

Psalm 78:34

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and enquired early after God.

Analysis

When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and enquired early after God. The Hebrew *hārag* (הָרָג, "slew") describes God's judicial execution through plague or judgment, triggering superficial repentance. The verb *shāhar* (שָׁהַר, "enquired early") means to seek earnestly at dawn, suggesting urgency born from crisis rather than genuine devotion. This pattern reveals foxhole religion—turning to God only when death threatens.

The cycle exposes Israel's perpetual spiritual amnesia: prosperity breeds complacency, judgment sparks panic-prayer, deliverance leads back to complacency. Their seeking was reactive self-preservation, not covenant faithfulness. Asaph chronicles this tragic pattern to warn his own generation against repeating their fathers' hypocrisy.

This verse anticipates the New Covenant promise of transformed hearts (Jeremiah 31:33), since mere external crisis cannot produce lasting repentance. Only the Spirit's work creates seekers who pursue God in prosperity and adversity alike (John 4:23-24).

Historical Context

This refers to incidents during the wilderness wanderings when God judged Israel's rebellion—the plague after the golden calf (Exodus 32:35), Korah's

rebellion (Numbers 16:49), and the fiery serpents (Numbers 21:6). Each judgment temporarily restored fearful compliance, but hearts remained unchanged.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. Do you seek God most earnestly during crises, revealing that fear rather than love motivates your devotion?
2. What patterns of "forgetting God" during good times characterize your spiritual life?
3. How does genuine repentance differ from the panic-driven seeking described in this verse?

Interlinear Text

אָמַת וְיָרַשׁ וְהָיוּ וְיָשַׁבְתִּי

H518 When he slew H2026 them then they sought H1875 him and they returned

H7725

אָלָּא וְיִשְׁעַרְתִּי

and enquired early after God

H7836

H410

Additional Cross-References

Hosea 5:15 (Parallel theme): I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.

Numbers 21:7 (Parallel theme): Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org