

The Revelation of Joseph Smith in its American Cradle:

The Eschatological, Political, and Soteriological Trajectories of a New Religion

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With notable bombast Joseph Smith entered the fray of 19th century second great awakening preachers and prophets, not through revival sermons in an established denominational effort, but through the publication of the *Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, which told the story of ancient Israelites, from around the time of Zechariah (600 B.C.), who traveled to and populated the Americas, taking with them and continuing their own line of God's written revelation to His Jewish people, an anthology which only came to be unearthed and translated by, and in the time of, the American man Joseph Smith. Since its publication, much ink has been spilt by Joseph's enemies in attempts to refute the *Book of Mormon*. Just two years after its 1830 publication, one of its earliest critics said it contained

every error and almost every truth discussed in New York for the last ten years. [Joseph] decided all the great controversies: - infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of free masonry, republican government and the rights of man.¹

For the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* this is not at all shocking. Since God led Joseph to unearth the BOM at that time and place, it is only appropriate that it apply for the issues of his day, in his context – it needs to evince evidence of that context.² But in order to discover and make sense of Joseph's revelations, they must be placed within their 19th century American backdrop with all its *inherited historical trajectories*. Most specifically, Joseph

¹ Campbell, Alexander. *Delusions an Analysis of the Book of Mormon with an 1832*. Facsimile Publisher, 2013. 85.

² Givens, Terryl L. *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*. 1 edition. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 166-167.

Smith's revelations fit into the protestant American context as a result of the existing puritan-theological eschatological, soteriological, and political historical-trajectories.

The eschatology of Smith's work has an uncanny resemblance to the post-reformation protestant views provided by trajectories from the theologian Joseph Mede (1586-1638), which aid in placing Smith's revelations pertaining to the American Indian, the Jews, the millennium, and the place of his followers. St. Augustine (354-430), the preeminent early-church theologian, taught that Revelation 20's millennium meant a non-literal thousand year reign of Christ, from his resurrection to the end of the world, but seventeenth-century puritans were united in recasting Augustine's theology with a historicist hermeneutic, following Martin Luther, so that they saw an optimistic progression in history toward the triumph of the protestant gospel.³ Protestant eschatological expectations began to shape protestant biblical interpretation, and vice versa. Along with this recasting of Augustine came a departure from Augustine, a belief that the past history of the church was not the millennium at all, but a period of great apostasy. Such was the belief, following Mede, of Westminster Divine Thomas Goodwin:

The state of the church, from Christ's time until the kingdom of Christ, may be divided into two: 1. The state of the church during the first four hundred years after Christ, usually called primitive times. 2. The state of the church during the times of Antichrist, whom Jesus Christ is to destroy with the brightness of his coming.⁴

³ Beeke, Joel R., and Mark Jones. *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*. 1st Edition edition. Grand Rapids, Mich: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012. 774.

⁴ Per Jue, Jeffrey K. *Heaven Upon Earth: Joseph Mede*. 2006 edition. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2006. 178; Found in: Goodwin, Thomas. *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, 12 Volume Set*. Sovereign Grace Publishers, Inc., 2001. Vol. III: 65.

Goodwin projected Mede's interpretation of Revelation into dates bracketing the beginning of apostasy and the age of millennium, getting 395 A.D. and 1656, though he would revise them to 360-365 A.D. and 1700.⁵ This historicist great apostasy period is implicit in the revelation period of Joseph Smith, whose BOM teaches that "In or about the year A.D. 421, Moroni, the last of the Nephite prophet-historians, sealed the sacred record and hid it up unto the Lord, to be brought forth in the latter days... In A.D. 1823, this same Moroni... visited the Prophet Joseph Smith."⁶ "The important point to realize is [not date-setting *per se*, but] that the Puritans did not view eschatology as mere theological speculation. Rather, they saw themselves as participants in events that would lead to full eschatological realization."⁷ The socio-cultural movements of America were generally thought to be the movement of a new age. And this new age followed Joseph Mede's eschatological trajectories.

Mede largely influenced the historicist's optimism concerning the end times, especially as it came to be understood as a wholly future millennial reign of Christ; some have even called him the possible father of premillennialism.⁸ Two effects of this theology were puritan expectations for 1) a future conversion of the Jewish people, and 2) a revelation of "the latter-day glory of the church and the New Jerusalem."⁹ Concerning the order of events, "[T]he millenarians (e.g.

⁵ Jue, Jeffrey K. *Heaven Upon Earth: Joseph Mede*. 2006 edition. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2006. 178-179

⁶ Saints, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day. *LDS Triple Combination - Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price*. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012. Introduction.

⁷ Beeke, Joel R., and Mark Jones. *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*. 1st Edition edition. Grand Rapids, Mich: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012. 779.

⁸ *Ibid.* 777.

⁹ *Ibid.* 778

Mede, Twisse, Goodwin, and Holmes) expected that the return of the Jews to the true Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and to the land promised to Abraham by God, would usher in the millennium, or, at least be one of the first things accomplished in the millennium.”¹⁰ Joseph Smith’s revelations fit into this schema exactly, with creative modifications. For him, the American-Indians are Jews, and the land of promise is America. The BOM unearths an ancient prophesy which declares to a Jewish people-group, through their own prophets, to go to America, which will be a “land of promise” through covenant with God;¹¹ thusly the peoples Joseph Smith and others knew as American-Indians were actually descendants of Israel. In this way Joseph believed that the millennium was directly tied to the conversion of the American-Indians, and he wasn’t the only one; there were many before him. For example, John Eliot (1604-1690) was a fervent evangelist to the Indians, even producing the first Bible printed in America, which was in the Algonquian language he learned in a mere three years – “Like most Puritans, Eliot believed strongly that the last times were near. Since the gospel shall be heard by all the earth before Christ’s second coming, the Indians must be evangelized immediately”, specifically because he believed “they were Hebrews, retrograde descendants of the biblical patriarchs and the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel”,¹² and the inclusion of Israel spoken of in Romans 11, “thus all Israel shall be saved”, needed to be fulfilled.¹³ Whether or not one saw the Indians as the Jewish people, there was a belief that their inclusion indicated the millennial kingdom. Cotton Mather, for instance,

¹⁰ Toon, *Purians, The Millenium and the Future of Israel*, 127.

¹¹ Book of Mormon, henceforth BOM, references from Skousen, Prof Royal, ed. *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*. Translated by Joseph Smith. First Edition edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. 2 Nephi 1.

¹² Beeke, Joel R., and Mark Jones. *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*. 1St Edition edition. Grand Rapids, Mich: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012. 784-785.

¹³ For more on how Smith’s revelation interacts with Rom. 11, see BOM’s book of Jacob.

argues that the last of the apocalypse's silver trumpets will be the coming of Christ, the millennial kingdom, and that the direct application of this coming kingdom is the inclusion of the American-Indians.¹⁴ So strong is the connection between preaching to American-Indians and the expectation of the millennial kingdom, which could only come with the inclusion of the Jews,¹⁵ that Joseph Smith biographer Fawn Brodie says "America's most distinguished preachers — William Penn, Roger Williams, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards — had all espoused the theory

¹⁴ Mather, Cotton 1663-1728. *India Christiana. A Discourse, Delivered unto the Commissioners, for the Propagation of the Gospel among the American Indians Which Is Accompanied with Several Instruments Relating to the Glorious Design of Propagating Our Holy Religion, in the Eastern as Well as the Western, Indies. An Entertainment Which They That Are Waiting for the Kingdom of God Will Receive as Good News from a Far Country.* By Cotton Mather, D.D. and F.R.S. 2246. Green, Bartholomew, 1667-1732, printer., 1721. 16-24. http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EAI&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=0F301862F2117588&svc_dat=Evans:eaidoc&req_dat=8A00336EDFB54E79A7AF828A0975AC0D.

¹⁵ Notice the confounding of Israel and the Jews - Mather, Increase 1639-1723. *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation, Explained and Applied: Or, A Discourse Concerning the General Conversion of the Israelitish Nation. Wherein Is Shewed, 1. That the Twelve Tribes Shall Be Saved. 2. When This Is to Be Expected. 3. Why This Must Be. 4. What Kind of Salvation the Tribes of Israel Shall Partake of (viz.) a Glorious, Wonderful, Spiritual, Temporal Salvation. Being the Substance of Several Sermons Preached by Increase Mather, M.A. Teacher of a Church in Boston in New England. [Ten Lines of Scripture Texts].* 143, 1669. 62. http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EAI&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=0F301570F110BAE0&svc_dat=Evans:eaidoc&req_dat=8A00336EDFB54E79A7AF828A0975AC0D.

[that the red men were a remnant of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel].”¹⁶ The millennial kingdom was coming, and the Indians would be primary players.

With the expectation of the future conversion of the Jews, Mede and others had specific expectations about how God would reveal himself before the millennium; these expectations are reflected in Smith’s revelations, but creatively applied to the American-Indians. Historian Jeffrey Jue explains how Mede taught Christ would audibly speak from heaven; “For Mede, the Apostle Paul’s conversion served as a pattern for the Jews, because he formerly opposed Christianity even to the point of persecution, and thus needed Christ to appear to him personally in order to be convinced of the validity of the Christian gospel.”¹⁷ The BOM contains this same basic narrative: “And it came to pass that there was a voice heard among all the inhabitants of the earth upon all the face of this [American] land, crying... I am Jesus Christ the Son of God.”¹⁸ Smith

¹⁶ Brodie, Fawn M. *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*. 2nd Revised & enlarged edition. New York: Vintage, 1995. 45. – She is slightly mistaken, for Mather says in Mather, Cotton 1663-1728. *India Christiana. A Discourse, Delivered unto the Commissioners, for the Propagation of the Gospel among the American Indians Which Is Accompanied with Several Instruments Relating to the Glorious Design of Propagating Our Holy Religion, in the Eastern as Well as the Western, Indies. An Entertainment Which They That Are Waiting for the Kingdom of God Will Receive as Good News from a Far Country. By Cotton Mather, D.D. and F.R.S.* 2246. Green, Bartholomew, 1667-1732, printer., 1721. 24. http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EAIX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=0F301862F2117588&svc_dat=Evans:eaidoc&req_dat=8A00336EDFB54E79A7AF828A0975AC0D. that both the time and way of American colonization in unknown, and while Edwards did write a pamphlet showing the correlations between Hebrew and the Indian language he knew, he wrote in Edwards, Jonathan 1745-1801. *Observations on the Language of the Muhhekaneew Indians; in Which the Extent of That Language in North-America Is Shewn; Its Genius Is Grammatically Traced: Some of Its Peculiarities, and Some Instances of Analogy between That and the Hebrew Are Pointed Out. Communicated to the Connecticut Society of Arts and Sciences, and Published at the Request of the Society. By Jonathan Edwards, D.D. Pastor of a Church in New-Haven, and Member of the Connecticut Society of Arts and Sciences.* 21068. Meigs, Josiah, 1757-1822, printer., 1788. 16. http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EAIX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=0F3018D38AB58420&svc_dat=Evans:eaidoc&req_dat=8A00336EDFB54E79A7AF828A0975AC0D. – “How far the use of prefixes and suffixes, together with these instances of Analogy, and perhaps other instances, which may be traced out by those who have more leisure, go towards proving, that the North-American Indians are of Hebrew, or at least Asiatic extraction, is submitted to the judgment of the learned...” Nevertheless, both theologians indicate a desire for this connection.

