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## LESSON NOTES (EXPLORE THE BIBLE SERIES)

STUDIES IN THE HYMNBOOK OF HOLY SPIRIT—LIFESTYLE CHOICES  
 (Psalm 1 & 78, The Lord's Day, June 4 & 11, 2017)

### OVERVIEW

“Sessions 1 & 2” *Learning to Meditate from Early Believers*

Much of what we know about the Lord God is nonsense. Our culture changes through language, legacy, and latitude the true source of knowledge about the Lord God. When we examine His sharing with us, Holy Spirit makes it much clearer about who He, the Father, and the Son is all about. Trying to get our brains wrapped around the immensity, power, and sovereignty of the Lord God Yahweh has always cramped the style of the spiritually sentient human. In fact, the more we consider seriously His nature, the more we begin to rely upon our own language, legacy and latitude of acceptance—rather than the language, legacy, and latitude **He** has provided. His provision? The Hymnbook of the Lord God.

**A QUESTION TO GET YOU THINKING:  
 HOW DO WE WRAP OUR BRAINS AROUND  
 THE REALITY OF OUR CREATOR?**



Yes, the Hymnbook of the Lord God is one of the great treasures of all time. For example, from the Psalms we can learn how the Lord God thinks about us (“What is mankind that You are mindful of him?” Psalm 8:4; Hebrews 2:6). We can cherish His sense of humor (“You formed the whale to play in the ocean.” Psalm 104:26). We can praise Him for little things (“Wine to gladden the heart.” Psalm 104:15), and the big things (“He set the earth’s foundations.” Psalm 104:5). We can sense the beauty of His partnership (“He guards the path of those who follow His path.” Psalm 1:6). And just as beautiful, although scary, we can recognize His righteous standard for those who choose another path—sheer, futile destruction (Psalm 1:4-5).

Human beings are stupid, often socially, and usually spiritually. Psalm 78 speaks to our spiritual stupidity. We get thirsty and when quenched, we kvetch about food. We get fed and kvetch about our weight. We praise the Lord God in some of the most idolatrous ways—lying through our teeth, “worshipping” Him no differently than the pagan who wishes to assuage his/her deity. We end our talks with Him with an abracadabra-like “In your name...” or “In Jesus name...” and tack on the magic “Amen.” Never realizing just what lie we are espousing by such cliché-ridden language. Psalms can be tough on us. Good.

*Advice about lifestyle—choose your destination.*

**(1)** How secure and prosperous are those who do not follow the path of counsel of the wicked. Nor do they stand with the lifestyle of sinners. Nor do they sit with the crowd of the arrogant.

Q Who are the “blessed?” Food? Shelter? Clothing? How then can you be a blessing to others?

Q What is the best counsel of the wicked? [independence; self-importance]

Q What lifestyle of those who are separated from the Lord God entices you the most?

Q About what are most people most arrogant [scoffers]? [their biological legacy; the size of their car/house/boat]

**(2)** The secure one, in contrast, finds pleasure, yes delight in listening to the Lord’s voice. The blessed one is he who meditates on the Lord’s commands, daily, consistently, often.

Q What are the delights, the pleasures in obeying [listening to the voice] of the Lord God?

Q What does it mean to “meditate” on His commands? [hagag, intense study & reflection]

**(3)** The secure one is like a tree planted near abundant water; that tree yields fruit when it should; i.e., in its season—its leaves never wither, never fall off.

The secure one in God succeeds in everything he attempts. [see footnote 20]

Q How did the Lord God instruct us to judge others? Matthew 7:1 vs. 7:16

Q How can the Godly person succeed in “everything” he attempts? [footnote 20]

**1:1** How blessed<sup>2</sup> is the one<sup>3</sup> who does not follow<sup>4</sup> the advice<sup>5</sup> of the wicked,<sup>6</sup>

or stand in the pathway<sup>7</sup> with sinners,

or sit in the assembly<sup>8</sup> of scoffers!<sup>9</sup>

**1:2** Instead<sup>10</sup> he finds pleasure in obeying the Lord’s commands;<sup>11</sup>

he meditates on<sup>12</sup> his commands<sup>13</sup> day and night.

**1:3** He is like<sup>14</sup> a tree planted by flowing streams;<sup>15</sup>

it<sup>16</sup> yields<sup>17</sup> its fruit at the proper time,<sup>18</sup> and its leaves never fall off.<sup>19</sup>

He succeeds in everything he attempts.<sup>20</sup>

**(4)** Compare to the wicked. Like the remnants of wheat/grain, they're driven away by the wind. **(5)** So? The wicked will not be able to withstand judgment [compare their fruit]. Nor can they sit comfortably with the Godly.

- Q What is chaff? How do you recognize chaff? For what is it good?
- Q What winds drive the chaff away from the grain, the fruit as it were?
- Q Why is judgment more of a problem for the wicked than the blessed?
- Q Why do the wicked have trouble "sitting with groups of the righteous?"

**(6)** Therefore, the Lord God Yahweh guards the paths of those who follow, who stay within His path. But, the path of the wicked ultimately ends in destruction. They perish.

- Q Why does the Lord God Yahweh guard the path/the way of the godly? [blessed]
- Q How do we stay on the path? [see verse 2]
- Q So who wanders from the path? Why?
- Q How do the wicked perish? Why do they perish?

**1:4** Not so with the wicked!

Instead <sup>21</sup> they are like wind-driven chaff. <sup>22</sup>

**1:5** For this reason <sup>23</sup> the wicked cannot withstand <sup>24</sup> judgment, <sup>25</sup>

nor can sinners join the assembly of the godly. <sup>26</sup>

**1:6** Certainly <sup>27</sup> the Lord guards the way of the godly, <sup>28</sup>

but the way of the wicked ends in destruction. <sup>29</sup>

TEXTUAL CLARIFICATIONS & ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS FOR MEDITATION: PSALM 1<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **sn** *Psalm 1*. In this wisdom psalm the author advises his audience to reject the lifestyle of the wicked and to be loyal to God. The psalmist contrasts the destiny of the wicked with that of the righteous, emphasizing that the wicked are eventually destroyed while the godly prosper under the Lord's protective care.

<sup>2</sup> **tn** The Hebrew noun is an abstract plural. The word often refers metonymically to the happiness that God-given security and prosperity produce (see v. 3; [Pss 2:12; 34:9; 41:1; 65:4; 84:12; 89:15; 106:3; 112:1; 127:5; 128:1; 144:15](#)).

<sup>3</sup> **tn** *Heb* “[Oh] the happiness [of] the man.” Hebrew wisdom literature often assumes and reflects the male-oriented perspective of ancient Israelite society. The principle of the psalm is certainly applicable to all people, regardless of their gender or age. To facilitate modern application, we translate the gender and age specific “man” with the more neutral “one.” (Generic “he” is employed in vv. 2-3). Since the godly man described in the psalm is representative of followers of God (note the plural form צַדִּיקִים [tsadiqim, “righteous, godly”] in vv. 5-6), one could translate the collective singular with the plural “those” both here and in vv. 2-3, where singular pronouns and verbal forms are utilized in the Hebrew text (cf. NRSV). However, here the singular form may emphasize that godly individuals are usually outnumbered by the wicked. Retaining the singular allows the translation to retain this emphasis.

<sup>4</sup> **tn** *Heb* “walk in.” The three perfect verbal forms in v. 1 refer in this context to characteristic behavior. The sequence “walk–stand–sit” envisions a progression from relatively casual association with the wicked to complete identification with them.

<sup>5</sup> **tn** The Hebrew noun translated “advice” most often refers to the “counsel” or “advice” one receives from others. To “walk in the advice of the wicked” means to allow their evil advice to impact and determine one's behavior.

<sup>6</sup> **tn** In the psalms the Hebrew term רְשָׁעִים (rýsha'im, “wicked”) describes people who are proud, practical atheists ([Ps 10:2, 4, 11](#)) who hate God's commands, commit sinful deeds, speak lies and slander ([Ps 50:16-20](#)), and cheat others ([Ps 37:21](#)).

<sup>7</sup> **tn** “Pathway” here refers to the lifestyle of sinners. To “stand in the pathway of/with sinners” means to closely associate with them in their sinful behavior.

<sup>8</sup> **tn** Here the Hebrew term מוֹשָׁב (moshav), although often translated “seat” (cf. NEB, NIV), appears to refer to the whole assembly of evildoers. The word also carries the semantic nuance “assembly” in [Ps 107:32](#), where it is in synonymous parallelism with לְקָהָל (qahal, “assembly”).

<sup>9</sup> **tn** The Hebrew word refers to arrogant individuals ([Prov 21:24](#)) who love conflict ([Prov 22:10](#)) and vociferously reject wisdom and correction ([Prov 1:22; 9:7-8; 13:1; 15:12](#)). To “sit in the assembly” of such people means to completely identify with them in their proud, sinful plans and behavior.

<sup>10</sup> **tn** Here the Hebrew expression כִּי־אִם (ki-'im, “instead”) introduces a contrast between the sinful behavior depicted in v. 1 and the godly lifestyle described in v. 2.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the NET Bible's Textual Notes (<https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Psalms+1:1>)

<sup>11</sup> **tn** *Heb* “his delight [is] in the law of the Lord.” In light of the following line, which focuses on studying the Lord’s law, one might translate, “he finds pleasure in studying the Lord’s commands.” However, even if one translates the line this way, it is important to recognize that mere study and intellectual awareness are not ultimately what bring divine favor. Study of the law is metonymic here for the correct attitudes and behavior that should result from an awareness of and commitment to God’s moral will; thus “obeying” has been used in the translation rather than “studying.”

<sup>12</sup> **tn** The Hebrew imperfect verbal form draws attention to the characteristic behavior described here and lends support to the hyperbolic adverbial phrase “day and night.” The verb הָגַגַּ (hagag) means “to recite quietly; to meditate” and refers metonymically to intense study and reflection.

<sup>13</sup> **tn** Or “his law.”

<sup>14</sup> **tn** The Hebrew perfect verbal form with *vav* (ו) consecutive here carries the same characteristic force as the imperfect in the preceding verse. According to the psalmist, the one who studies and obeys God’s commands typically prospers.

<sup>15</sup> **tn** *Heb* “channels of water.”

<sup>16</sup> **tn** *Heb* “which.”

<sup>17</sup> **tn** The Hebrew imperfect verbal forms in v. 3 draw attention to the typical nature of the actions/states they describe.

<sup>18</sup> **tn** *Heb* “in its season.”

<sup>19</sup> **tn** Or “fade”; “wither.”

**sn** The author compares the godly individual to a tree that has a rich water supply (*planted by flowing streams*), develops a strong root system, and is filled with *leaves* and *fruit*. The simile suggests that the godly have a continual source of life which in turn produces stability and uninterrupted prosperity.

<sup>20</sup> **tn** *Heb* “and all which he does prospers”; or “and all which he does he causes to prosper.” (The simile of the tree does not extend to this line.) It is not certain if the Hiphil verbal form (יַצְלִיַח, *yatsliakh*) is intransitive-exhibitive (“prosper”) or causative (“causes to prosper”) here. If the verb is intransitive, then כֹּל (*kol*, “all, everything”) is the subject. If the verb is causative, then the godly individual or the Lord himself is the subject and כֹּל is the object. The wording is reminiscent of [Josh 1:8](#), where the Lord tells Joshua: “This law scroll must not leave your lips! You must memorize it day and night so you can carefully obey all that is written in it. Then you will prosper (literally, “cause your way to prosper”) and be successful.”

<sup>21</sup> **tn** Here the Hebrew expression כִּי־יִמָּ (ki-’im, “instead,” cf. v. 2) introduces a contrast between the prosperity of the godly depicted in v. 3 and the destiny of the wicked described in v. 4.

<sup>22</sup> **tn** *Heb* “[they are] like the chaff which [the] wind blows about.” The Hebrew imperfect verbal form draws attention to the typical nature of the action described.

**sn** *Wind-driven chaff*. In contrast to the well-rooted and productive tree described in v. 3, the wicked are like a dried up plant that has no root system and is blown away by the wind. The simile describes the destiny of the wicked (see vv. 5-6).

<sup>23</sup> **tn** Or “Therefore.”

<sup>24</sup> **tn Heb** “arise in,” but the verb is used metonymically here in the sense of “stand”; “endure,” as in [1 Sam 13:14](#) and [Job 8:15](#). The negated Hebrew imperfect verbal form is here taken as indicating incapability or lack of potential, though one could understand the verb form as indicating what is typical (“do not withstand”) or what will happen (“will not withstand”).

<sup>25</sup> **tn Heb** “the judgment.” The article indicates a judgment that is definite in the mind of the speaker. In the immediate context this probably does not refer to the “final judgment” described in later biblical revelation, but to a temporal/historical judgment which the author anticipates. Periodically during the OT period, God would come in judgment, removing the wicked from the scene, while preserving a godly remnant (see [Gen 6-9](#); [Ps 37](#); [Hab 3](#)).

<sup>26</sup> **tn Heb** “and sinners in the assembly (or “circle”) of [the] godly.” The negative particle and verb from the preceding line are assumed by ellipsis here (“will not arise/stand”).

**sn** The *assembly of the godly* is insulated from divine judgment ([Ps 37:12-17, 28-29](#)).

<sup>27</sup> **tn** The translation understands ׀ as asseverative. Another option is to translate “for,” understanding v. 6 as a theological explanation for vv. 3-5, which contrasts the respective destinies of the godly and the wicked.

<sup>28</sup> **tn Heb** “the Lord knows the way of the righteous.” To “know a way” means, in its most basic sense, “to recognize/acknowledge a pathway, route, or prescribed way of life” (see [Josh 3:4](#); [Job 21:14](#); [Ps 67:2](#); [Isa 42:16](#); [Jer 5:4-5](#)). Here it could refer to the Lord recognizing the behavior of the godly and, by metonymy, rewarding their godliness with security and prosperity (resulting in the translation, “the Lord rewards the behavior of the godly”). The present translation takes the verb in the sense of “mark out” (cf. [Job 23:10](#)), which metonymically could mean “watch over, protect, guard.” In this case the “way of the godly” is not their behavior, but their course of life or destiny; a translation reflecting this would be “the Lord protects the lives of the godly” or “the Lord watches over the destiny of the godly” (cf. NEB, NIV, NRSV). The Hebrew active participle ׃׃׃ (yodea’, “knows”) has here a characteristic durative force.

<sup>29</sup> **tn Heb** “but the way of the wicked perishes.” The “way of the wicked” may refer to their course of life ([Ps 146:9](#); [Prov 4:19](#); [Jer 12:1](#)) or their sinful behavior ([Prov 12:26](#); [15:9](#)). The Hebrew imperfect verbal form probably describes here what typically happens, though one could take the form as indicating what will happen (“will perish”).

## TEXTUAL ISSUES PSALM 78:1-8; 32-39

Psalm 78:1-8. *Listen to My voice.* Listen up. Listen to My voice; you are My people, and I AM your Teacher...

I will teach you via narratives through which you can learn previously unknown things from the past about what you've previously heard from your ancestors.

We will not hide this knowledge from the children—we will tell generation why the Lord God Yahweh is worthy of praise. Why His deeds reflect power, and wonder, and evoke praise.

Consider the statutes He decreed for our forefathers, like Jacob to teach their children. These children were also commanded to teach their children, on and on until this day.

If done, then our children will put their trust in God; neither will they forget His deeds. They will listen to His voice. They will not grow up like their ancestors, stubborn and rebellious. Their *raison d'être* (i.e., their reason for being, their "heart") will not be like their ancestors who were not faithful to the Lord God.

- Q What is the Hebrew simile/metaphor often translated for "obey?" [See Joshua 10:14]
- Q Why did the Lord God teach using parables/proverbs/stories? [See Matthew 13:34-35]<sup>2</sup>
- Q What is the spiritually pragmatic value of a "statute" from the Lord God Yahweh?
- Q What are we to teach our children so they can teach their children? [Hint: Deuteronomy 6:4-9]<sup>3</sup>
- Q Why are we to teach our children the parables from the voice of the Lord God? [Faith, remember, listen/obey; submissive, contented, loyal to HIM]

## PSALM 78:1-8

O my people, hear my teaching;  
listen to the words of my mouth.

<sup>2</sup>I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old—<sup>3</sup>what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.

<sup>4</sup>We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.

<sup>5</sup>He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, <sup>6</sup>so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.

<sup>7</sup>Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. <sup>8</sup>They would not be like their forefathers—a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.

<sup>2</sup>Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."

<sup>3</sup>Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone (i.e., "Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone.") 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.



## CONTEXTUAL ISSUES PSALM 78: 32-39

Psalm 78:9-31. *Spoiled Children*. We forgot what Yahweh had done, and the wonders He had shown us. We refused to listen, to obey His statutes.

From dividing the sea to leading by cloud during the day and fire by night, the Lord God split rocks for water.

Yet, we continued to sin. Then it really hit the fan—We complained, “Can God really spread a table in the desert?”<sup>4</sup> When we saw the water, we again tested the Lord God—“Can He also give us food?”

When Yahweh heard our hearts, He was furious—we did not believe in God nor trust His deliverance.

Nonetheless, the Lord God opened the doors of heaven and we ate the bread of angels [“manna” meaning “What’s this?”] Food came like the dust, birds as numerous as sand on the beach. We ate until we had more than enough. The Lord God had give us what we craved.

BUT, even while the food was still in our mouths, we began to go back to our rebellious ways. God was furious, and to exact justice, He put to death the sturdiest among us, our young men were cut down.

Q What did we eat in the desert?  
Why didn’t it satisfy us?

Q Why was the Lord God able to conclude we did not believe in Him? [verse 22]

Q Why is the Lord God so easily enraged?

## PSALM 78:9-31

The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle; <sup>10</sup>they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law.

<sup>11</sup>They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them. <sup>12</sup>He did miracles in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan. <sup>13</sup>He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand firm like a wall. <sup>14</sup>He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night. <sup>15</sup>He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas; <sup>16</sup>he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers.

<sup>17</sup>But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High. <sup>18</sup>They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved. <sup>19</sup>They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the desert?"

<sup>20</sup>When he struck the rock, water gushed out, and streams flowed abundantly. But can he also give us food? Can he supply meat for his people?"

<sup>21</sup>When the LORD heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, <sup>22</sup>for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance.

<sup>23</sup>Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; <sup>24</sup>he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven.

<sup>25</sup>Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat.

<sup>26</sup>He let loose the east wind from the heavens and led forth the south wind by his power. <sup>27</sup>He rained meat down on them like dust, flying birds like sand on the seashore. <sup>28</sup>He made them come down inside their camp, all around their tents. <sup>29</sup>They ate till they had more than enough, for he had given them what they craved.

<sup>30</sup>But before they turned from the food they craved, even while it was still in their mouths, <sup>31</sup>God's anger rose against them; he put to death the sturdiest among them, cutting down the young men of Israel.

<sup>4</sup>See an interestingly different use of this “spreading a table” metaphor in Psalm 23:5



## TEXTUAL ISSUES PSALM 78: 32-39

Psalm 78:32-39. *Lesson from the Creator.*

In spite of all of God's bounty, His deliverance and His mercy, we kept on sinning. In spite of His wonders, we still did not believe. So? He ended our days, in terror and in futility. Whenever God killed us, we would seek Him again, and we did so eagerly.

When this happened, we remembered that God is our Rock—God the Most High is our Redeemer. BUT, then we would flatter Him with our mouths. We lied with our tongues—"I surrender all!" Balderdash. Our reason for existence was neither loyal, nor were we faithful to the covenant He had established for His glory and our good.

Through all our profane behavior, He was nonetheless merciful [מֵרַחֵם; ra-hum, *full of compassion*]; He did not destroy us completely. Again and again He restrained His anger; again and again He did not let His full wrath be stirred.<sup>5</sup> He remembered we were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.<sup>6</sup>

- Q Why did we keep on sinning? Or, why do we still keep on sinning?
- Q Why is the end filled with terror and futility for those being rejected by the Lord God?
- Q What spiritually pragmatic value is death?
- Q How do we flatter the Lord God, yet lie with our tongues? Identify an example of God-flattering. Lying with our tongues: "I surrender all..."
- Q What is the spiritually pragmatic value of remembering we are merely a "passing breeze that does not return?" Is this actually true?
- Q Why didn't the Lord God Yahweh destroy us all who lie with our tongues and flatter Him with idolatrous praise? What makes praise idolatrous? [Hint: to curry favor. Like the magician's "abracadabra," ending prayer with a quick "In Jesus name, amen..."]

## PSALM 78:32-39

In spite of all this, they kept on sinning; in spite of his wonders, they did not believe. <sup>33</sup>So he ended their days in futility and their years in terror. <sup>34</sup>Whenever God slew them, they would seek him; they eagerly turned to him again.

<sup>35</sup>They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. <sup>36</sup>But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues; <sup>37</sup>their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant.

<sup>38</sup>Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. <sup>39</sup>He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.

<sup>5</sup>Revelation 6:16-17: They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"

<sup>6</sup>James 4:14: Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a *mist* that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

ADVANCED BIBLE COMMENTARY FOR PSALM 1 & 78<sup>7</sup>

**Psalm 1** Human witness and date unknown. Godly wisdom here declares the final outcome of the two "ways": "the way of sinners" (v. 1) and "the way of the righteous" (v. 6). As an introduction to the *Hymnbook of Holy Spirit*, this psalm reminds the reader

- (1) that those of whom the Psalms speak (using various terms) as the people of God, those whom he receives in his presence and favors with his salvation and blessing, must be characterized by righteousness—sinners have no place among them (v. 5; see Ps 15; 24)—and
- (2) that the godly piety that speaks in the Psalms is a faithful response to God's revealed (and written) directives for life—which is the path that leads to "blessedness."

**1:1** Speaks progressively of association with the ungodly and participation in their ungodly ways. *Blessed*. The happy condition of those are close to the Lord God by revering the Lord and doing his will (see 94:12; 112:1; 119:1-2; 128:1; Pr 29:18; cf. Ps 41:1; 106:3; Pr 14:21; Isa 56:2), who put their trust in him (see 40:4; 84:5,12; 144:15; 146:5; Pr 16:20; Isa 30:18; Jer 17:7; cf. Ps 2:12; 34:8), and so are blessed by God (see especially 41:1-3; 144:12-14; see also Mt 5:3-12).

The *Hymnbook of Holy Spirit* begins by proclaiming the blessedness of the godly and ends by calling all living things to praise God in his earthly and heavenly sanctuaries (Ps 150). *walk in*. Order his life according to *counsel*. Deliberations and advice (see Pr 1:10-19). *stand*. Station oneself. *sinners*. See v. 5; those for whom evil is habitual, for whom wickedness is a way of life. *sit*. Settle oneself. *mockers*. Those who ridicule God and defiantly reject his law (see Pr 1:22).

**1:2** *on his law he meditates*. Seeking guidance for life in God's law rather than in the deliberations of the wicked. *day and night*. See Joshua 1:8.

**1:3** *like a tree . . . does not wither*. See Jeremiah 17:8; a simile of the blessedness of the righteous. Such a tree withstands the buffeting of the winds and, flourishing, it blesses man, animals and birds with its unfailing fruit and shade.

**1:4** *like chaff . . . blows away*. A simile of the wretchedness of the wicked. Chaff is carried away by the lightest wind, and its removal brings about cleansing by extracting what is utterly useless (see Ruth 1:22).

**1:5** *will not stand in the judgment*. Will not be able to withstand God's wrath when he judges (see 76:7; 130:3; Ezr 9:15; Mal 3:2; Mt 25:31-46; Rev 6:17). *assembly*. The worshiping assembly at God's sanctuary (as in 22:25; 26:12; 35:18; 40:9-10; 111:1; 149:1; see Ps 15; 24).

*righteous*. One of several terms in the Hebrew Scriptures for God's people; it presents them as those who honor God and order their lives in all things according to his will. In every human relationship they faithfully fulfill the obligations that the relationship entails, remembering that power and authority (of whatever sort: domestic, social, political, economic, religious, intellectual) are to be used to glorify the Lord God, not to exploit others.

**Ps 78** A psalm of instruction--of warnings not to repeat Israel's sins of the past but to remember God's saving acts and marvelously persistent grace and, remembering, to keep faith with him and his covenant. Here as elsewhere (pervasively in the Hebrew Scriptures), trust in and loyalty to God on the part of God's people are covenant matters. They do not spring from abstract principles (such as the formal structure of the God-human

<sup>7</sup>Adapted, corrected, and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV © 1996.

relationship) or from general human consciousness (such as feelings of dependence on "God" or a sense of awe in the presence of the "holy"), but they result from remembering God's mighty saving acts. Correspondingly, unfaithfulness is the more blameworthy because it contemptuously disregards all God's wonderful acts in his people's behalf (see Psalm 105-106).

The psalm probably dates from the period of the divided monarchy (note verse 9 referring to Ephraim) and may have been composed about the time of the prophet Hosea (both Hosea and Isaiah speak frequently of the northern kingdom as Ephraim since it was the dominant tribe of that realm). Israel's unfaithfulness is here epitomized in the sin of Ephraim (v. 9); the psalm concludes by recalling the rejection of "Israel" (v. 59) and the abandonment of Shiloh (v. 60), but the election of Judah and Mount Zion (v. 68). The psalm was no doubt a warning to worshippers at Jerusalem not to fall away after the manner of their brothers to the north.

By placing this psalm next to Ps 77, the editors of the Psalter ranked David alongside Moses (and Aaron) as the Lord's shepherd over his people (see vv. 70-72; 77:20) who brought the exodus to its (provisionally) climactic fruition by completing the conquest of the promised land—a perspective apparently shared by the author of the psalm.

The psalm is composed of 77 (Hebrew) lines (72 numbered verses) and seven stanzas—with an 11-line introduction. After the introduction, the structure of the stanzas is symmetrical: 8 lines, 16 lines, 9 lines, 16 lines, 9 lines, 8 lines. The two sequences of 16 lines-9 lines constitute a thematic cycle, while the two 8-line stanzas frame the double cycle and underscore the contrast between the sin of Israel ("Ephraim," vv. 9-16) and the unending mercy of God to his people—mercy that is evidenced in his victory over his enemies and his election of Zion (in Judah) and David (vv. 65-72).

**78:1-8** *O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.* This is the title to the Psalm and believers would quote this to refer to the whole psalm. Jesus the Christ did this (see Matthew 27:45) by referring to Psalm 22—i.e., “My God, My God. Why have you forsaken Me?”

**78:2** *parables . . . hidden things.* The Hebrew underlying these two expressions occurs in 49:4 ("proverb," "riddle") and Ezekiel 17:2 ("parable," "allegory")—which raises the question of whether the author is here influenced by prophetic use of wisdom language. While both terms had specialized uses—those reflected in 49:4—they apparently also became conventionalized more generally for instruction in a wide variety of forms.

