

Psalm 78:12-16 Delivered, Guided, Provided
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Introduction

For nine years I preached the Sunday after Christmas, each time from Psalm 78. The psalm basically is a rebuke to the people of God for forgetting his great wonders. The psalmist promises that he will pass on these glorious deeds to the next generation. So he recounts those wonders, as well as the failures of God's people to obey God and to remember what he had done. We are going to look at verses 12-16, which summarize God's works. They provide a tidy three-point sermon about what God did for his people. He delivered them; he guided them; and he provided for them.

Text

God Delivered

¹² *In the sight of their fathers he performed wonders
in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.*

The wonders of God that take center stage in the history of Israel are those involving their exodus from Egypt. The exodus is the great story of deliverance. No wonders top those wonders; no deliverance is more significant than that deliverance. For though their history begins with the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it is this event that turns them into a nation; and not merely a nation, but the nation of God. Though God made a covenant with their fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—it is when the exodus takes place that he makes a covenant directly with them to be their God and for them to be his people. Of all their deliverers, it is Moses who rises supreme, because he was the redeemer whom God sent to deliver his people.

“In the fields of Zoan,” refers most likely to the place where Pharaoh held court when Moses met with him and pronounced each plague. So Moses pronounces each of the ten wonders. Verse 13 takes us to the climactic wonder—the crossing of the Red Sea.

¹³ *He divided the sea and let them pass through it,
and made the waters stand like a heap.*

The crossing of the Red Sea is the climactic moment of deliverance from slavery. As Moses said to the people just before it took place: “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today” (Exodus 14:13).

God Guided

As great as the deliverance from slavery was, it was not the completion of the story. God did not merely have in mind freedom from hardship; he delivered his people out of Egypt that he might lead them into the Promised Land of Canaan. And so, verse 14 speaks of another wonder accomplished for this end in mind.

- 14** *In the daytime he led them with a cloud,
and all the night with a fiery light.*

The pillar of cloud and of fire first appears as the people begin to leave Egypt. It represented the presence of God. It would go before the people and they would follow. It protected the people on their way out of Egypt, coming in between them and Pharaoh's army while the Red Sea was being divided. It rested on Mt. Sinai, and from out of it God would speak to Moses. Once the tabernacle was built, it would rest upon the tabernacle, representing God's presence in the midst of his people. It would take them on their 40-year journey through the wilderness until they entered the Promised Land.

God Provided

So by his great wonders, God delivered his people from bondage, and he led them into the Promised Land. By other wonders, God provided for his people.

- 15** *He split rocks in the wilderness
and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.*
16 *He made streams come out of the rock
and caused waters to flow down like rivers.*

There are two times where God produced water from a rock. Early in the journey the people camped at a place that had no water source. God provided water by having Moses strike a rock. Years later the same problem would occur, and again water was provided out of a rock. God provided when the provision seemed impossible.

Lessons for the People

Again, by his great wonders, God delivered his people from bondage; he led them into the Promised Land, and he provided for their needs. Let's consider why the psalmist is recounting these wonders. What does he want to teach his people?

1. Give Glory to God

One reason is for them to give glory to God. These deeds are glorious deeds (v. 4), and as such they are intended to glorify the God who performed them. Indeed, the people were made a covenant nation of God for this purpose. They were to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation that glorified God before the world, that proclaimed his excellencies. And they above all people had reason to do so, given the great wonders that God performed on their behalf.

We can glorify God for what are even greater wonders than those of the exodus. The apostle Peter gets caught up in this.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Indeed, he tells us that we have been included in the covenant of God's people for the very purpose of declaring God's praise.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

You do that on the Lord's Day. You gather with God's people who have been delivered along with you from the bondage of sin by the victory of Christ on the cross. Now, when you return home, will you praise God—will you glorify him—for that same deliverance, or is it only when you come to church? Do you praise him for that same deliverance when you pray to him? I suspect that is what Philippians 4:6 has in mind when it says, “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Always keep before you the deliverance made for you by Christ. It certainly puts the matter at hand in perspective.

2. To Trust God and not be Unfaithful

The other reason for writing the psalm is what underlines the whole psalm. The psalmist shows how the people of God, despite the wonders he performed before them, nevertheless learned little from them. *“They forgot his works and the wonders that he had shown them”* (v. 11). As a result *“they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert! They tested God again and again and provoked the Holy One of Israel”* (v. 40-41).

