

## PSALM 79 AND 80

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you accept the late date for the composition of this psalm—i.e., during the period of the Maccabees?
2. We *must* associate this psalm with a desecration and destruction of the Temple—which one? Discuss the reasons for your choice.
3. War has not changed. We could use the description given here to describe a thousand wars. Who has won by wars?
4. The writer of the psalm feels that jealousy is the cause for the calamity. Discuss.
5. Are we to assume that God acts on nations—tribes and families as well as individuals? i.e. the sins of nations—tribes and families accumulate over a period of time until God brings punishment? If not this, what?
6. The personal pronoun appears very prominently: (a) *your* land, (b) *your* Temple, (c) *your* people, (d) *your* name—why? Did it help?
7. There is both strength and weakness in the promises of the afflicted. Discuss.

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### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Prayer for the Flock and Vine of Israel.

### ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, By Three Significant Titles, Jehovah is besought to interpose for Salvation, before Three Significantly Selected Tribes. Stanza II., vers. 4-7, Remonstrance with God for the length of His Manifestation of Displeasure. Stanza III., vers. 8-11, The Vine—Transplanted out of Egypt and Prosperous in Canaan. Stanza IV., vers. 12-15, The Vine—Endangered and Damaged: Prayer that it be Inspected and Protected. Stanza V., vers. 16-18, In order that the Destruction of the Vine may be Averted, Representation and Restoration are Besought.

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(Lm.) By Asaph—Psalm.

- 1 Shepherd of Israel oh give ear!  
leader of Joseph as a flock,  
throned on the cherubim oh shine forth!

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- 2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh  
oh stir up thy heroic strength,  
and oh come to our salvation!
- 3 *Oh God! restore us,  
And light up thy face,  
And we shall be saved.*
- 4 Jehovah God of hosts!  
how long hast thou been angry<sup>1</sup> in spite of<sup>2</sup> the prayer of  
thy people?
- 5 [How long] hast thou fed them with the bread of tears,  
given them to drink of tears in large measure?<sup>3</sup>
- 6 [How long] wilt thou make us a strife to our neighbours,  
or shall our foes laugh at us?<sup>4</sup>
- 7 *O God of hosts! restore us,  
And light up thy face,—  
And we shall be saved.*
- 8 A vine out of Egypt thou didst lift,  
didst drive out nations and plant it:
- 9 Didst clear a space before it,  
so it rooted its roots and filled the land:
- 10 Covered were the mountains with its shade,  
and with its boughs the cedars of GOD:
- 11 It thrust forth its branches as far as the sea,  
and unto the River its shoots.<sup>5</sup>
- 12 Wherefore hast thou broken down its fences,<sup>6</sup>  
so that all who pass along the way have plucked of its fruit?
- 13 The boar out of the forest<sup>7</sup> gnaweth it,  
and the roaming beast of the field browseth on it.
- 14 O God of hosts! return we pray thee,  
look around out of the heavens and see,—  
and inspect this vine;

1. Ml.: "snorted" or "fumed."

2. Or: "during."

3. Ml.: "by the tierce." "The third part of some larger measure, perhaps the bath (Ez. 45:11), and if so equivalent to nearly three gallons,—a large measure for tears, though a small one for the earth, Is. 40:12 ('measure')—Dr.

4. So some cod. (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn. M.T.: "laugh to themselves" ("mock as they please"—Dr.).

5. Or: "suckers."

6. Or: "walls."

7. That is=symbol of Rome. Or: "river: (=symbol of Egypt). See G. Intro., 338-340.

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- 15 And be thou the protection<sup>8</sup> of that which thy right-hand  
hath planted,  
and over the bough<sup>9</sup> thou hast secured for thyself.
- 16 It is to be burned with fire it is to be cut down,  
at the rebuke of thy face<sup>10</sup> they will perish!
- 17 Let thy hand be over the man of thy right hand,  
over the son of mankind<sup>11</sup> thou hast secured for thyself:
- 18 So shall we not draw back from thee,  
thou wilt restore us to life<sup>12</sup> and on thy name will we call.
- 19 *Jehovah God of hosts restore us,  
Light up thy face,—  
And we shall be saved.*

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

(CMm.) For the Wine-presses = Feast of Tabernacles.

