

Restore us, O God

The Psalm for the Fourth Sunday in Advent is Psalm 80:1-7. Israel's prayer is for restoration when she had been ravaged by a foreign power.

**Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. ² Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up your might and come to save us! ³ Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!
⁴ O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? ⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure. ⁶ You make us an object of contention for our neighbors, and our enemies laugh among themselves. ⁷ Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved!**

References to Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh (v 2), representing the Northern Kingdom of Israel, suggest that this psalm may have been written in response to the Assyrian campaign of 2Ki 17:1-6. Refugees from the Northern Kingdom have come to the Jerusalem sanctuary in the Southern Kingdom to pray for restoration and peace.

Verses 1-3 are an appeal for God to arouse himself and go before his people again with all his glory and might as he did of old in the desert.

The shepherd-flock recurrent element is an image for God that speaks not only of protection but also of divine self-sacrifice for the sheep.

The church of Christ is called a flock because of its unity. It gives gentleness, to the anointed.

In verses 3 & 7 the psalmist asks God to have his face shine on them. God's face beams with gentle kindness so that His people are not harmed but blessed. Through the mercies and promises of the covenant, the people who were terrified by the Lord's presence now begin to see him for who he is.

Verses 4-7 are a lament over the Lord's severe punishment of his people. After 722 B.C. Israel never again existed as an independent kingdom, and even Judah was confined to a relatively small area of the hills of Judea.

During this Advent season we remember that we daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment. However, we also know that the Jesus, whom we celebrate in a few days, has taken care of every one of our sins and leaves us with a confident hope for his second coming. We are reminded that when we hear his blessing at the end of worship services we know that his face shines on us.

Prayer: As you have delivered Your people of old, dear Lord, so also deliver me for the sake of your Son, Jesus. Amen. (TLSB)