

248 “.... and visit this vine”

Psalm 80 is a cry to the Lord from His covenant people Israel. They have sinned, they have been punished, they are in a bad way, so now they are pleading - “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel” (v 1a) “how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? (v 4) “Turn us again, O God” (vv 3,7 and 19); and in verse 14, “Return we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine”.

The vine (along with the fig and the olive) is a frequently-used picture throughout Scripture, usually related in some way to God’s people and their state of well-being or otherwise. When every man can sit in peace under his vine and eat of its fruit, that is a clear demonstration that all is well (eg., I Kings 4.25 / Isaiah 36.16 / Micah 4.4); and equally, when all is far from well, as in Psalm 80, then this is reflected in the sickness of the vine (eg., Isaiah 24.7 / Jeremiah 8.13 / Hosea 10.1 / Psalm 80.8-16).

This identification of the vine with Israel gives added significance to Jesus’ own words in John 15, “I am the true vine ...”, thus placing His own Person and presence at the very heart of Israel and Judah as their Messiah. His Jewish disciples, after their close involvement in Jesus’ three-year ministry and now listening to Jesus speaking thus at the Last Supper, would have understood the Messiah-message “loud and clear”, even though very soon afterwards they found themselves in the era of the New Covenant of grace involving Gentiles as well as Jews.

This Messiahship of Christ is of course as relevant today as it always has been – Jesus, Jeshua, is come, He is still the true vine and still the Jewish Messiah. Now it is the turn of the Gentile branches of the Christ-Vine fervently to lift to the Lord those old prayers of Psalm 80 and the like, “Turn again, O God of hosts - turn again the hearts of thy covenant people Israel that they may at last recognise Jeshua as their Messiah”. That wonderful day will come; it is booked firmly into the Divine Diary; it will happen (egs., Matthew 24.30 / Revelation Chapter 5 / Philippians 2.9-11), and, wonderfully, our prayers have a part to play in bringing this to pass.

There are no grounds whatsoever for Christians ceasing to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Psalm 122.6-7), especially now that the Jews are back in part of their land (as promised of course); that they are still for the most part set strongly against Jesus of Nazareth; and that the Middle East is in turmoil with Jerusalem at the very focus of the action. Surely “the peace of Jerusalem” and the well-being of “the Israel-vine” merit our constant prayers. (For those of us having a particular burden in this matter, typing ‘Prayer for Israel’ into a search engine will show helpful websites).

While the biblical picture of the vine primarily concerns God’s original covenant people of then and now, it can also be faithfully applied elsewhere for our benefit. We too now, as Gentile believers in Christ, are fellow members of Christ’s Church alongside Messiah-accepting Jews (the old Jew-Gentle distinctions are done away with through Jesus, Galatians 3.26-29); we too therefore have our place, as branches, within the Christ-Vine of John 15. So we are right to ask, Is the Lord, the

Vine, content with the state of both the corporate and individual vine branches? The answer to that question is probably the all-to-familiar “Yes, and No”!

The key to healthy branches and abundant fruit-bearing lies in the branches “abiding” in the Vine (John 15.4-8). This involves our deliberately holding fast in our daily lives to Christ the Vine in loving obedience. This “abiding” allows the sap of the Holy Spirit to course through our lives to do His gracious work, both within us – as He “brings forth much fruit (verse 5b / and eg., Galatians 5.22-23), and beyond us – as He uses us in the fields that “are white already for harvest” (John 4.35).

We can also lift to the Lord the Psalm 80 “visit the vine” prayer for our particular nations, for clearly in the affairs of any nation so much depends on the spiritual and political leadership that exists. Praying for our leaders has never been a casual suggestion for when we have nothing else to do! (eg., Mark 12.17 / Romans 13.1-8 / I Timothy 2.1-4), and this applies especially in these dangerous and turbulent times.

So as Christ’s redeemed people we can humbly lift that prayer of old wherever it may be needed today – be it for Israel, for the Church, for the nations, for one another or for ourselves - “Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine”.

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