PARAPHRASE

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O Shepherd of Israel who leads Israel like a flock; O God enthroned above the cherubim, bend down Your ear and listen as I plead. Display Your power and radiant glory.

2 Let Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh see You rouse Yourself and use Your mighty power to rescue us.

3 Turn us again to Yourself, O God. Look down on us in joy and love;<sup>1</sup> only then shall we be saved.

4 O Jehovah, God of heaven's armies, how long will You be angry and reject our prayers?

5 You have fed us with sorrow and tears,

6 And have made us the scorn of the neighboring nations. They laugh among themselves.

7 Turn us again to Yourself, O God of Hosts. Look down on us in joy and love;<sup>1</sup> only then shall we be saved.

8 You brought us from Egypt as though we were a tender vine and drove away the heathen from Your land and planted us.

9 You cleared the ground and tilled the soil and we took root and filled the land.

8. So Del. and others.

9. Ml.: "son." Some cod. (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.) "son of man (*adam*)"—Gn.

10. Gt.: "mouth"—Gn.

11. Heb.: *Adam*.

12. Or: "quicken us."

1. Literally, "cause Your face to shine upon us."

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10 The mountains were covered with our shadow; we were like the mighty cedar trees,<sup>2</sup>

11 Covering the entire land from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River.

12 But now You have broken down our walls leaving us without protection.

13 The boar from the forest roots around us, and the wild animals feed on us.

14 Come back, we beg of You, O God of the armies of heaven, and bless us. Look down from heaven and see our plight and care for this Your vine!

15 Protect what You Yourself have planted, this son You have raised for Yourself.

16 For we are chopped and burned by our enemies. May they perish at Your frown.

17 Strengthen the man You love,<sup>3</sup> the son of Your choice,<sup>4</sup>

18 And we will never forsake You again. Revive us to trust in You.

19 Turn us again to Yourself, O God of the armies of heaven. Look down on us, Your face aglow with joy and love—only then shall we be saved.

## EXPOSITION

The exceeding beauty of this psalm is obvious at a glance,—with its striking invocation, its threefold refrain, and its exquisite allegory of the Vine. Its power, however, cannot be felt to the full until its scope is observed and its spirit perceived. Its scope is, to reconcile all the tribes of Israel to each other and to their God: its spirit is, on the one hand, one of absolute loyalty to Jehovah, in his preference for Judah as the leading tribe, and to the house of David as the divinely appointed reigning dynasty; and, on the other hand, one of tender regard for the susceptibilities of the northern tribes. Whether *Asaph*, the author of this psalm, be *Asaph the Second* or *Asaph the Seventh* matters little, so long as we take him to have been the prophet compeer of King Hezekiah. While the King was *inviting* the tribes to come to Jerusalem, the psalmist was *singing* them in to Jehovah's royal seat.

Viewed from this standpoint, what address is discovered in

2. Literally, "the cedars of God."

3. Literally, "the man of Your right hand."

4. Literally, "the son of man You made strong for Yourself."

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the opening invocation. When the term "Israel" did not mean the whole nation, it specially meant the Ten Tribes; and of "Joseph" the same may be said, with the especial consideration added, that as both Ephraim and Manasseh were integral members of the northern kingdom, "Joseph" would more emphatically point "North." So far, then, the invocation counts two for the "North"; but when the third Divine Title is added, "Throned on the cherubim," then, as the holy cherubic Throne was now located in Jerusalem, that was emphatically one for the South. So that, while this invocation, in the order of mention, yields the leading place to the North, and then weightily gravitates to the South, it may be truthfully described as a tribe-uniting Invocation.