¹⁷ Jue, Jeffrey K. *Heaven Upon Earth: Joseph Mede*. 2006 edition. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2006. 192.

¹⁸ 3 Nephi 9:1, 15.

creatively applies this narrative because this event does not happen at the time of European expansion into the Americas, but before the great apostasy, just after the ascension of Christ into heaven; that is, at about the same time Paul received a revelation from heaven. However, it is through this event, told in the now-discovered BOM, that the American Indians – the Jews – of Joseph’s time are told they *already have* received a voice from heaven. And so Martin Harris, to whom Joseph Smith primarily dictated his revelations, said about the BOM that “‘an important epoch had arrived — that a great flood of light was about to burst upon the world, and that the scene of divine manifestation was to be immediately around us.’ The Golden Bible, he said, would ‘contain such disclosures as would settle all religious controversies and speedily bring on the glorious millennium.’”¹⁹ Smith’s revelations showed a way forward in the conversion of the Jews/Indians and all the disputations concerning them, providing a way forward into the millennium while also resolving existing soteriological tensions. For example, Cotton Mather argued that the gospel was preached in the Americas at the time of the apostles in order to refute those who taught the Americas couldn’t be populated until after the apostolic gospel-proclamation.²⁰ The BOM is cognizant of this tension: “Is not a soul at this time precious unto God as a soul will be at the time of his coming? Is it not as necessary that the plan of redemption should be known unto this people as well as unto their children?”²¹ The waiting Mede-like

¹⁹ Brodie, Fawn M. *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*. 2nd Revised & enlarged edition. New York: Vintage, 1995. 38.

²⁰ Mather, Cotton 1663-1728. *India Christiana. A Discourse, Delivered unto the Commissioners, for the Propagation of the Gospel among the American Indians Which Is Accompanied with Several Instruments Relating to the Glorious Design of Propagating Our Holy Religion, in the Eastern as Well as the Western, Indies. An Entertainment Which They That Are Waiting for the Kingdom of God Will Receive as Good News from a Far Country. By Cotton Mather, D.D. and F.R.S.* 2246. Green, Bartholomew, 1667-1732, printer., 1721. 25. http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EAIIX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=0F301862F2117588&svc_dat=Evans:eaidoc&req_dat=8A00336EDFB54E79A7AF828A0975AC0D.

²¹ Alma 39:17-18; Also cf. the BOM Title Page

theologians were riddled with unresolved tensions, into which Joseph's American eschatological revelations creatively intruded, providing for a new people group an identity as the millennial people of God – *the Latter Day Saints*.

The people set apart through the revelations of Joseph Smith were also, being the initiators and inheritors of the eschatological New Jerusalem, a political body standing in a typical relationship with Moses's Israel, deeply defined by American theological and republican-political history. Historian Jeffrey Jue again helpfully explains that “[t]he history of the nation of Israel, from the exodus to the promise land and finally into exile, was applied to the present circumstances of the New England churches... [L]iterary studies concluded that New Englanders regarded themselves as the antitype of Israel, replacing ethnic Israel as the recipients of God's blessings...”, but the problem inherent in this depiction of New England theology is that they believed ethnic Israel was not cast off as God's chosen people, so that there was a clear distinction between Israel and the church.²² However, this once again created a place in which Joseph Smith was able to circumvent the theological tensions of his time, since he taught the Indians were Jews, thusly allowing for a typical relationship between America and Israel, a semi-valid later-fulfillment of historian Perry Miller's thesis, which taught that New Englanders saw themselves as “establishing a godly community that would serve as a religious example to the world... like ancient Israel's exodus from Egypt, on an ‘Errand into the Wilderness,’ mandated by God and bound by a special covenant.”²³ “Semi-valid” because the errand into the wilderness

²² Jue, Jeffrey K. *Heaven Upon Earth: Joseph Mede*. 2006 edition. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2006. 195.

²³ *Ibid.* 175

was seen by New Englanders as the migration from Europe, but Joseph taught, again, that the fulfillment of this came in the ancient world, through Jewish travelers before the time of Christ – which through Joseph’s new revelation the New Englanders were experiencing for the first time, fitting the Jew to Gentile pattern of gospel proclamation.²⁴ And so the BOM says, “And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.”²⁵ Here Joseph’s revelation indicates a clear type/anti-type relationship between Israel and America, America being the ultimate promised land.²⁶ And instead of keeping a distinction between the church and Israel, the BOM maintains two peoples of God in two places: “Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? Wherefore I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another...”²⁷ This utterance provides a division and unity in the people of God, united by written revelation on both continents, so that Smith himself has bridged the type/anti-type relation through his revelation,²⁸ culminating in a new temple on the new continent.²⁹

²⁴ Cf. 2 Nephi 10:10-14

²⁵ Alma 37:45. Cf. Omni 1:15

²⁶ The BOM is full of double-fulfillment language. Cf. 2 Nephi 6:11

²⁷ 2 Nephi 29:8

²⁸ Contra, per Jue, Jeffrey K. *Heaven Upon Earth: Joseph Mede*. 2006 edition. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2006. 195-208., the New England puritan interpretation of type/anti-type fulfilled in the church. Rejection of this puritan tradition also illuminates the difference between LDS temple ritual and the Christian’s de-centralized worship in the church.

²⁹ Suggested in other puritans like Cotton, who “urged his congregation to discern whether God was calling them to ‘build a house’ in America.” Beeke, Joel R., and Mark Jones. *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*. 1st Edition edition. Grand Rapids, Mich: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012. 780. Explicit throughout Smith’s D&C.

As a distinctly religious-political body in America, Smith's New Israel also inherited American-republican values. Historian Mark Noll writes brilliantly about the historical development of a synthesis between American religion and American republicanism. He writes,

Traditional Christian complaints were recited for several centuries as a common litany: Republican instincts prized human self-sufficiency more highly than dependence upon God. They demeaned the life to come by focusing without reservation on this-worldly existence. They defined the human good in terms of public usefulness instead of divine approval. Both Protestants and Catholics, in addition, regularly noted the persistent correlation of republican political convictions and heterodox theological opinions.³⁰

If in eschatology Joseph Smith followed the early puritans, this was a sure departure; the theology of Smith's revelations were thoroughly republican, which Noll argues is directly connected to the atheists and heterodox.³¹ In the late 18th century "[t]raditional religious believers who might still have worried about the corrupting effects of republican principles could only have been reassured when leading patriots went out of their way to employ traditional religious language in supporting their wig policies", which is exactly what happened.³² Noll references, as an example of dissenting political language synthesizing with the religious, Gilbert Tennet who in 1737 said "that nothing mattered more than coming to experience 'everlasting Liberty' from 'Bondage and Servitude.' ... 'Are ye in Bondage and Servitude? Here is a spiritual, noble, and everlasting Liberty offered to you, in the Riches of Christ! Oh! If the Son of the Father's Love do but make you free, ye will be free indeed.'"³³ Of course, Jesus was originally

³⁰ Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 57-58.

³¹ Ibid. 61

³² Ibid. 83

³³ Ibid. 75

speaking about a liberty from sin, but this language is appropriated for entirely different means.

Joseph Smith, riding on this same political-religious movement, takes up in his direct revelations from God this exact synthesis of republicanism, capped with the words of Jesus in John 8:

And that law of the land which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind, and is justifiable before me. Therefore, I, the Lord, justify you, and your brethren of my church, in befriending that law which is the constitutional law of the land; And as pertaining to law of man, whatsoever is more or less than this, cometh of evil. I, the Lord God, make you free, therefore ye are free indeed; and the law also maketh you free.³⁴

“In their shared efforts, both political and religious figures were tailoring the project of republican independence to fit the language of traditional Protestant religion. After only a few years, America’s religious population, with Protestant evangelicals in the forefront, began in similar fashion to tailor their religious projects to fit the language of republicanism.”³⁵ Joseph Smith’s revelations are a clear representative of this tailoring. Language in the BOM also reflects this American republican identity, such as references to the “land of liberty”, a “true friend of liberty”, “liberty of worshipping the Lord their God”, “support the cause of freedom... maintain a free government”, “defense of your liberty and your property and your country”, or again using the soteriological language of the New Testament for political ends – “My soul standeth fast in that liberty in the which God hath made us free.”³⁶ Whatever human author Smith’s revelations are ascribed to, they generally share the same early American-republican idiom. Smith himself,

³⁴ Saints, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day. *LDS Triple Combination - Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price*. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012. D&C 98:5-8.

³⁵ Noll, Mark A. *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 85.

³⁶ BOM In order: 2 Nephi 10:11; Mosiah 29:32; Alma 46:17/Alma 62:37/Alma 21:22/Alma 46:35/3 Nephi 3:2/Alma 61:9 contra Gal. 5:1

with his early American compatriots, crafted a motto for their newfound church that was likewise distinctly American-republican; written in Joseph's journal:

Motto of the Church of Christ of Latterday Saints./The Constitution of our country formed by the Fathers of Liberty./Peace and good order in society Love to God and good will to man./All good and wholesome Law's; And virtue and truth above all things/And Aristarchy live forever!!!/But Wo to tyrants, Mobs, Aristocracy, Anarchy and Toryism: And all those who invent or seek out unrighteous and vexatious lawsuits under the pretext or color of law or office, either religious or political./Exalt the standard of Democracy! Down with that of Priestcraft, and let all the people say Amen! that the blood of our Fathers may not cry from the ground against us. Sacred is the Memory of that Blood which baught for us our liberty...³⁷

Thusly not only Joseph Smith's revelations, but his established church was *fully* involved, even by divine fiat, in the Republican-protestant synthesis that was part of the historical American experiment.

Joseph's political revelations were not only a republican-protestant American synthesis, but his soteriological revelations also show a similar trajectory, taking on the philosophy of the common sense realism in which Pelagian/Arminian theology thrived. Joseph's revelations came at an interesting time in Methodist history, during or directly after a shift away from Wesley himself into a more American context,³⁸ so that while Joseph's BOM followed Wesleyan

³⁷ 16. Journals, March–September 1838ID #6664 Smith, Joseph. Collection, 1827–1846. CHL., <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/journal-march-september-1838#!/paperSummary/journal-march-september-1838&p=2>

³⁸ Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 330-364.

teachings like universal atonement,³⁹ Christian perfectionism,⁴⁰ free will,⁴¹ the innocence of infants,⁴² the denial of predestination,⁴³ synergistic regeneration,⁴⁴ and even total depravity,⁴⁵ his larger corpus moved in the general trend of republican-Americanization that Methodism experienced through the 1820's-30's.

Noll, in straightforward manner, writes that “[i]t was only when Christian orthodoxy[, with its doctrines of total depravity, the sovereignty of divine grace, and the need for revelation from God,] gave way that republicanism could flourish.”⁴⁶ The same decade the BOM was revealed was also the decade in which Methodism adopted republicanism.⁴⁷ Wesley himself was resistant to republicanism,⁴⁸ as was early Methodism in America,⁴⁹ but his theology was taken in a new direction; for example, Methodist Asa Shinn wrote *An Essay on the Plan of Salvation* in 1813, which whole-sale adopted common sense moral reasoning, gaining such popularity that it

³⁹ 2 Neph 9:7; Mosiah 3:11, 4:7; Alma 34:8

⁴⁰ 2 Nephi 31:20; 3 Nephi 8:1

⁴¹ Mosiah 2:21

⁴² Mosiah 3:16; Mormoni 8

⁴³ Alma 31:12-18 contains a denial of double predestination; 3 Nephi 19:20-36 compare with John 17

⁴⁴ Mosiah 3:19

⁴⁵ Mosiah 3:19

⁴⁶ Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 60.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 347 – “By the next decade[, from 1820's to the 1830's,] Methodists... were wholehearted promoters of the commonplace Christian republican vision.”

⁴⁸ Ibid. 331 – “Wesley opposed American independence, reprobated republican politics as inherently sinful, and criticized the era's new moral philosophy as dangerously self-centered...”

⁴⁹ Ibid. 336 – “in no case were these Methodist convictions occasioned by adapting to republican thought, to beliefs about the providential destiny of the United States, or to the principles of commonsense moral philosophy.”

became required reading for ministerial candidates by 1834.⁵⁰ Joseph's BOM revealed a "plan of salvation"⁵¹ with similar components, including modern language of faculty psychology.⁵² Smith, who sounds just like the earlier Methodist O'Kelley,⁵³ lauded man's moral-intellectual faculties so ardently it no doubt made others nervous or outraged:

Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence. Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light.⁵⁴

In this way religious moral freedom became coterminous with the political freedom and American self-sovereignty that Joseph's American-Zionism required. While Wesley recommended Mede's eschatological views,⁵⁵ he would never have entertained the American-protestant synthesis that Joseph's revelations brought.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 348-349

⁵¹ Jarom 1:2; Alma 24:14, 42:5

⁵² Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 289-290. Lamb, Martin Thomas. *The Golden Bible: Or, The Book of Mormon. Is It from God? 1887*. Facsimile Publisher, 2015. 219. BOM 1 Nephi 15:25; Jacob 3:11; Words of Mormon 1:18; Mosiah 29:14; Alma 32:27

⁵³ Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 339. – "Reason – O what a gift to fallen man? This is the light that dear Jesus gives to all born into the world; if they live to be capable of using of it they find it arising with the light of nature as ideas of good and evil appear."

⁵⁴ Saints, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day. *LDS Triple Combination - Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price*. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012. D&C 93:29-31.

⁵⁵ Jue, Jeffrey K. *Heaven Upon Earth: Joseph Mede*. 2006 edition. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2006. 248.

Smith's revelations embodied the revivalistic nature of his time, especially as it pertained to man's moral freedom to choose. New England's 1830s donned a new era: "Steady-state religion began to share space with the revivalistic 'one eternal now.'"⁵⁶ "Revivalist conversion was the religious analogue to Lockean individualism",⁵⁷ and Smith's revealed narratives were chalk-full of it, regardless of the time period – conversion was falling on the ground, preaching rolled from verse to verse,⁵⁸ and men sang the "song of redeeming love."⁵⁹ It is no coincidence that the pre-eminent revivalist Charles Finney, sharing the 1830's and New York with Smith, also both stressed individual action by free agency, hostility to Calvinism, and a synthesis of politics and religion.⁶⁰ And yet Finney did not go nearly as far as Joseph in his departure from orthodoxy. The Wesleyan tension between total depravity and the free agency of man given through the atonement was solved by an infusion of common-sense moral reasoning, such that the fall of man became a moral good – that Adam and Eve's eyes were opened in the garden was not evil,

⁵⁶ Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 138.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 214; Yet Noll also relates that revivalists had "a mixture of individualism and communitarianism", which would also, and especially, be true for Smith's Zionist people.

⁵⁸ Lamb, Martin Thomas. *The Golden Bible: Or, The Book of Mormon. Is It from God? 1887*. Facsimile Publisher, 2015. 222-227. Also, Joseph's revelation weaves together Biblical references not at all like the NT use of the OT, or the OT use of the OT, but like an impromptu revivalist sermon; for example, D&C 95:4-7.

⁵⁹ The "song of redeeming love" was colloquial revival language for experiencing conversion. E.g., note its use in Latta, John E. (John Ewing) 1773-1824. *A Sermon Delivered on the 24th Day of August, 1809, a Day Recommended by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, to Be Set Apart for Solemn Thanksgiving and Prayer. By the Rev. John E. Latta. Published by Request*. 17898. Brynberg, Peter, 1755?-1816, printer., 1809. 23. http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EAIX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=104404BB1F75ECB0&svc_dat=Evans:eaidoc&req_dat=8A00336EDFB54E79A7AF828A0975AC0D.

⁶⁰ Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 306-308; Smith is especially hostile to Calvinism in his denial of double predestination and his continual hatred for cessationism

for now they could decide between good and evil, which is the highest moral good:⁶¹ “it is given unto them to know good from evil; wherefore they are agents unto themselves...”⁶² Thusly Smith championed a *method-ist* way unto eternal exaltation by which men could, by good works through free moral agency, become gods.⁶³ One Scottish Presbyterian, eager to see the American experiment at work, returned in 1800 with this report on how Americans construed the Bible: “In the Beginning the Sovereign People created Heaven & Earth”.⁶⁴ Joseph Smith was one of those Americans.

Finally then, it is clear that distinctly American historical conditions, in eschatology, politics, and soteriology, create the context for Joseph Smith’s revelations. No other context could foster the BOM’s revelation that in Zion men should be judged according to their crimes, not their religious beliefs, since all men are equal.⁶⁵ No other content could foster the revelation of Smith: “In this way [the churches] may establish Zion... [a]ccording to the [American] law and constitution of the people... [t]hat every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment...”⁶⁶ No other context could allow for a

⁶¹ Moses 5:10-11

⁶² Moses 6:54-57; Therefore god is not able to save men per Alma 11:37

⁶³ Saints, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day. *LDS Triple Combination - Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price*. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012. D&C 131:2; 132:20.

⁶⁴ Noll, Mark A. *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 66.

⁶⁵ Alma 30:7-11.

⁶⁶ Saints, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day. *LDS Triple Combination - Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price*. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012. D&C 101:74-78.

temple dedication in Ohio to signify the coming millennial kingdom of Christ through the American Constitution and its baptisms of age of accountability eight-year-olds.⁶⁷ But Joseph's 19th century protestant-American context was the cradle of his revelation, and none other. True latter-day saints take note.

⁶⁷ Ibid. D&C 109 (Perhaps JS's most eloquent revelation); D&C 68:27

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Psalm 80:
A Prayer for Reorientation

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Introduction

In the psalms of David, the people of God have the words of “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1);¹ perhaps it could be said that, in the psalms of Asaph, the people of God have the words of the bittersweet psalmist of Israel. Asaph’s collection strikes a melancholy tone. Largely found in the third book of the psalter (73-89), these psalms reflect points of crisis in the life of the psalmist, and in the corporate life of Israel. Tanner comments, “Book Three [of the psalter] represents every time when the world and its violence make no sense, times when we do not understand why God does not simply fix it. Book Three is a poetic rendering of theodicy.”² In the first psalm of Asaph, God says through the psalmist, “And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (50:15). The thematic or theological center to the psalms of Asaph may be the invitation to cry out to God in distress, as the psalms give a vocabulary for an individual, church, or nation who are experiencing a day of trouble.

1: Historical Analysis

1.1 Authorship

Psalms 73-89 are one of twelve psalms in the psalter bearing the designation “of Asaph” (אֲשָׁף): Psalm 50, and psalms 73-83, the first eleven psalms of book 3 in the psalter. The biography of Asaph is found primarily in 1 and 2 Chronicles. 1 Chronicles lists Asaph among those “whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the LORD after the ark rested there” (1 Chron. 6:31, 39; cf. 15:16, 17). Chapter 16 lists Asaph as chief among those whom David appointed to “minister before the ark of the LORD, to invoke, to thank, and to praise

¹ All Scripture citations, besides those from psalm 80, are taken from the ESV. All Scripture citations from psalm 80 are the author’s translation, unless otherwise noted.

