices are bad. Yeah. And then sometimes it takes a major wake-up call to get their attention again.

Yeah. That's a great way to put it. And we see the same idea in other biblical passages, like in Isaiah and Psalm 44, where God is called on to wake up and intervene.

So there's a precedent for this. Yeah. Okay.

So we've got miracles, we've got rebellion, we've got a sleeping deity. Right. This psalm is full of drama.

It is. But there's one detail that really struck me. Okay.

David is the only person who's named in this entire psalm. That's a great observation. Why is that such a big deal? Well, remember what we said about how important names were in ancient cultures? Yeah.

By naming David, the psalm is highlighting his importance. Okay. It's highlighting his selection as God's chosen leader.

Right. And remember earlier how the psalm talks about God as Israel's shepherd? Yeah. Leading them through the wilderness.

Exactly. Right. So it's like David is inheriting that role.

He's becoming the shepherd of God's people. Yeah. It's a powerful statement about David's legacy and his place in God's plan.

Wow. So there's a lot more going on in this psalm than just a rehash of the Exodus story. Oh, yeah.

Definitely. It's about leadership. It's about learning from the past.

Right. It's about understanding this really complex relationship between God and humanity. Yeah.

And speaking of the Exodus, let's move on to those plagues. Okay. Now, you might be surprised to learn that the order and the number of plagues in Psalm 78 are different than what we see in the book of Exodus.

It's true. Wait, really? I thought the plagues were fixed like a set list. Well, both accounts have a lot of the same plagues.

Okay. But there are some variations. So Psalm 78 follows a seven-plague tradition while Exodus has 10.

Okay. But in ancient Israelite thinking, both the number seven and 10 represent completeness. So it's not about getting bogged down in the exact number.

Right. It's about understanding that they represent this complete and utter control that God has over nature. Exactly.

Okay. Some scholars also suggest that the plagues might be arranged in order of increasing severity. Oh, interesting.

Leading up to that devastating plague of the firstborn. What stood out to you about the plagues in Psalm 78? Well, one thing is that Moses and Aaron are totally missing. Oh, wow.

Yeah. It's all about God acting directly. Interesting.

No middleman. So that really reinforces the point that it's about God's power. Yes, absolutely.

His power and involvement; he's the one calling the shots. Gotcha. Okay.

And there's one more detail about the plagues that might surprise you. Do you remember the plague of flies? Of course. Who could forget that one? So the Hebrew word there, Eirov, actually means swarms.

It's not specifically flies. Okay. And get this, Jewish tradition interprets this plague as being swarms of wild beasts.

Wild beasts instead of insects. Not insects. Wow.

Okay. Wild beasts. That changes the whole picture.

Right. What's the significance of that? Well, for one thing, it paints a much more vivid picture. Yeah.

And maybe even terrifying. Yeah. Right? This interpretation is also supported by the fact that the Psalm talks about these swarms devouring things.

Okay. And if we look at the Targums, which are ancient Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible. Right.

They also describe this plague as involving wild animals. Wow. So instead of just annoying insects, we've got like lions and tigers and bears.

Oh my, roaming the land. Right. It adds a whole other layer of intensity to this story.

Definitely. Makes you question what you thought you knew. Yeah.

What assumptions did we bring to this text? Exactly. That we have to rethink now? Yeah. It's not just flies.

It's this potential for chaos and destruction. Right. But it also kind of highlights the fact that these ancient texts weren't meant to be taken as literal scientific reports.

Absolutely. They often use poetic and symbolic language to convey deeper theological truths. So it's not about getting bogged down in those specifics.

It's about understanding the message. The why behind the what. The why behind the what.

I like that. Right. It really makes you question any assumptions you might have going in.

Right. It's not just flies. It's this whole potential for chaos.

Absolutely. And destruction. Yeah.

And it really highlights how these texts weren't meant to be taken as literal scientific reports. Right. Yeah.

Using a different kind of language to get across these truths. So it's not about getting bogged down in the specifics, but understanding the bigger message. Like, what are they trying to say? Exactly.

So as we move towards the end of Psalm 78, there's this really powerful shift in focus. Okay. We see God rejecting Ephraim and then choosing Judah as the location for the temple.

Right. And this echoes that second theme that we talked about. Yeah.

That selection of David and Judah represents the southern kingdom. And the rejection of Ephraim representing the north. So it's like this pivotal moment in Israelite history.

Yeah. But it's more than just like a political event. Exactly.

What does this choice tell us about, like, how the Israelites saw their relationship with God? Yeah. And how does that connect to the Psalms' message of learning from the past? It's almost like they're saying, well, you know, God chose Ephraim before, but they messed up. They didn't learn from their mistakes.

So now God is choosing Judah. Right. Hopefully he'll get it right.

Yeah. It highlights the importance of remaining faithful to God. Okay.

And upholding the covenant. Okay. And remember, it's David who's specifically chosen to lead God's people.

Right. He inherits this role of shepherd, taking on a huge responsibility. What kind of challenges do you think he faced? Oh, I'm sure it was incredibly difficult.

Yeah. Especially considering the Israelites' history of rebelling against God. Right.

They didn't exactly have the best track record. No, they didn't. He had to deal with internal conflicts and external threats.

Yeah. And the constant pressure of living up to God's expectations. Right.

So this brings us back to those two big themes that we talked about at the beginning: learning from the past. Right. And understanding the consequences of our actions.

Yeah. Psalm 78 is like a masterclass in both of those. It's like the Psalm is saying, don't be like those Israelites who kept rebelling and forgetting God's goodness.

Learn from their mistakes. But what about US? How can we apply this ancient wisdom to our lives today, thousands of years later? That's the million-dollar question, isn't it? Yeah. Like, what blessings are we taking for granted? How can we be better shepherds in our own lives and communities? It's a really good question.

It's a powerful invitation to kind of reflect on our own journeys. Yeah. To examine our own hearts and to see where we might be falling short.

It's so interesting because we think of Psalm 78 as this ancient text, but it's still so relevant today. It really is. It's a living, breathing word that still speaks to us.

Okay. So before we wrap up our deep dive today, there are just a couple more details that I want to point out that I think add another layer to our understanding. Okay.

Sounds good. Okay. So first of all, it's worth noting that while the Psalm does mention the word Torah, which means instruction, it doesn't actually describe the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

That's interesting. Which is kind of strange, right? It is. You would think that event would be front and center in a Psalm all about the Exodus.

Yeah. So what do you make of that? Well, it could suggest that the Psalm is focusing less on the legalistic aspects of the Torah and more on that broader relationship between God and his people, their covenant, their promises, and their responsibility to be faithful. So it's more about the heart of the matter than just the rules.

Exactly. Okay. And then there's this other really intriguing part.

Okay. Where it mentions Ephraim retreating during a battle, which, again, we don't see anywhere else in the Bible. Right.

It's one of those lost traditions. Yeah. It's like this hidden piece of history.

Right. It makes you wonder what else is out there. It does.

It's a reminder that the Bible isn't necessarily exhaustive. There might be other stories and traditions- that we just don't know about. That we haven't discovered yet.

And then there's that part about the plagues. Yeah. Where Psalm 78 describes the frogs as destroying people.

Oh, right. Yeah. Which isn't how they're depicted in Exodus.

Yeah. It seems like the psalmist is adding a little drama there. Right.

A little literary flair. Okay. So it's not just about embellishment.

Right. These little variations in the language might actually serve a purpose? I think so. They might highlight a particular aspect of the story or emphasize a certain theological point.

So even the tiniest details can be important. And then remember the plague of hail- yes. In Psalm 78, it says that it affected both plants and animals.

Right. And that's interesting because it's an example of a literary technique. Okay.

Called chiasmus. Chiasmus. Chiasmus.

Okay. Which is often used in biblical poetry. Break that down for me.

So chiasmus is basically a reversal of elements in two parallel phrases. I see. So in this case, plants and animals are reversed to create this mirrored effect.

So it's like a poetic mirror image. Exactly. Okay.

And it's a subtle way of emphasizing God's power over all creation. Gotcha. And then finally, remember how Moses and Aaron are totally absent- yes.

From Psalm 78's account of the plagues? Yes. It's all about God acting directly. Right.

It's showcasing his power. Yeah. His agency.

And it creates this really stark contrast- between God's actions and the Israelites' constant complaining and disobedience. Right. They're always grumbling and rebelling.

It's like God's doing all of this for you, and you're still not happy. Yeah. Seriously.

Like, come on. Yeah. It highlights that human tendency to take God's blessings for granted.

Yeah. And to focus on what we lack instead of what we have. So even though Psalm 78 focuses on the exodus- right.

It's really a story about us. Yes. It's about the human condition, our struggles- our flow.

Our capacity for both gratitude- yes. And rebellion. It's a story that transcends time and culture.

It's a story about the relationship between God and humanity. Yeah. And it's full of lessons that still resonate with us today.

Right. Yeah. It makes you wonder if we're still making those same mistakes today.

It really does. Taking God's blessings for granted, focusing on what we don't have instead of what we do. It's definitely something to think about as we wrap up our deep dive into Psalm 78.

Okay. I'm just really struck by how this ancient text speaks to the timeless struggles of humanity. Yeah.

It's this reminder that history isn't just facts and dates. Yeah. It's like a tapestry of human experiences and divine interventions- wow.

And these are enduring truths that can still guide us. We're all part of this one big story. Right.

This grand narrative that connects us to the past and the future. Precisely. Yeah.

So as we finish up our look at Psalm 78- okay. I want to leave you with one final thought-provoking question. Shoot.

If this Psalm is ultimately about learning from the past- right. What lessons can we take away from it today, thousands of years later? What can we learn from the Israelites' triumphs and failures? That's a really good question. It challenges us to look at our own lives- and our own communities and ask ourselves, are we making the same mistakes? Right.

Are we missing those lessons? That history is trying to teach us. And it's not just about avoiding those mistakes. Right.

It's about understanding the principles of faithfulness, obedience- Right. Gratitude that is all woven throughout the Psalm. And recognizing God's presence even when it's hard.

Yes. Even when it feels like he's distant- right. Or silent.

Being good stewards of what we've been given. Yes. Absolutely.

Wow. So much to think about. It is.

It's a lot to unpack. What an amazing deep dive this has been. It really has.

This Psalm is packed with so much. So anyone listening- yeah. I encourage you to go spend some time with Psalm 78 yourself.

Yes. Read it slowly. Yeah.

Go thoughtfully. Yeah. Let it challenge you.

Inspire you. Yeah. And maybe even surprise you.

And don't stop there. No. Keep going.

Check out some of the other Exodus songs. There's a whole world of wisdom waiting to be discovered. Absolutely.

Well, that wraps up our deep dive into Psalm 78 for today. It was a pleasure. Thanks for joining us, and we'll see you next time for another deep dive.