In the same spirit the psalm proceeds, with the tact of a Divine winsomeness: "Thou who art throned in the South, before the North shew forth thy glorious presence!" "Before the North": more in detail, *Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh*,—Ephraim and Manasseh being, of course, the two sons of Joseph; with little Benjamin placed between them, with exquisite good taste and with striking historical reminiscences clustering about the arrangement; first, as all being the descendants of the two sons of Rachel; and second, as having been placed in the rear of the Ark in the appointed order of march through the wilderness: "Thou who are throned in the Ark before them, before them shine forth, as thou leadest them on to victory and glory." Nor was this association of Benjamin with Ephraim and Manasseh without historical propriety or hortatory necessity. "At first sight," says Kirkpatrick, "it may seem strange that Benjamin is reckoned among the northern tribes, for partially at any rate it sided with Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:21, 2 Chr. 11:3, 23, 15:8, 9); but the one tribe remaining to David was Judah (1 Kings 11:13, 32, 36), and Benjamin must be reckoned to the Northern Kingdom to make up Ten tribes, for Simeon had become merged in Judah and is not counted. The principal Benjamite towns of Bethel, Gilgal, and Jericho belonged to the Northern Kingdom." To which we may add a sentence from Delitzsch as to these three cities: "But, like Ramah (1 Kings 15:21f), not without being contested (cf. 2 Chr. 13:19); the boundaries were therefore fluctuating."

Thus wooed into united supplication, the twelve-tribed nation is led forward in impassioned pleading, as the repeated use of the "*h*-paragoric" shews: *Oh give ear! Oh shine forth! Oh stir up! "O come!"*

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The refrain too is worthy of its place as the triple crown of the psalm. *O God! restore us: or, bring us back*—which would especially suit those who were in banishment;—or, *bring us back* to our former estate, *Restore us*—which would suit all who lamented their degeneracy and disunion. *And light up thy face*—with that smile which so gladdens all such as love thee. *And,* thus gladdened—united—guided, *we shall be saved* from foes and dangers and sins.

To this stanza of invocation and petition, succeeds a stanza of invocation and remonstrance. Only, now, the invocation is shorter: *Jehovah*—the Becoming One; *God of Hosts*, with saints and angels and elements at thy command, waiting to do thy will.—Invocations are useful, as the natural outcome of earnestness; as apt reminders, to the petitioner and his fellow-worshippers, of the nature of the weighty business in hand—that we are neither dreaming nor soliloquising, nor aimlessly wandering: we are in the court of the Divine Presence, speaking to the Almighty—*that* is our one present business. Moreover, Invocations are turned into pleadings by the choice of epithets to suit our need, and by the accumulation of them as so many avenues of approach to him whom we worship.—*How long?* is the key-note of the remonstrance, the spirit of which should undoubtedly be carried through the remainder of the stanza: up to and preparing for the supplicatory refrain. *How long* hast thou been thus angry and wilt thou continue to be? *How long* hast thou fed us with the bread of tears—so that our hungry lips open in vain for food, only to taste the salt tears that fall upon them? *How long* art thou going still further to make us a strife to our smaller neighbours, who are quarreling among themselves as to who first and who most shall insult us in our humiliation? *How long* are our more formidable foes to be permitted to turn on us with a scornful laugh when we groan under their unchecked atrocities?—Thus are we permitted to interweave the element of time with our prayers: *How long?* The longest may seem but “a small moment” to Him who sees the end from the beginning; but, to us, creatures of a day, it is a serious aggravation to our troubles that they are so long continued. And what we are here taught by Asaph is, that we may dare to remonstrate with God over the almost unbearable protraction of our trials. Thus, as least, shall we find an intensified refrain of petition welcome, as a relief to the burden which weighs down our spirits: *O God of Hosts, restore us, And light up thy face, And we shall be saved.*

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And now comes the Vine—the parable, the allegory of the Vine—and let us remember that we are still, in prayer, speaking to Him whose vine it is: its Owner, its Planter and Transplanter, its Waterer and Fencer, its Devastator, its seeming Neglecter, its severe Inspector, its true and only Protector, its Redeemer and Restorer.