² Nancy DeClaisse-Walford, Rolf. A Jacobson, and Beth Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. E.J. Young, R.K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 583.

the LORD, the God of Israel” (1 Chron. 16:4, 5). In the tabernacle worship, Asaph played the cymbals and was appointed, along with his brothers, to sing thanksgiving to the LORD (1 Chron. 16:5, 7). In chapter 25, as David is organizing the Levites for ministry in the temple Solomon would build, Asaph is listed as one of three chiefs, with four sons under him, and 48 musicians under his sons (1 Chron. 25:1, 2, 9, 12, 14). Asaph was present at the dedication of Solomon’s temple, along with other chiefs, leading in instrumental playing and congregational singing, just antecedent to the glory of the LORD filling the temple (2 Chron. 5:12-14). Throughout the remainder of 2 Chronicles, descendants of Asaph appear in the account, especially connected with the worship of Israel. Descendants of Asaph are associated with the worship in the reforms of both Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Chron. 29:12; 35:15).

Asaph’s descendants continued to play an important part in Israel’s worship after the exile. Descendants of Asaph are among the returned exiles listed in Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 2:41, Neh. 7:44), and they aided in musical praise when the foundation of the second temple was laid (Ezra 3:10). Thus, Asaph the man was active around the time of the Davidic monarchy (c. 1000 B.C.), but the guild of musicians bearing his name continued after his death, at least until the rebuilding of the temple after the Babylonian exile (516 B.C.). Not all are convinced of the connection of the Asaph of Chronicles and Ezra with the Asaph of the psalter. Tanner is not optimistic about the connection: “It is impossible to connect the verses in 1 Chronicles and Ezra with this psalm collection.”³ However, given the significant biblical data connecting Asaph and his guild with the worship, especially the music of Israel, it is curious why the testimony of the chronicler regarding the origin of the Asaph guild is not more accepted as being connected with book 3 of the psalter.

³ Tanner, *Psalms*, 582.

The post-exilic references to the descendants of Asaph are important, because many of the psalms bearing the designation אֲשָׁף, psalm 80 included, do not appear as if they can be associated with a man who lived during the reigns of David and Solomon. Some of these psalms describe times when God's temple was destroyed, when the citizens of Jerusalem lay dead in the streets, when the nation was mocked and scorned by their neighbors, and when her walls were broken down (Ps. 74:3, 7; 79:1, 4; 80:7,⁴ 13). These images do not appear to be consistent with a description of either David or Solomon's reign. Thus, it seems best to attribute psalm 80 to descendant of Asaph, still active in his musical guild, and therefore making the designation אֲשָׁף appropriate.

1.2 Date and Setting

It is difficult to precisely date psalm 80, and no suggested date is without problems. All see the psalm as post-dating the Asaph of Chronicles, however that is where the agreement stops. The reference to Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin (80:2) have led many to give psalm 80 an origin in the northern kingdom of Israel, at or near its destruction at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 B.C. This view has early attestation, as the superscription in the LXX reads, "concerning the Assyrians."⁵ Calvin, Keil and Delitzsch, Dahood, and Kidner take this view.⁶ This dating has problems, especially the reference to Benjamin in 80:2. Benjamin, at least initially, sided with Judah after Jeroboam's rebellion (1 Kings:12:21, cf. 2 Chron. 11:1). The reference to the

⁴ Throughout this paper, references to psalm 80 will follow the versification in the Masoretic Text (MT).

⁵ For a discussion of noteworthy textual variants, see 2.1 below.

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 295-296; C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 5, *Psalms* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 382-383; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100*, The Anchor Bible, ed. William F. Albright and David N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 255; Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1975), 288.

cherubim between which God dwelt (80:2), language associated with Jerusalem, may also hint at a Judean, not a northern origin for the psalm.⁷

The references to the northern tribes along with the three-fold petition that God “cause us to return” (80:4, 8, 20) has led some to associate psalm 80 with the reigns of Hezekiah or Josiah. During Hezekiah’s reforms some northerners responded to his invitation to keep the Passover of the LORD in Jerusalem, including men from Manasseh and Ephraim (2 Chron. 30:10, 18). Similarly, during Josiah’s reforms men from Judah and Israel were present to keep the Passover (2 Chron. 35:18). In this dating scheme, God-fearing northerners who have come to live in Jerusalem are petitioning in psalm 80 for a return of the northern tribes from the Assyrian captivity.⁸ However, psalm 80 does not seem to present a psalmist petitioning for his lost brothers to be brought back, but one who is himself in exile: “cause us to return” (80:4, 8, 20).

A better date for psalm 80 seems to be the period of Judah’s exile in Babylon, probably after the temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. This would explain the psalmist’s use of the first-person plural in his three-fold petition to return. The reference to the God dwelling between the cherubim (80:2) could reflect a period of the exile before the glory of the LORD had departed from the temple (Ezek. 10), and before the temple was destroyed. However, connections with psalm 79, discussed below, make this unlikely. Alternately, if the psalm were written during the Babylonian exile but after the temple had been destroyed, the reference to God dwelling between the cherubim could still make sense. The tabernacle and temple were understood as being patterned after heavenly realities (Ex. 25:40). A faithful psalmist could have

⁷ Tremper Longman III, “The reference to God as enthroned above the cherubim indicates a connection with the theology of the Jerusalem temple, and thus a southern perspective” in *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 298.

⁸ This is Tate’s preferred dating, although he is not dogmatic (Marvin E. Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 20, *Psalms 51-100*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, John. D. W. Watts [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991], 311).

understood the glory to have departed the physical temple (Ezek. 10), and yet seen the reality of God dwelling between the cherubim as still valid (Ex. 25:17-22, Ps. 80:2).

Another piece of evidence for an exilic dating comes from thematic and linguistic connections between psalm 80 and 79. There can be little doubt that psalm 79 describes the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. In psalm 79, the Asaphite psalmist describes nations defiling the temple, laying Jerusalem in ruins, and causing the streets of Jerusalem to run with blood from the slain (4:1, 3). The psalmist summarizes the situation in 79:4, “We have become a taunt *to our neighbors* (לְשִׁכְנֵינוּ), *mocked* (לְעַג) and derided by those around us.” In 80:7 the psalmist laments, “You have made us a strife *to our neighbors* (לְשִׁכְנֵינוּ), and our enemies *mock* (לְעַג).” Additionally, psalm 79 ends with a description of the people of God as the “*sheep* (צֹאן) of your *pasture* (מִרְעֵי־תֶדֶד)” (79:13), and psalm 80 begins by addressing the “*Shepherd* (רֹעֶה) of Israel, the one guiding Joseph *like a flock* (כַּצֹּאֵן) (80:2). Thus, the thematic connections (the nation derided by neighbors and a strife to neighbors), the linguistic connections (neighbors, mocking, shepherd/pasture, and flock/sheep), the canonical proximity (psalm 79 followed by 80) may well indicate a chronological proximity between psalms 79 and 80. James Hamilton offers support for this dating: “The points of contact between Pss 79 and 80...create the impression that Ps 80 asks for restoration from the devastation wrought on the temple in Ps 79. In conjunction with Ps 78, we see that Israel’s history of disobedience led to the attack on the temple in Ps 79, resulting in the request for restoration and favor in Ps 80.”⁹ Thus, while no dating for psalm 80 is required by Scripture, a date during the Babylonian exile seems to best account for the particular details of the text.¹⁰

⁹ James Hamilton, *Psalms*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 2:72.

¹⁰ A date of composition during the Babylonian exile does not resolve all the dating difficulties for psalm 80, perhaps especially the references to Joseph, Ephraim, Manasseh, as opposed to Judah and Jerusalem.

2: Textual Analysis

The BHS¹¹ offers 30 text-critical notes for psalm 80. Below, twelve noteworthy entries in the critical apparatus are discussed. Brotzman and Tully say that “the MT is our most important text tradition of the OT.”¹² While there are cases where there are obvious errors in the MT which can be solved through textual criticism, these cases are few.¹³ Additionally, Brotzman and Tully give cautions about the editorial philosophy behind the critical apparatus of the BHS.¹⁴ Therefore, the textual analysis below is not an attempt to “recreate the text,” but an examination of variants, and suggestions regarding their origin. Throughout the analysis, the MT is followed. The translation for each note follows in parentheses.

Note 2, 80:1b (Compare with [psalm] 45:1a.): Note 80:1b points out that the superscription for psalm 80 also appears in psalm 45, albeit with a different preposition על-שִׁעָנִים. An interesting cross-reference, especially since the preposition used in 45:1 is the same preposition some variant readings have in 80:1.

Note 3, 80:1c (the LXX adds “regarding the Assyrians.”): Note 80:1c shows that the LXX gives a historical setting to the Psalm, probably the Assyrian conquest and exile of the northern tribes of Israel recorded in 2 Kings 17. Given such a setting, the psalmist may be praying for a restoration of the northern tribes from the Assyrian exile. It is possible that the psalm is set during the Assyrian exile, and many commentators have noted the distinct use of northern tribes in the psalm.¹⁵ However, a Babylonian context seems somewhat more likely.¹⁶

¹¹ *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, ed. K Elliger and W. Rudolph (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977).

¹² Ellis R. Brotzman and Eric J. Tully, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 59.

¹³ Brotzman and Tully, *OT Text Criticism*, 56.

¹⁴ “Overall, the textual apparatus in the BHS is highly problematic” (Brotzman and Tully, *OT Text Criticism*, 105).

¹⁵ See footnote 6, above.

¹⁶ For the proposed date during Babylonian exile, see section 1.2: Date and Historical Setting.

Note 4, 80:3a (Some medieval manuscripts have “toward the sons.”): This variant would have verse 3 read: “Toward the sons (לְבָנָי) of Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, be stirred up with your strength and come to save us!” instead of “Before (לְפָנָי) Ephraim...” This variant could arise from a spelling error, as the difference is a single letter, בּ vs. פּ. Certainly the Psalmist does not have in view the actual patriarchs of Israel, but the sons and descendants of those patriarchs. This this variant is not impossible. However, the face or countenance of God (פָּנֵיָהּ) plays a major theme in this psalm, thus it seems the lexical connection between the noun “face” (פָּנֵה) and the preposition “before” (לְפָנָי) should not be lost.

Note 7, 80:4a (Syriac and old Latin versions as well as vv. 8 and 20 have “God of armies.”): The Syriac and the Latin seem to want to give more consistency to the use of the divine name within the psalm. In every other instance of either אֱלֹהִים or יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים, the divine name is connected with צְבָאוֹת (80:5, 8, 15, 20). However, by prematurely adding צְבָאוֹת, the progression of the Psalm is short-circuited. The movement from “*God*, cause us to turn,” (80:4) to “*God of armies*, cause us to turn,” (80:8) to “*LORD God of armies*, cause us to turn” (80:19) is lost through the addition made in the Syriac and Latin. Thus, it seems best to the flow of the psalm to read with the MT.

Note 8, 80:5a (Two medieval manuscripts are lacking “God,” probably delete.): For the first time in the critical apparatus for psalm 80, the editors suggest a change, instead of drawing attention to a variant. Specifically, they suggest deleting “God.” According to Ross, this may be because “LORD of armies” is a more common construct than “LORD God of armies.”¹⁷

Note 12, 80:6b (The Syriac is lacking “in full measure.”): The Syriac simply has “you have given them tears to drink.” Certainly, the Syriac paints a picture of judgement and lament,

¹⁷ Ross, *Psalms*, 684n6.

but not as full a picture as what the MT presents: “you have given them tears to drink *in full measure*.”

Note 14, 80:8a (LXX before *lord*, read, perhaps, “LORD.”): The LXX has “LORD God,” instead of simply, “God.” This is probably an attempt to harmonize with 80:5, which the editors of BHS are open to. However, this would hamper the progression of the refrain in the psalm (see comment for Note 7, above).

Note 15, 80:b (the LXX adds “selah.”): Perhaps because of the refrain in v. 8, the translators of the LXX inserted a selah break. This does not have any textual supports from any Hebrew manuscripts, and should not be followed.

Note 19, 80:12a (Perhaps a verse has dropped out.): The editors suggest that perhaps a verse has dropped out of the text, citing the refrain repeated in 80:4 and 80:8. However, there is nothing which requires strophes of equal length.¹⁸

Note 20, 80:14a (∫ suspended.): In the MT the ∫ in the text is superscripted. Many suggest it is to represent the middle letter of the psalter.¹⁹

Note 23, 16b-b (from [verse] 18, delete): The editors of BHS assume that the latter half of 16 has been incorrectly transplanted from verse 18 below. However, this misses the allusion to the LORD planting David when he established his covenant with him (2 Sam. 7). The editors’ suggestion should be disregarded.

Note 24, 16c (the LXX and Syriac add “of man,” confer with 80:18): The LXX and the Syriac attempt to be consistent in psalm 80’s references to the son, adding “of man” in 80:16 to harmonize with 80:18.

¹⁸ Tate, 308.

¹⁹ Ross, *Psalms*, 685n16.

3: Translation and Analysis

3.1 Translation and Psalm Structure

The structure of psalm 80 consists of an introduction (80:1), followed by two stanzas. The first stanza consists of two strophes, each of nine cola. The first strophe (80:2-4) contains a petition for salvation, and the second strophe (80:5-8) describes the predicament from which the nation needs to be saved. The second stanza contains three strophes, but unequal cola.²⁰ The third strophe (80:9-12) is a reminder of God's former dealings, the fourth strophe (80:13-17) centers on a petition for God to turn towards his people, and the fifth strophe (80:18-20) is a petition for God to strengthen the son of man who is at his right hand.²¹ The first, second, and fifth strophes end with a repeated refrain: "[LORD], God [of armies], cause us to return! And cause your face to shine, and we shall be saved!" (80:4, 8, 20). Closely connected, the fourth strophe centers on a petition that the God of armies himself would turn (80:15). Below is a personal translation, highlighting the refrain of the psalm in bold text:²²

Stanza 1: Introduction

- 1 To the chief musician: to lilies.
A witness for Asaph, a psalm.

Strophe 1 – Petition for Salvation.

- 2 Shepherd of Israel, listen!
[The one] guiding Joseph like a flock,

²⁰ There is broad agreement that the refrain of verses 4, 8, and 20 end three strophes in the Psalm. However, there is not broad agreement about how, or if, to divide vv. 9-20. Tanner suggests four strophes (*Psalms*, 630-632) and Keil and Delitzsch propose five (*Psalms*, 383). Others emend the psalm to make it fit a more consistent pattern – see a discussion in Tate, *Psalms*, 308. Tate is helpfully critical of such an approach: “The imposition of a preconceived notion of poetic structure (strophes of equal length interrupted by a standardized refrain) has not been followed by everyone and has little to comment it” (308).

²¹ Westermann uses Psalm 80 as a prototypical example of a lament of the people, containing an address and cry for help, a reference to God's earlier saving deeds, a lament, a confession of trust, a petition, motifs (the vine), and repeated petition, and a vow of praise (Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 53-54.

²² For a personal translation in parallel with the MT, see Appendix A.

- [the one] dwelling between the cherubim, shine forth!
3 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,
let yourself be stirred up with your strength,
and come to save us.
4 **God, cause us to return!**
And cause your face to shine,
and we shall be saved!

Strophe 2 – Israel’s Predicament.

- 5 LORD God of armies,
how long will you be angry in the prayer of your people?
6 You have caused them to be fed with the bread of tears,
and given them tears to drink again and again and again.
7 You have made us a strife to our neighbors,
and our enemies mock,
8 **God of armies, cause us to return!**
And cause your face to shine,
and we shall be saved!

Stanza 2:

Strophe 3 – God’s Former Dealings.

- 9 You brought a vine from Egypt,
you drove out nations and planted it.
10 You cleared its face,
and caused the root to be rooted, and it filled the land.
11 The mountains were covered with its shadow,
its boughs [covered] the mighty cedars.
12 It sent out its branch to the sea,
and to the river its branches.

Strophe 4 – Petition for God to See and Act.

- 13 Why have you broken through its hedges,
so that all passing by the way pluck it?
14 The boar from the woods tears it up,
and the beast of the field grazes there.
15 **God of armies, please turn!**
Look from heaven and see,
and attend to this vine!
16 and the shoot which your right hand has planted,
and on the son you strengthened for yourself.
17 It is burned in fire, it is cut.
From the rebuke of your face they are carried off.

Strophe 5 – Petition for the Son of Man to be Strengthened.

- 18 Let your hand be on the man of your right hand,
on the son of man you strengthened for yourself.
19 And we will not deviate from you.
Make us live and we will call to your name.
20 **LORD God of armies, cause us to return!**
And cause your face to shine,
and we shall be saved!

3.2 Exegetical Analysis

3.2.1 - Introduction: 80:1

80:1 designates this psalm as coming from the Asaphite guild of musicians.²³ The chief-musician is instructed that the Psalm is “to lilies” what some suggest may be a musical tune.²⁴ Psalms 45, 60, and 69 also contain various forms of *שִׁשְׁבִּימִים* (lily/lilies) in their titles. Similarly, the psalm is called *עֵדוּת* (a witness), as is psalm 60. Interestingly, psalm 60 begins with a request for restoration, *הִשְׁכִּיבֵנו* (60:1), similar to the three-time repeated petition in psalm 80: *הִשְׁכִּיבֵנו*. However, connections based on aspects of the titles, beyond authorship, do not seem important.²⁵

3.2.2 - Strophe 1: 80:2-4

80:2 contains three references to God: *רֹעֵה*, *נֹהֵג*, and *יֹשֵׁב*. Each of these is a qal active participle, and thus could be used substantively as direct addresses to God:²⁶ *Shepherd* of Israel, *Leader* of Joseph...*Dweller* between the cherubim.²⁷ The psalmist makes a close grammatical connection between what God does in his works, and who God is in his person. The psalmist seems to be reasoning with God: that since he is a shepherd, a leader, and one who dwells

²³ See 1.1: Authorship, above.

²⁴ The NIV has: “For the director of music. *To the tune of* “The Lilies of the Covenant.”

²⁵ “Those who are most learned in antiquities adduce nothing but probable conjectures [from the title of Psalm 80]” (Calvin, *Psalms*, 296).

²⁶ Tanner, *Psalms*, 630-631n.6.

²⁷ For the substantive use of the qal participle, see Gary D. Pratico and Mile V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 241.

between the cherubim, he will of necessity be inclined to “come and save” (80:3) the nation of Israel, which stands in need of his salvation. Especially noteworthy may be the reference to God “dwelling between the cherubim.”²⁸ The cherubim, between which God dwelt, overshadowed the mercy seat on top of the ark of the covenant (Ex. 17-22). Thus, the psalmist may be reasoning that since Israel stands in need of mercy, and since God dwells on his mercy seat between the cherubim, Israel may expect to receive mercy from their shepherd.

The petition in 80:2 that God “shine forth!” anticipates a request that will give structure to the remainder of the psalm – “cause your face to shine!” In 80:2 the request that God “shine forth” is followed by a request for salvation actively given by God: “come to save us” (וּלְקַח לִישַׁעַתָּה לָנוּ). The remaining petitions that God shine forth are followed by assurance that the people of God will be the passive recipients of his salvation, “we will be saved” (וְנִשְׁעָה). Thus, the psalmist does not doubt God’s ability to save – if God comes to save Israel, Israel will be saved.

The reference to Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, is widely debated. The tribes have a close familial connection as the offspring of Rachel (Gen. 30:22; 35:16-18; 41:50-52), and the three tribes were stationed on the west of the tabernacle in the wilderness (Num. 2:19-21). If the dating of the Babylonian exile is correct, the reference of these tribes demonstrates a concern by the psalmist for more than simply Judah and Jerusalem, but for all of Israel. It shows a desire not only that Judah return, but that all Israel be gathered back to the land.

80:4 contains the first instance of the threefold refrain which gives structure to the psalm, here in its earliest form: “God, cause us to return! And cause your face to shine, and we shall be

²⁸ The MT does not have a preposition between “the one dwelling” [יָשַׁב] and “the cherubim” [הַכְּרוּבִימִים]. Many English translations provide the preposition “(up)on,” or “above” (ESV, RSV, NASB, NLT), while others provide the preposition “between” (NKJV, NIV).

saved!” (אֱלֹהִים הַשִּׁיבֵנו וְהָאֵר פְּנֵיהֶם וְנִשְׁעָה:). הַשִּׁיבֵנו is a hiphil, imperative, 2ms, with a 1cp suffix of שׁוּב. In 80:4, הַשִּׁיבֵנו is translated as “restore us” in nearly all English translations.²⁹ However, the sense of שׁוּב is, according to one lexicon, “turn back” or “return.”³⁰ Holladay gives “return,” “go back,” and “come back” as definitions.³¹ Since the hiphil is used to express causation, and given the potential of an exilic setting, translating הַשִּׁיבֵנו as “cause us to return” makes sense. It is not simply a restoration of a relationship with God that psalm 80 has in view, but a restoration of a relationship with God through a return to the land of promise.

The request that God “cause his face to shine” (וְהָאֵר), is a hiphil, imperative, 2mp of אִוֵר, “to shine.”³² This request draws to the Aaronic priestly blessing: “May the LORD make his face shine” [יֵאָר יְהוָה], where אִוֵר is a hiphil, imperative, 2mp, with the jussive sense.³³ In 80:4 the psalmist asks that God would do what God had already promised to do in the Aaronic blessing. In 80:4 וְהָאֵר may function as a synecdoche for the whole of the Aaronic blessing: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace” (Num. 6:24-26). Thus, the psalmist requests covenant blessings for a people desperately in need of help.

3.2.3 - Strophe 2: 80:5-8

In the first strophe the psalmist brought a petition for salvation, and in the second strophe the psalmist presents the predicament from which Israel needs salvation. The second strophe begins and ends with a reference to God as “God of armies” (אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת) (80:5, 8). In 80:3 the

²⁹ The ESV, NIV, NASB, RSV, and NKJV all translate שׁוּב as “restore.”

³⁰ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 996. Hereafter, *BDB*.

³¹ William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 362.

³² *BDB*, 21

³³ Jussive, or the volitional imperfect, because it (1) is imperfect (2) at the start of the sentence (3) with no vav-consecutive. See Pratico and Van Pelt, *Hebrew Grammar*, 257.

psalmist asked that God “be stirred up with your strength,”³⁴ and now he addresses God as “LORD God of armies” – evidently the first petition of 80:3 has been answered. The psalmist is still awaiting an answer to the second petition of 80:3, “come to save us.”

The first aspect of Israel’s predicament was God’s disposition toward their prayers: “how long will you be angry in the prayer of your people?” (80:5). “How long?” is a question asked in several psalms, including Asaphite psalms: “How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever?” (79:5). In 74:9 the psalmist laments: “We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long.” The false prophets of Judah had been exposed, since their prophecies of “peace, peace” (Jer. 6:14; 8:11) had come to nothing. Since there were no true prophets, the psalmist puts the question to God: “How long, O God?” (74:10). Thus, the question “how long?” is not a question of distrust or despair, but a question full of faith since God knows how long, and since he does not afflict his people forever (Lam. 3:31).³⁵

The situation of God being angry (תִּשְׁפֹּץ), or “wrapped in smoke”³⁶ in the prayer of his people is not without parallel. Jeremiah laments, “you have wrapped yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through” (Lam. 3:44). Ross suggests that the prayers God is rejecting are hypocritical and insincere prayers.³⁷ However, this is not necessarily the case. It is possible that the prayers God rejected were insincere, like the prayers of wayward Israel in Isaiah: “Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen” (Isa. 1:15). There is certainly sin involved in Israel’s predicament, but their prayer for reorientation (80:4, 8, 20) does not seem to be hypocritical.

³⁴ Keil and Delitzsch offer “Stir up thy warrior-strength” as a translation of 80:3 (*Psalms*, 381).

³⁵ Tate: “The “How long?” is not a rejection of punishment itself. Rather, it implies that the punishment is deserved: “Why?” is not asked. The thing at issue is the claim that the punishment has gone on long enough!” (*Psalms*, 314).

³⁶ Ex. 19:18, “Now Mt. Sinai was wrapped in smoke [תִּשְׁפֹּץ] because the LORD had descended on it.”

³⁷ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: 42-89* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2013), 693.

The psalmist adds to his lament that not only is God angry with Israel's prayer, but the Shepherd of Israel is feeding his flock with "the bread of tears," and causing them to drink tears "again and again and again" (שִׁלֵּשׁ, 8:6).³⁸ שִׁלֵּשׁ is connected with the cardinal number "three" (שְׁלֹשָׁה). *BDB* demonstrates a range of meanings, from "third" or "measure," to "officer – the third man (in a chariot)."³⁹ This is figurative language, describing the afflictions of God's people.⁴⁰ The bread and tears could also be a reference to Israel's experience in the wilderness after the exodus, when they ate bread from heaven and drank water from the rock (Ex. 16, 17). Tanner comments, "Verse [6] may also be a reference to the wilderness, for instead of sweet water and manna, their food and drink are now *tears*."⁴¹ The events surrounding the exodus were in the psalmist's mind as he composed psalm 80 (cf. the third strophe, 80:9-12), so Tanner's suggestion is probable.

The psalmist closes the description of Israel's predicament in this strophe with a reference to Israel's neighbors: "You have made us a strife to our neighbors, and our enemies mock" (80:7). If this mocking and strife in 80:4 is connected to psalm 79:1-4 and the destruction of Jerusalem, this may be another attempt by the psalmist to rouse God to action. God had said of Jerusalem, "I have chosen Jerusalem that my name may dwell there" (2 Chron. 6:6). If the nations are making a mockery of the people called by God's name (2 Chron. 7:14) in the city where God's name dwells (2 Chron. 6:6), then this would certainly tend to incentivize God to defend the glory of his own name.

³⁸ Tate points out that this language parallels language in Isa. 30:20 and Hos. 9:4 (*Psalms*, 314). This may be evidence favoring the Assyrian exile, not the Babylonian, as the setting for this psalm.

³⁹ *BDB*, 1026.

⁴⁰ Ross, *Psalms*, 693.

⁴¹ Tanner, *Psalms*, 633.

The strophe ends with the second of three refrains: “God of armies, cause us to return! And cause your face to shine, and we shall be saved!” (80:8). Tanner comments, “It is interesting that even if the problem is stated as God’s anger, the people ask for God to cause them to *return*, acknowledging they are involved and culpable in the relationship.”⁴² While the discipline may have been brought on by sin, the solution is not that the discipline would cease, but that Israel return to the LORD (cf. Jer. 3:22).

3.2.4 - Strophe 3: 80:9-12

The third strophe begins a consideration of God’s former dealings with Israel, presented through the illustration of the transplanted vine [יִצְאָל].⁴³ Of all the characteristics of the Asaphite collection of the psalter, its attention to and use of history stands out as perhaps the most prominent.⁴⁴ So, it is not surprising that as the psalmist petitions for God to “cause [Israel] to return,” he reminds God of his saving acts in the past. The language of the strophe draws on images of the exodus, conquest, and early monarchical periods of Israel’s history, when God brought them out of Egypt, drove out nations before them, and filled the land (80:9-10).⁴⁵ Kidner sees a potential negative connotation with the imagery of a spreading vine in the parable of the tree and the vine in Judges 9.⁴⁶ Such a concern is unwarranted – the entirety of the third strophe is a celebration of God’s faithfulness to his vine, not the success the vine enjoyed when it “filled the land” (80:10).

⁴² Tanner, *Psalms*, 633.

⁴³ Many commentators make a connection between Israel being called a vine, and Joseph (already mentioned in 80:2) being called “a fruitful vine” (Gen 49:22, NIV). So, Keil and Delitzsch (*Psalms*, 385), Tate (*Psalms*, 314), Longman (*Psalms*, 299), and Kidner (*Psalms*, 291). This is possible, and the imagery is similar. However, psalm 80 uses יִצְאָל, while Gen. 49:22 uses תֵּבֵן.

⁴⁴ Psalm 74:12-17; 75:1; 76:2-3; 77:11-20; 78:1-72; 80:9-12; 81:4-12; 83:9-12. In the Asaphite collection, only Psalms 50, 73, 79, and 82 lack distinct references to God’s deeds in the past.

⁴⁵ For more on the vine imagery as it is used in psalm 80, see a biblical-theological discussion in 5.1, below.

⁴⁶ Kidner, *Psalms*, 291.

The second half of the strophe, 80:11-12, advances the imagery of the vine filling of the land (80:10). The vine covered mountains, and cedars, and spread from the (Mediterranean) Sea [ים] to the (Euphrates) River [נהר].⁴⁷ In view may be Sinai to the south, the cedars of Lebanon to the north, the Euphrates to the east, and the Mediterranean to the west: in total, a picture of a vine which has covered the whole earth. This was the promise which God had made to his people: “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours. Your territory shall be from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the western sea” (Deut. 11:24). The description in 80:10-11 appears to refer to the reign of Solomon – a golden era for the nation of Israel: “Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates, to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt” (1 Kings 4:21).

The rehearsal of God’s saving acts seems to be calling to God’s attention to the glory of the works he had done in the past. The strophe is full of verbs with God as the actor: “you brought” (בָּרַעַתְּ hiphil, imperfect, 2ms), “you drove” (שָׁרַעַתְּ piel, imperfect, 2ms), “you cleared” (פָּצַעַתְּ piel, perfect, 2ms), “and you caused [it] to be rooted” (שָׁרַעַתְּ hiphil, imperfect, 2ms, vav-consecutive). The resultant activity of the vine, “and it filled the land” (וַתִּמְלֵא-אֶרֶץ piel, imperfect 3fs, vav-consecutive) is not a result of Israel’s success, but the necessary outcome for a vine which had been so well cared for. The psalmist does not take any glory for Israel. Instead, rehearsing the special care that God had given in past days, he prepares for the coming petition that God would revive his glorious work.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ ים especially applies to the Mediterranean Sea, while נהר especially applies to the Euphrates River (*BDB*, 410, 625).

⁴⁸ Ross, *Psalms*, 695.

3.2.5 - Strophe 4: 80:13-17

The fourth strophe is chiasmatic in structure:

- [13a] (a) Why have you broken through its hedges?
[13b] (b) All passing along the way pluck it.
[14a] (c) The boar from the woods tears it up.
[14b] (d) The beast of the field grazes there.
God of armies, please turn!
[15] (e): **Look from heaven and see,
and attend to this vine!**
[16a] (d^ˆ) The shoot which you planted
[16b] (c^ˆ) The son you strengthened for yourself.
[17a] (b^ˆ) It is burned in fire, it is cut.
[17b] (a^ˆ) From the rebuke of your face they are carried off.

In this scheme, (a) and (a^ˆ) show the connection of the walls of Israel being torn down, and the people of Israel being carried off into exile; (b) and (b^ˆ) show the destruction done to the vine; (c) shows the destruction of the vine by strong enemies, and (c^ˆ) shows the strong son who could defeat the enemies; (d) pictures a beast grazing and (d^ˆ) shows what the beast is feeding on: the vine; (e) is an example of the central petition of the psalm, that God would turn away from his anger, look at the distress of his people, and attend to his vine.

The fourth strophe begins with a pitiful picture of what the vine has become. The psalmist asks, “why have you broken through its *hedges* (from רָדָּן)?”⁴⁹ This is not the word used to describe the destruction of the *walls* of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (הַמִּזְבֵּחַ, cf. 2 Chron. 36:19)⁵⁰, but the imagery is similar, and it could describe the same event. Certainly, the destruction of the walls of Jerusalem made it possible for “those passing along the way” (80:13) to pillage the city: “And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these [the king of

⁴⁹ According to Holladay, a “stone wall made of loose field stones and piled up with mortar” (*Lexicon*, 57).

⁵⁰ According to Holladay, a “wall around building or portion of city” (*Lexicon*, 98).

Babylon] brought to Babylon” (2 Chron. 36:18). The boar (חַזִּיר, often translated “swine”)⁵¹, which was active in the destruction of God’s vine, was an unclean animal, adding insult to Israel’s defeat (cf. Deut. 14:8, “And the *pig* (חַזִּיר)...is unclean for you). The psalmist’s question in 80:13, according to Ross, “is not so much asking for a reason from God as lamenting that God has enabled the enemies to do this.”⁵² The psalmist is not protesting innocence, but is asking a lamenting rhetorical question. The answer to the psalmist’s question, implicit in psalm 80, is explicit elsewhere in the Asaphite collection: “yet they sinned,” (78:17), “still they sinned” (78:32), “they tested and rebelled” (78:56).

The psalmist moves from this description of the nation’s trouble to the central petition in the psalm in 80:15: “God of armies, please turn! Look from heaven and see, and attend to this vine!” The request that God would “please turn!” (שׁוּבוּ־נָא, qal, imperative, ms with the particle of entreaty) is related to the refrain petition of the psalmist for the nation: “cause us to return!” (הֲשׁוּבֵנוּ, hiphil, imperative, 2ms, 1cp suffix). שׁוּבוּ־נָא is the only word in the psalm with an *Oleheyored*, the strongest disjunctive in the poetic books.⁵³ This makes the petition that God would turn the hinge on which the psalm swings. Combined with this central petition is a three-fold request: *look* (טַהַר־נָא hiphil, imperative, ms), *and see* (וַיִּרְאֶה qal, imperative, ms with a vav-consecutive), *and attend* (וַיִּשְׁמַע qal, imperative, ms with a vav-consecutive). Looking and seeing are similar, and the three imperatives taken together allude to God’s dealings with Israel during the exodus: “And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had *visited* (פָּקַד) his people of Israel and that he had *seen* (רָאָה) their affliction, they bowed their heads and

⁵¹ Holladay, *Lexicon*, 99.

⁵² Ross, *Psalms*, 695.

⁵³ William D. Barrick, “The Masoretic Hebrew Accents in Translation and Interpretation” (Sun Valley, CA: the Master’s Seminary, n.d.), 6. <https://drbarrick.org/files/papers/other/HebrewAccentsrev.pdf> (Accessed 16 Feb 2023).

worshipped” (Ex. 4:31). The psalmist knows that if God will only look and see, he will act in mercy.

80:16 introduces a distinctly messianic hope in the psalm.⁵⁴ With God attending the vine still in mind, the psalmist asks that God would also attend to “the son whom you strengthened for yourself.” Longman comments, “The reference to the king as God’s son connects to the Davidic covenant in which God promised that David would have a descendant on the throne forever, and that the king ‘would be his son’ (2 Sam. 7:14, Ps. 2:7).”⁵⁵ With the language of the Davidic covenant already established, the psalmist appeals to that language. In the psalmist’s mind, if the LORD were to turn towards his people in grace, it would be evidenced in the exaltation of the Davidic king.

Reality sets in once again, however — returning to the vine, the psalmist laments that “it is burned in fire, it is cut” (80:17). The petition that God would turn and attend to the vine and the son are still unfulfilled. Indeed, the people of God are not being “rooted in the land” (80:10), but, at God’s rebuke, are being “*carried off*” (אָדָּנָה, qal, imperfect, 3mp) to exile. Verse 17b is difficult to translate. Nearly all English translations take אָדָּנָה as “to perish,” either giving it a jussive sense, “may [the enemy] perish at your rebuke” or applying it to the people of God, “at your rebuke [your people] perish.”⁵⁶ However, אָדָּנָה can also mean “to be carried off,”⁵⁷ or “be lost or strayed.”⁵⁸ Otzen observes, “Occasionally, the meaning “wander off, run away” also

⁵⁴ This is not to suggest that “the son” of 80:16 is the only messianic expectation in psalm 80, but it is perhaps the strongest.

⁵⁵ Longman, *Psalms*, 300.

⁵⁶ Tanner, *Psalms*, 634.

⁵⁷ Holladay, *Lexicon*, 1.

⁵⁸ *BDB*, 1.

appears, especially with reference to animals.”⁵⁹ Israel has already been referred to as a flock (80:2), and their recurring petition has been, “cause us to return.” Therefore, if the problem is exile, it seems appropriate to consider the rebuke of God which the psalmist laments as Israel being “carried off.”

3.2.6 Strophe 5:18-20

The central petition of the psalm is found in 80:15 – אֲנִי־בֶן־יְמִינֶךָ, and the basis for the hope of this petition being answered is bound up in 80:18: God strengthening the son of his right hand whom he makes strong for himself. In psalm 110:1 David identifies the man at God’s right hand as his own Lord. Thus, the psalmist is alluding to one greater than David, in whom are bound up the fortunes of the ruined vine, so desperately in need of help. This is the messianic hope and center of the psalm: as God strengthens the man of his right hand, the fortunes of the people will be strengthened as well.⁶⁰

Attached with this prayer for restoration is a promise of worship. If God turns his face, and if the son of man is strengthened, then the nation promises faithfulness to him: “we will not deviate from you.” Tate comments, “The vow in [80:19] is noteworthy because of its use of the verb סָגַב, ‘move away/backslide;’ freely translated: ‘We will never be backsliders again!’”⁶¹ The promise of worship, “we will call (נִקְרָא) on your name” (80:19) alludes to God’s word through Asaph in 50:15, “and call upon me (וְקִרְאַנִי) in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” The psalmist then closes with the final refrain, now at its fullest: “LORD God of armies, cause us to return! And cause your face to shine, and we will be saved.” Since the

⁵⁹ Benedikt Otzen, “אָבִי,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 15 vols., ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. John T. Willis et. al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 1:20. (Hereafter, *TDOT*).

⁶⁰ Longman, *Psalms*, 300-301. For more on the son of man, see 5.2, below.

⁶¹ Tate, *Psalms*, 316.

Davidic covenant was invoked in 80:16 and 80:18, it is appropriate to end the psalm with a petition to the covenant name of God: the LORD.

4.1 Lexical Considerations: שׁוּב Word Study.

Throughout psalm 80, שׁוּב plays an important part in the progression. It is a word with several nuances, and the twelfth most common verb in the OT, occurring over 1050 times.⁶² At its most basic, שׁוּב carries the sense of turning back, returning, or going back.⁶³ In the hiphil stem (as in 80:4, 8, 20), “the notion of physical movement is frequently attested ...[and] can have significant theological implications especially when referring to the return from exile.”⁶⁴ This seems to be the best way to understand its use in psalm 80, as a petition for a return from exile into the promised land.

However, since a return from exile and repentance from sin are so closely connected, it is not surprising that שׁוּב plays a major role in the prophets. Hosea uses it to describe Israel’s need to repent, “Come, let us *return* to the LORD” (Hos. 6:1). Jeremiah uses שׁוּב extensively, calling Judah to repent: “*Return*, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness” (Jer. 3:22). When the LORD had answered the prayers of his people, including the prayer found in psalm 80, they rejoiced in his work, “When the LORD *restored* the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream” (Ps. 126:1).

5. Theological Considerations

Psalm 80 is not directly cited anywhere in the New Testament. However, the imagery of the vine and the son of man seem to be implicitly behind much of Christ’s preaching.⁶⁵

⁶² Heinz-Josef Fabry, “שׁוּב,” in *TDOT*, 14:463.

⁶³ *BDB*, 996; Holladay, *Lexicon*, 362.

⁶⁴ Fabry, “שׁוּב,” in *TDOT*, 14:480

⁶⁵ Andrew Streebt, *The Vine and the Son of Man: Eschatological Interpretation of Psalm 80 in Early Judaism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014).

5.1 – Biblical Theology and the Vine

Psalm 80 centers on an extended illustration of Israel being a vine which God transplanted from Egypt into the promised land (80:9-17). This is not an isolated illustration, but one which runs through the OT: “Often...in the Old Testament, God is presented as a gardening horticulturalist with Israel depicted as his pleasant planting.”⁶⁶ In his covenant with David, the LORD uses gardening imagery, “I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them” (2 Sam. 7:10). In the prophets, the vine motif continues. Isaiah presents a picture of God’s tender care: God cleared the ground (Isa. 5:1, cf. Ps. 80:10), and planted it (Isa. 5:2, cf. Ps. 80:9); but when the vineyard did not produce good fruit, he broke down its wall (Isa. 5:5, cf. Ps. 80:13), and let it be trampled down (Isa. 5:5, cf. Ps. 80:14). Ezekiel also uses vine imagery to picture God’s transplanting of Israel from Egypt to the promised land (Ezek. 17:1-10). Jeremiah pictures Judah as “a choice vine” which inexplicably has become “a wild vine” (Jer. 2:21).

In the New Testament, Christ draws on this OT imagery, making connections with the NT church, and with his own person and work. In Mark 12:1-11 Jesus gives the parable of the tenants and the vineyard. When the owner of the vineyard is unable to get a harvest from his tenants, he eventually sends his son, whom the tenants kill, after which the owner gives the vineyard to others. Christ explicitly cites psalm 118, but Streett argues that he is also alluding to the vine in psalm 80: “the lexical and rare concept agreement in the combination of the son and the vineyard [in Mark 12:1-11], is a strong pointer to Psalm 80.”⁶⁷ Jesus also draws on vine imagery in John 15:1-8. In this passage, Jesus identifies himself as the vine, his Father as the vinedresser, and the disciples as the branches (John 15:1, 5). This is unexpected, since so far, the vine has always represented Israel. In a similar way to Jesus representing the true Israel and the

⁶⁶ Hamilton, *Psalms*, 74.

⁶⁷ Streett, *The Vine and the Son*, 202.

faithful son (Hos. 11:1, Matt. 2:15), in John 15 Jesus is the true and fruitful vine.⁶⁸ Jesus is demonstrating the messianic identity between himself and his people – their union with him, and their fruitfulness as a fruit of that union.

5.2 – Biblical Theology and the Son of Man

Psalm 80 presents a messianic figure as central to the fortunes of the people of God: the son of man (80:16, 18). “Son of Man” was Jesus’ most common self-designation in the gospels.⁶⁹ Many scholars suggest that Jesus took this messianic designation from the Daniel’s vision, “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom” (Dan. 7:13-14). Notably, Streett argues that Daniel is drawing from the language of Psalm 80 in his vision.⁷⁰ The vine which covers the earth, closely connected with the son of man (Ps. 80:9-12, 16) does fit well with the vision in Daniel of the son of man being given a kingdom and an everlasting dominion. Thus, when Jesus presents himself as the messianic son of man, he draws not only from Daniel 7, but also from psalm 80: he is the son of man whom the God of armies must strengthen if the vine is to flourish again.

5.3 Systematic Theology – The Grammar of Salvation

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks, “What is justification?” and answers: “Justification is a work of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”⁷¹ In justification, God is active – he pardons, he accepts, he imputes. Those justified are

⁶⁸ Streett argues that in John 15, Psalm 80 is interpreted messianically and eschatologically (*The Vine and the Son*, 218-219).

⁶⁹ Marius, Ne, “‘Son of Man’ in the Gospel of Mark,” *Skriflig*, 51, no. 1 (2017): <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v51i3.2096>.

⁷⁰ Streett, *The Vine and the Son*, 107.

⁷¹ WSC Q&A 33.

passive. It is noteworthy that the grammar of psalm 80 demonstrates this truth: God is the active party in our salvation. In the threefold refrain of psalm 80, the petition for a return has God as the active party: הָשִׁיבֵנוּ – a hiphil, imperative, ms with a 1cp pronominal suffix. The hiphil expresses causation, the returning is something that God will cause to take place.⁷² However, for the people of God, the result of this returning is passive: וְנִשְׁעָרָה – a niphil, imperfect, 1cp, with a cohortative suffix. The niphil expresses passivity, “we will be saved.”⁷³ This is not to say that God’s people are inactive, but their activity is a result of God’s activity. They promise, “we will call on your name,” but this calling follows God’s salvation. First, God must “make us live” (80:19).

6: Homiletical Outline:⁷⁴

Introduction:

1. Review the situation of Israel’s exile: do not demand that it be Assyrian or Babylonian, but simply that it is a psalm for people in a time of distress – the Fallen Condition Focus of the Psalm.
 2. Establish a connection between Israel and the church – this is a psalm which we can take on our lips and sing to God, asking for his help.
 3. Homiletical Point: *When you are far from God, cry out and appeal for help.*
- I. Cry out for help, appealing to God’s character (vv. 1-6).
 - A. God is a shepherd – picture of care and protection (v.1).
 - B. God is merciful – he dwells between the cherubim on the mercy seat (v.1).
 - C. God is full of pity – pour out your heart to him (vv.4-7).
 - II. Cry out for help, appealing to God’s former dealings (vv. 8-11).
 - A. Use history to preach to yourself (cf. 77:11-12).
 - B. Remind God of the glory he receives in redeeming and reviving his people: *you brought, you drove, you cleared.*

⁷² For the hiphil, see Pratico and Van Pelt, *Hebrew Grammar*, 287ff.

⁷³ For the niphil, see Pratico and Van Pelt, 264ff.

⁷⁴ The versification and references in the homiletical outline follow the ESV.

III. Cry out for help, appealing to your status in Christ (vv. 12-20).

- A. God has given us the messianic Son of Man in Jesus Christ, and God has made him strong: at the resurrection he was given all authority.
- B. In Christ, as those who share in his resurrection, we can promise devotion and offer worship (v. 18).
- C. In Christ, we can be confident that our prayers have been heard: *LORD, God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!*

Appendix A: MT and Personal Translation in Parallel

Verse:	Masoretic Text	Personal Translation
1	לְמַנְצֵחַ אֶל־שֹׁשְׁבִימִים עֲדוֹת לְאַסָּף מִזְמוֹר:	To the chief musician: to lilies. A witness for Asaph, a psalm.
2	רֹעֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל! הַאֲזִינָה נְהַג כַּצֹּאן יוֹסֵף יֵשֵׁב הַכְּרוּבִים הוֹפִיעָה:	Shepherd of Israel, listen! [The one] guiding Joseph like a flock, [the one] dwelling between the cherubim, shine forth!
3	לִפְנֵי אֶפְרַיִם וּבִנְיָמִן וּמְנַשֶּׁה עוֹרְרָה אֶת־גְּבוּרָתְךָ וּלְכֵה לִישַׁעַתָּה לָנוּ:	Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, let yourself be stirred up with your strength, and come to save us.
4	אֱלֹהִים הַשִּׁיבֵנו וְהָאֵר פְּנֵיךָ וּנְשָׁעָה:	God, cause us to return! And cause your face to shine, and we shall be saved!
5	יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת עַד־מַתִּי עֲשֵׂנָת בְּתַפִּלַּת עַמֶּךָ:	LORD God of armies, how long will you be angry in the prayer of your people?
6	הָאֵכַלְתֶּם לֶחֶם דְּמַעְיָה וְתִשְׁלַמוּ בְּדַמְעוֹת שְׁלִישׁ:	You have caused them to be fed with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink again and again and again.
7	תְּשִׁימֵנוּ מִדּוֹחַ לְשִׁכְנֵינוּ וְאֵיבֵינוּ לְעַגְרֵלָמוּ:	You have made us a strife to our neighbors, and our enemies mock,
8	אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת הַשִּׁיבֵנו וְהָאֵר פְּנֵיךָ וּנְשָׁעָה:	God of armies, cause us to return! And cause your face to shine, and we shall be saved!
9	גָּפְנָה מִמִּצְרַיִם תְּסִיעַ תְּגַרְשׁ גֹּוֹלִים וְתִטְעֶנָּה:	You brought a vine from Egypt, you drove out nations and planted it.
10	פָּנִיתָ לְפָנֶיהָ וְתִשְׁרַשׁ שְׁרָשֶׁיהָ וְתִמְלֵא אֶרֶץ:	You cleared its face and caused the root to be rooted, and it filled the land.
11	כָּסוּ הַרִימִים צִלְהָה לְעֵנְפֶיהָ אֲרֻז־אֵל: תִּשְׁלַח קַצִּירָהּ עַד־יָם וְאֶל־נָהָר יִזְקוּתֶיהָ:	The mountains were covered with its shadow, its boughs [covered] the mighty cedars.
12	לָמָּה פָּרַצְתָּ גְדָרֶיהָ וְאָרוּהָ כְּלַעֲבָרִי דָּרָךְ:	Why have you broken through its hedges so that all passing by the way pluck it?
13	יְכַרְסֵמֶנָּה חֲזִיר מִיַּעַר וְיִזוּ שְׂדֵי יִרְעֶנָּה:	The boar from the woods tears it up, and the beast of the field grazes there.
14	אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת שׁוּב־נָא הִבַּט מִשָּׁמַיִם וּרְאֵה וּפְקֹד גִּפְנֵי זֹאת:	God of armies, please turn! Look from heaven and see, and attend to this vine.
15	וּכְנֵה אֲשֶׁר־נִטְעָה יְמִינְךָ וְעַל־בֶּן אֲמַצְתָּה לָּךְ:	and the shoot which your right hand has planted, and on the son you strengthened for yourself.
16	שָׂרְפָהּ בְּאֵשׁ כְּסוּתָהּ מִצַּעֲרַת פְּנֵיךָ יֵאָבְדוּ:	It is burned in fire, it is cut. From the rebuke of your face they are carried off.

Verse:	Masoretic Text	Personal Translation
18	<p>תְּהִי יְדֶיךָ עַל־אִישׁ יְמִינְךָ עַל־בֶּן־ אָדָם אֲמַצְתָּ לָּךְ:</p>	<p>Let your hand be on the man of your right hand, on the son of man you strengthened for yourself.</p>
19	<p>וְלֹא־נִסְוֶה מִמֶּנּוּ תְחַיֵּנוּ וְנִשְׁמָחַ נִקְרָא:</p>	<p>And we will not deviate from you. Make us live and we will call to your name.</p>
20	<p>יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת הַשִּׁבְנוּ הָאָרֶץ כְּנֹיֶךָ וְנִשְׁעָה:</p>	<p>LORD God of armies, cause us to return, and cause your face to shine, and we shall be saved!</p>

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