Though God delivered them, guided them, and provided them, they still would not trust God when times got tough. The psalmist does not want his generation to fall into the same faithless pattern.

And so we are also to let the wonders that God has performed lead us to trust him. If God would perform the marvelous and costly deliverance for us from our bondage to sin, will he not also guide us and provide for us along our Christian journey? If he delivered you through the Red Sea, will he not also guide you through the wilderness and provide for you until you reach the Promised Land?

There are many things that we fear. We fear loss—the loss of a job, the loss of a relationship, the loss of our health. We fear losing our security—our retirement, our ability to pay bills, our protectors such as our parents or anyone else we rely on. We are starting to fear the loss of our freedom to practice our faith. We may very well fear the loss of our reputation, as our society grows more hostile to our beliefs and values.

Are we going to make it through our wilderness? We will if we trust God our Father to guide us, if we trust our Lord Jesus Christ to shepherd us, if we trust the Holy Spirit to give us the knowledge we need. We will if we believe God when he says that he will guide us and provide for us. Jesus spoke of this.

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?... But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:25-26, 33).

Why not take Jesus at his word? That is the same thing you want. When you make a promise that you will be there for someone, you want to be believed, especially when trials come. We love to speak of believing *in* God, believing *in* Jesus. Take out the “in.” God wants you to believe him; Jesus wants you to believe him. When he says that he is with you wherever you go, he wants you to trust him.

He says to look at the birds and see how they are provided for, and then adds are you not of more value than they? I say to you, look at the cross and see how he has provided for you there. What greater proof do you need that he values you? What other gift must the Father send to prove his love?

3. Set the Context for a New Shepherd

There is one other purpose of the psalmist for recounting the wonders of God’s deliverance, guidance, and provision. It is to set the stage for the servant appointed by God to carry on this shepherding work.

He chose David his servant
and took him from the sheepfolds;
from following the nursing ewes he brought him
to shepherd Jacob his people,
Israel his inheritance.
With upright heart he shepherded them
and guided them with his skillful hand. (vv. 70–72)

The shepherd David was made the shepherd-king over Israel. In that role, he led the armies that delivered the people from their enemies. He provided for them as a shepherd leads his sheep to water and pastures. He guided them specifically in the ways of the Lord, so that the people followed after God.

We have a greater David. We have a shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep and who raised it up again. We have a shepherd who did not once live, but lives forever. He remains our shepherd. He has bought us with his own blood and he will not give us up. He guides us through dangers that we do not even know, for Satan desires to have us. He provides for us as we go

through our Christian journey, for he abides with us. With an upright heart he shepherds us and guides us with his skillful hand.

Will you not glorify him when you step out of the sanctuary? Will you not trust him to guide you and provide for you? Will you not rest in him, trusting that he will provide what you need at the right time? This is what he wants. To be trusted. To be believed.

If you are not a follower of Christ, here then is your opportunity. You may protest that you have not heard enough evidence. Perhaps you have not taken the time to learn the actual stories of the Bible that display the wonders of God? Listen to this individual's story.

"I grew up in an atheist household and had minimal exposure to Jesus or the Bible. I had solid, nurturing relationships with my family and friends and experienced success academically and athletically, yet I still felt that I was incomplete. In the summer before my junior year of high school I began to become increasingly exposed to Christianity. I became better friends with individuals who took their Christian faith seriously and began reading John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* for school, which alerted me to the fact that I knew next to nothing about the Bible's stories. I asked a friend to explain the stories to me and was presented with the Gospel for the first time. I initially found the Christian message offensive and Jesus unbelievable. The Holy Spirit used Christians in my midst to break through my resistance until one afternoon I entertained and accepted that the God of the Bible could be real. I began to ask more questions and explore the nature of God. As my understanding of God's holiness grew, I began to discover the depths of my sinful nature, my great need for Jesus' sacrifice, and ultimately, explanations for why I could feel incomplete when my life was otherwise running smoothly. I surrendered my life into Jesus' loving hands."

Perhaps the changing of your own heart could be the next wonder of God to be told.