It is thus that this Vine comes before us;—1. Transplanted and Prosperous, 2. Endangered and Damaged, 3. Inspected and Protected, 4. Represented and Restored. Although these headings are not exactly conformed to the stanzical divisions of the psalm, they may be helpful as a basis of study. While paying a passing regard to the framework of the Allegory, let us chiefly endeavour to get at its true meaning.

1. The Vine—Israel: *Transplanted and Prosperous*. It began its growth in Egypt. But in Egypt there was neither room for its growth, nor an atmosphere to make it fruitful. Egypt was peopled by an oppressing nationality, unfavourable to the growth within it of a free nation; and Egypt was poisoned with idolatry, unfitted for the development of a pure nation. Jehovah desired a nation both free and pure: fitted to be a channel of blessing to all the other nations of the earth. Therefore he transplanted his Vine—*lifted it*, as a vine is lifted with its roots, or a vine-layer is lifted, and laid in its ample bed.

But it must have a *cleared space* to receive it. The Owner of this Vine foresaw this need and provided for it. Hence the psalmist says: *Didst clear a space before it*. And the Divine directions were, that the space should be cleared. The iniquity of the Amorites was now full; and therefore, being mindful that the space they occupied should be filled to better purpose, the Disposer of Nations commanded them to be extirpated—a severe but needful mandate; “severe,” because it involved the destruction of the innocent with the guilty; “needful,” because the seven nations of Canaan had become a pest and a peril to the world. Unmerciful? Verily: it would have been more merciful, if the terrible Divine Behest of Destruction had been sternly executed. It would have saved the lives as well as the morals of generations yet unborn.

Nevertheless, space was made; so that this Vine, transplanted from Egypt, grew rapidly: in the picturesque language of the psalm, *it rooted its roots, and filled the land*. As if on purpose to recall and amplify the blessings on Joseph which fell from his father Jacob’s lips (Gen. 49), the psalmist proceeds:

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*Covered were the mountains with its shade*—the mountains of the South, *And with its boughs the cedars of God*—on the Lebanon to the North, a feat which the Vine, as a climbing plant, is able to accomplish; *It thrust forth its branches*, with the true thrusting power of growth, *as far as the sea*—the Mediterranean, to the West; *and unto the River (Nahar=the Euphrates) its shoots (or suckers)*. Great (outward) prosperity, nearly if not quite realised in the days of Solomon. Is it strange that such prosperity should not have endured? Alas! there was a worm at the root of this Vine. Idolatry—the very thing that the God of Israel would not tolerate—had entered and was making rapid advances even in the days of Solomon.

2. *Endangered and Damaged*.—Inwardly, the danger was Sin—flagrant national Sin. The outward danger followed. The Owner of the Vine himself *broke down its fences*. His own character was involved: his purposes were being thwarted: there was a needs-be that he should interpose. Self-consistency and truth demanded it: all this had been threatened by Moses, and it must come. *All who passed along the way*—Egypt to meet Assyria, Assyria to meet Egypt—*plucked of its fruit*; and verily the fruit of this Vine was luscious and tempting; as, for example, the golden treasures of the Temple! Pity the defenceless Vine! when the *boar out of the forest*—the wild-boar of Assyria, Babylon, Greece or Rome, came that way (the Boar was anciently the symbol of Rome). The Vine, that is the Nation, more frequently pitied itself, than turned in true repentance to its offended God. True to the life it is, that Jewish scholars have punned on the very word which describes their punishment. The essential letters of the Hebrew word for *forest* are Y, R: if pronounced *jaar*, then it means *forest*; but if pronounced *ye-or* then it signifies *river*, and particularly the Nile. Now, they did not fear the Boar of the Nile so much as they stood in awe of the Boar of the forest east or west. The roaming beast of *the field*, in the next line, may mean—either any marauding power, or the smaller neighboring monarchs ever ready to browse on Israel's most tender and promising *shoots*.

