

# Psalm 80:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.

## Analysis

**Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.** This communal lament opens with urgent appeal, combining shepherd imagery with throne-room majesty. The congregation calls upon God to hear, to lead, and to shine forth in saving power.

"Give ear" (ha'azinah, הָאִזְנָה) is an imperative from azan, meaning to listen attentively, to incline the ear. This opening plea asks God not merely to hear but to pay attention, to engage with His people's cry. The same word appears in Moses' final song: "Give ear, O ye heavens... hear, O earth" (Deuteronomy 32:1).

"O Shepherd of Israel" (ro'eh Yisra'el, רֹאשׁה יִשְׂרָאֵל) invokes God's pastoral role. Unlike Psalm 23's individual "the LORD is my shepherd," this addresses God as shepherd of the entire nation. The title implies care, guidance, provision, and protection for all Israel.

"Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock" (noheg katstzon Yosef, נָהָג כָּצֵן יוֹסֵף) extends the imagery, specifying leadership of "Joseph"—likely representing the northern tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh were Joseph's sons). The psalm may address northern Israel's distress, perhaps the Assyrian threat or conquest.

"Thou that dwellest between the cherubims" (yoshev hakeruvim, יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרָבִים) shifts to throne-room imagery. God was enthroned above the mercy seat, flanked by

golden cherubim (Exodus 25:22). This title emphasizes sovereignty, holiness, and transcendence—the Shepherd is also the King of glory.

"Shine forth" (hofi'ah, הָפֵעַה) asks God to appear in radiant glory, to manifest His presence visibly and powerfully. The verb appears in Deuteronomy 33:2 describing God's appearance at Sinai. The petition asks for a new theophany—God showing Himself in saving power.

## Historical Context

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Psalm 80 is attributed to Asaph, for Shoshannim Eduth ("Lilies of Testimony")—likely a musical or liturgical designation. The references to Joseph, Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh (verses 1-2) suggest a northern focus, possibly composed before or shortly after the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom in 722 BCE.

The combination of shepherd and throne imagery was not contradictory in ancient thought. Kings were called shepherds of their people. David was shepherd before becoming king. The LORD as shepherd-king combined tender care with royal authority. Israel needed both: pastoral guidance for daily life and sovereign power to defeat enemies.

The cherubim imagery connected to the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and temple. Above the mercy seat, between the cherubim, God's presence dwelt (1 Samuel 4:4, 2 Samuel 6:2). Calling on God who "dwellest between the cherubims" invoked His covenant faithfulness and tabernacle-presence—the God who had committed Himself to dwell among His people.

## Related Passages

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**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**Psalm 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

## Study Questions

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1. How do the shepherd and throne-room images work together to present God's character?
2. What does it mean to ask God to 'shine forth,' and when might such prayer be appropriate?
3. Why might the psalm focus on Joseph (the northern tribes) rather than Judah?
4. How does the combination of tender care ('Shepherd') and transcendent majesty ('dwellest between the cherubims') inform your understanding of God?

## Interlinear Text

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וָאֶשְׁעֶה	רְאֵה	נָתַת	כָּאֵן	יְוָיָּה
<b>O Shepherd</b>	<b>of Israel</b>	<b>Give ear</b>	<b>thou that leadest</b>	<b>like a flock</b>
H7462	H3478	H238	H5090	H6629
בָּיִת	בּוֹנְדָה	בְּפִרְבָּה	הַפִּישָׁה	
<b>thou that dwellest</b>	<b>between the cherubims</b>	<b>shine forth</b>		
H3427	H3742	H3313		

## Additional Cross-References

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**Revelation 21:23** (Parallel theme): And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

**Psalms 50:2** (Parallel theme): Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.

**Psalms 77:20** (Parallel theme): Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

**Psalms 99:1** (Parallel theme): The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved.

**1 Peter 2:25** (Parallel theme): For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

**Ezekiel 34:23** (Parallel theme): And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.

**1 Samuel 4:4** (Parallel theme): So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

**2 Samuel 6:2** (Parallel theme): And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims.

**Hebrews 13:20** (Parallel theme): Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

**Isaiah 60:1** (Parallel theme): Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee.