

**Psalms: The Songs of the People of God**  
**Psalm 78: The Need to Remember and Not Forget**  
Sunday, June 30, 2019

**Introduction**

We are a people who are prone to forget. We must work hard to remember. The need to remember and not forget is a theme that runs throughout this Psalm. We must remember God's mercy and faithfulness. The temptation is to forget, which leads to doubt, which turns to unbelief and rebellion. If we are going to remain faithful to God, especially in difficult times, it's essential that we remember who God is and all that He has done on our behalf.

Psalm 78 is often classified as a historical psalm because the majority of the psalm is given to a retelling of the history of the nation of Israel, from their time in Egypt to the reign of King David. But this isn't history for the sake of records; it's history with a lesson (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13). What the psalmist shows throughout the psalm is God's faithfulness to his people despite their unfaithfulness. He also shows that their repeated rebellion was due in large part to their inability to remember.

Another major theme in the psalm is that each generation has a responsibility to teach the next generation about the works and words of God. In the historical section of the psalm we are told of two consecutive generations who were unfaithful. The people not only failed to remember for themselves, but they failed to adequately teach the next generation.

**The Psalmist's Introduction (78:1-8)**

- The psalmist's introduction lays out his intentions: He's going to tell a true parable and he's calling on the people to listen and respond (vv. 1-4).
- Throughout the OT the people of God are told that they have a responsibility; not only to remember for themselves, but to tell the next generation about what God has done (works) and what God has said (words) (Ex. 10:1-2; Deut. 6:6-9, 20-25; Ps. 145:1-4). This teaching serves to produce hope and trust in God and protect them from sin and rebellion.

**A Forgetful and Rebellious People and a God of Mercy and Faithfulness (78:9-72)**

- In vv. 9-72 the psalmist recounts the history of the nation of Israel from Zoan to Zion (Egypt to Jerusalem). The retelling emphasizes both the faithfulness of God and the forgetfulness of the people.
- **Structure** – While the structure can be debated it seems that there are two parallel sections that trace the history of Israel and highlight their forgetfulness and God's faithfulness (vv. 9-39 and vv. 40-64). In vv. 65-70 the psalmist makes it clear that God will keep His promises to His people in spite of their rebellion.

**The Psalmist's True Parable: Part One (78:9-39)**

- A. God's People Forget and Became Unfaithful (vv. 9-11)
- B. God's Faithfulness to His People in the Wilderness (vv. 12-16) (Exodus 13:17-22; 17:4-7; Numbers 20:6-11)
- C. Forgetfulness Leads to Doubt and Rebellion Against the 'Most High' (vv. 17-20)
- D. God Heard and was Angry: He Shows Mercy and Brings Judgment (vv. 21-31) (Numbers 11:31-35)
- E. God's Forgiveness Despite Insincere Repentance (vv. 32-39) (Hosea 6:1-7)

**The Psalmist's True Parable: Part Two (78:40-64)**

- A. God's People Don't Remember and Became Unfaithful (vv. 40-43)
- B. God's Faithfulness to His People from Egypt to the Promised Land (vv. 44-55) (Exodus 7-11)
- C. The People's Rebellion Against the 'Most High' (vv. 56-58)
- D. God Heard and was Angry: He Shows Mercy and Brings Judgment (vv. 59-64) (1 Samuel 4:1-11)

**The Psalmist's True Parable: Part Three (78:65-72)**

- In this final section the psalmist highlights God's faithfulness to his people. While the tribe of Ephraim was unfaithful and Shiloh is taken, God chooses to show favor to the tribe of Judah and establishes Jerusalem (Zion). The ark is taken from Shiloh but finds a new home on Mount Zion.
- In this final section the psalmist also introduces David, the one through whom God establishes an everlasting throne.

**Conclusion:**

This psalm (and the psalmist's parable) shows so clearly the results of forgetting. Forgetfulness leads to doubt, which turns to unbelief. Unbelief leads to disobedience and rebellion. Our hope is that God is merciful and faithful and that He will keep His promise to save His people.

For now, we must be faithful to remember and not forget. We must be committed to knowing the words and works of God, especially His work of salvation in Jesus. And we must be diligent in teaching the next generation so that they too will hope in God and not be given to sin and rebellion.