3. *Inspected and Protected*.—No wonder that the psalmist should again and more earnestly than ever betake himself to prayer. And, first, he prays for inspection: *O God of hosts! return, we pray thee look around out of the heavens*—on the



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various nations; *and see*—whether there is any other nation that interests and concerns thee like this; *and inspect this vine*—look narrowly into its condition, and see what, in thy clemency and wisdom, can be done in its behalf. So far, we Gentiles hearken with complacency: it is doubtless right, we are ready to say, that *this vine*, on which so much culture has been lavished should be *inspected!* But are we equally prepared to follow Asaph in the next step which he takes? *And be thou the protection of that which thy right-hand hath planted.* Perhaps we are utterly and genuinely unable to say “what more” the Divine Husbandman “could have done for his vineyard which he has not done for it” (Isa. 5). But how can he protect a nation which cannot and will not protect itself—cannot and will not come under his protection? And so we are straitened, not in God, but in ourselves, and in our own poverty of conception. We think we have reached the end of HIS ways which are “past finding out”! Is there never a *bough* in this Vine, which as a fresh layer can again be transplanted; and so a New Vine be produced therefrom? Perhaps, even to this length, the utmost stretch of our Gentile imaginations may extend. “Yes!” we say; “even that may be. ‘Salvation is of the Jews.’ The Messiah ‘comes of the seed of David.’ And, only give to the Messiah a new people; then he and his new people shall form a new Vine; and in that new Vine the old shall live again and so be perpetuated.” Good as far as it goes; only it does not go so far as the Apostle Paul would conduct us; for he exclaims, in a passage wherein Israel cannot mean the Church, “And so all Israel shall be saved.” Therefore we must yet stand firm to the text of this Asaphic Psalm.

4. *Represented and Restored.*—It was something that at the close of the previous stanza (ver. 15) we saw a *bough* that was not likely to be destroyed, seeing that Jehovah had *secured it for himself*. The Psalmist sets the peril of Israel’s national destruction clearly before him. The natural doom of such a Vine is *to be burned with fire*; and, with a view to such a burning, *to be cut down*: there is reason, in Israel’s persistent sin, for Divine Rebuke stern enough to leave Israel to *perish*. But this apprehension on the part of the psalmist prompts to renewed and more explicit prayer. *Let thy hand be protectingly over the man of thy right hand.* Is this man an individual or a nation? There is something to be said for the opinion of some that it may be the whole nation of Israel; even as, in ver. 15,

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*that which thy right hand hath planted* is clearly the nation. Still, we have already had brought before us the separating conception of a single *bough*, or *son*, of the Vine; and Jehovah's first care is clearly to protect and preserve that *bough*; and this is the idea which is now, in supplication, brought forward anew—brought forward anew and amplified,—and, in the process of repetition and amplification, more fully described and more accurately defined. Even the phrase, *the man of thy right hand* seems irresistibly to carry us forward to the Messiah. But when the duplicate phrase follows, *The son of Mankind—the Son of Adam*; and the striking description is repeated, *whom thou hast secured for thyself* that conclusion is undoubtedly confirmed; so that we are relieved to find that even the Aramaean Targum giving scholarly Jewish opinion in the early Christian centuries is borne along in the same direction with its paraphrase: "And upon Messiah the king, whom thou hast made strong for thyself." Still the question recurs—Does this gravitation of the psalm to the Messiah include or exclude the Nation? If we still follow the psalmist's lead,—to say nothing more now of concurrent Scripture,—we shall undoubtedly answer in the affirmative—It will include and not exclude the Nation. For who are these who now join in the pleading—*So shall we not draw back from thee*, fully and finally. On the contrary, however dead we are at present, yea even generations of our people in Hades (Eze. 37), *Thou wilt restore us to life*, and as the priestly nation we were originally intended to be (Exo. 19) and which prophecy clearly foretells we yet shall be (Isa. 61:6, 66:20) *And on thy name will we call. Jehovah, God of hosts, restore us*—us, the nation, inheriting the name and honour of the Vine thou didst lift out of Egypt, *Light up thy face, and we, the Vine, the Nation, shall be saved.*

Recurring to the opening of the psalm, a weighty lesson may be drawn therefrom for the guidance of such as would seek the reunion of Christendom. There is in this realm also the unfaithfulness which fears to tell Ephraim his sin. For these the 78th psalm furnishes instruction: showing the possibility of faithfully admonishing Ephraim, that he has "turned back in the day of battle," and yet so administering the lesson as to commend it to his attention. The present psalm furnishes the hint that, besides warning Ephraim, efforts to win him may be alternated with sterner remonstrances. Set the Ark of the Divine Presence before him, and entreat him to follow its lead;

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at the same time endeavouring to convince him that there are privileges to be enjoyed in Judah which Ephraim has forfeited. Let us hold fast the honour of having first denounced Divisionalism in Christendom: at the same time wooing back wanderers in a generous and winsome spirit.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. There are some very meaningful figures of speech in this psalm. List them and make application.
2. There seems to be a national purpose in the structure of the psalm. Discuss.
3. Is it ever proper to argue with God? Is this being done in verse 1 through 7? Discuss.
4. The comparison of Israel to a vine is fully and beautifully described. List the divisions of the text as given by Rotherham.
5. God accomplished two purposes in defeating the Amorites and giving their land to Israel. What were they?
6. Note the extent of the conquered land. Were not the promises of God fulfilled as to giving Israel the land? Discuss.
7. Who is "the boar of the forest"?; or is it "the boar of the river"?
8. Did God ever answer the prayer of verses 14, 15?
9. Perhaps when we fulfill the promise of verse 18, God will answer the prayers of verses 14, 15, 17, 19.
10. An English poet named Mant has done such a beautiful job poetically we wish to share his poem with you.  
Thy hands from Egypt brought a goodly vine,  
And planted fair in fertile Palestine;  
Clear'd for its grasping roots th'unpeopled land,  
And gave it high to rise, and firm to stand.  
Far o'er the eternal hills her shadow spread,  
Her tendrils wreath'd the cedar's towering head;  
And, as the centre of the land she stood,  
Her branches reach'd the sea, her boughs the eastern flood.  
Why hast Thou now her hedges rent away,  
And left her bare, the passing traveler's prey?  
The field-fed beast devours each tender shoot,  
Fierce from the wood the boar assails her root.  
Return, O God; from heaven Thine eyes incline;  
Behold, and visit this neglected vine:

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Regard the plant, Thou once didst love so well,  
And chief Thy pleasant branch, the hope of Israel.  
Burnt though she be and rent, her haughty foe  
The deathful terrors of Thy wrath shall know.  
But on the man, by Thee with strength array'd,  
The Son of Man by Thee for conquest made,  
Thy hand shall rest; till we Thy triumphs see,  
Resound Thy praise, and still remember Thee.  
Turn us again, Thou God of heav'n's high powers,  
Beam with Thy radiance forth, and peace shall still be ours.

## PSALM 81

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Mission-Song, to be Sung to the Northern Tribes.

### ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-5, A Festive Celebration Invoked; in which People, Levites, and Priests can Recall the Early History of the Nation. Stanza II., vers. 6-10, The Voice of the Divine Redeemer of the Nation is Heard; Recounting the Deeds by which He made the Nation His Own, and Summarising the Covenant into which He Entered with it. Stanza III., vers. 11-16, Divine Lamentation over the Nation's Past Failures, with Renewed Invitations and Promises designed to Win the People back to their Allegiance.

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(Lm.) By Asaph.

- 1 Ring out your joy unto God our strength,  
give a sacred shout to the God of Jacob:
- 2 Raise ye a melody and hold forth<sup>1</sup> the timbrel,  
the lyre so sweet with the lute:
- 3 Blow at the new moon the horn,  
at the full moon for the day of our feast.
- 4 Because a statute for Israel it is,  
a regulation by the God of Jacob:
- 5 A testimony in Joseph he appointed it,  
when he went forth over the land of Egypt:

1. Or: "bring hither"—Leeser, Dr., Per.; "strike"—Carter; "sound"—Del., Kp.