*things from of old.* Things for instruction from the past. Mt 13:35 refers to this verse as a prophecy of Jesus' parabolic teaching. Matthew apparently perceived in this psalm a prophetic voice anticipating that of the great Prophet. The "parables" of the psalm are, however, more like the teaching of Stephen (Acts 7) than that of Jesus.

**78:4-5** The Lord's saving acts and covenant statutes—both must be taught, and in relationship, for together they remain the focal point for faith and obedience down through the generations (see vv. 7-8). **78:4** *not hide them.* See Job 15:18.

**78:5** *teach their children.* See, e.g., Ex 10:2; 12:26-27; 13:8,14; Dt 4:9; 6:20-21.

**78:8** *stubborn and rebellious.* Like a rebellious son (see Dt 9:6-7,24; 31:27). *generation.* A people with certain characteristics (see 24:6; Dt 32:5,20), thus not limited to the exodus generation (see vv. 9-11,56-64).

**78:9-16** The northern kingdom violated God's covenant, not remembering his saving acts (a message emphasized by the prophets Amos and Hosea). Our history with God has been a long series of rebellions on our part (vv. 9-16,32-39,56-64), beginning already in the desert (vv. 17-31,40-55). **78:9** *men of Ephraim.* The northern kingdom, dominated by the tribe of Ephraim.

*turned back.* Neither the tribe of Ephraim nor the northern kingdom had a reputation for cowardice or ineffectiveness in battle (see, e.g., Dt 33:17). This verse is best understood as a metaphor for Israel's betrayal of God's covenant (see v. 10), related to the figure of the "faulty bow" (v. 57).

**78:12-16** A summary reference to the plagues in Egypt and to the water miracles at the Red Sea and in the desert. In the two cycles that follow (vv. 17-39,40-64), further elaboration intensifies the indictment. **78:12** See Ex 7-12. *Zoan.* A city in the northeast part of the Nile delta (see v. 43; see also Nu 13:22).

**78:17-31** Our rebelliousness in the desert; God's marvelous provision of food--and his anger. **78:17** *continued.* Although no sin in the desert has yet been mentioned, the poet probably expected his readers to recall (in conjunction with the miraculous provisions of water just mentioned) how the people grumbled at Marah because of lack of water (see Ex 15:24).

**78:18** See Ex 16:2-3. *put God to the test.* See vv. 41,56; see also note on Ex 17:2.

**78:20** *food . . . meat.* The poet is probably combining and compressing two episodes (Ex 16:2-3; Nu 11:4).

**78:21** *wrath.* See vv. 31,49-50,58-59,62; see also note on 2:5.

**78:23** *opened the doors of the heavens.* For this imagery see Ge 7:11; 2Ki 7:2; Mal 3:10.

**78:25** *angels.* Lit. "mighty ones." The Hebrew word is used only here of the angels, but reference is clearly to heavenly beings (see 103:20).

**78:26-28** See Ex 16:13; Nu 11:31. **78:26** *east wind . . . south wind.* Since the quail were migrating from Egypt at this time, the south wind may have carried them north and the east wind may have diverted them to the desert area occupied by the Israelites (the book of Numbers does not provide wind directions).

**78:27** *like dust . . . like sand.* Similes for a huge number (see note on Ge 13:16).

**78:32-39** Rebelliousness, which became Israel's way of life, showed itself early in the desert wandering (vv. 17-31) and continued throughout that journey. **78:32** *did not believe.* That God could give them victory over the Canaanites (see Nu 14:11).

**78:33** The exodus generation was condemned to die in the desert except for those who knew not the difference between right and wrong (see Deuteronomy 1:39; see also Nu 14:22-23, 28-35).

**78:36** See Isaiah 29:13:

The Lord God Yahweh says, "These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is made up only of rules taught by men."