

Psalm 77

To the chief Musician, to Jeduthun, A Psalm of Asaph.

Psalm 77:

The psalm is the voice of an individual, but since he speaks on behalf of the nation, the psalm may best be called a national lament psalm.

The six rhetorical questions (of verses 7-9), reveal that the psalm was written at a time when God had apparently withheld His compassion from His people, though no specific details are given.

In any case, the remedy for the situation is the same for both nation and individual: remembrance of God's mighty deeds in the past.

Therefore, after expressing his lament (verses 1-9), the psalmist recalls that human opposition could not withstand God's mighty deliverance at the time of the Exodus (verses 10-15); neither could natural powers stay His hand when He decided to act (verses 16-20).

The latter verses are a poetic description of the reaction of nature when the Israelites crossed the Red sea.

Verses 1-20:

This psalm illustrates one cure for depression.

The psalmist does not explain the cause of his despair, but he was definitely locked into gloom.

When he thought about God, it only caused him to complain bitterly.

But beginning in verse 10, the psalmist's mood starts to change because he commits himself to focusing on God's goodness and past acts of deliverance.

His lament then changes into a hymn of praise.

- I. The Irritations of a Depressed Soul (77:1-9)
- II. The Intention to Refocus the Mind (77:10-15)
- III. The Illustrations of God's Past Blessings (77:16-20)

Title:

"Jeduthun" (see note on Psalm 39: Title).

Verses 1-10:

Days of trouble must be days of prayer; when God seems to have withdrawn from us, we must seek Him till we find Him.

In the day of his trouble the psalmist did not seek for the diversion of business or amusement, but he sought God, and His favor and grace.

Those that are under trouble of mind, must pray it away.

He pondered upon the trouble; the methods that should have relieved him increased his grief.

When he remembered God, it was only the Divine justice and wrath.

His spirit was overwhelmed, and sank under the load.

But let not the remembrance of the comforts we have lost, make us unthankful for those that are still left.

Particularly he called to remembrance the many comforts with which he supported himself in former sorrows.

Here is the language of a sorrowful, deserted soul, walking in darkness.

A common case even among those that fear the LORD (Isa. 50:10).

Nothing wounds and pierces like the thought of God's being angry.

God's own people, in a cloudy and dark day, may be tempted to make wrong conclusions about their spiritual state, and that of God's kingdom in the world.

But we must not give way to such fears.

Let faith answer them from the Scripture.

The troubled fountain will work itself clear again; and the recollection of former times of joyful experience often raises a hope, tending to relief.

Doubts and fears proceed from the want and weakness of faith.

Despondency and distrust under affliction, are too often the infirmities of believers.

And, as such, are to be thought upon by us with sorrow and shame.

When, unbelief is working in us, we must thus suppress its risings.

Verses 1-2:

Even though the psalmist is confronted with distressing circumstances, his hand is "stretched out" to the LORD.

Psalms 77:1 "I cried unto God with my voice, [even] unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me."

Which is to be understood of prayer, and that vocal, and which is importunate and fervent, being made in distress (see Psalm 3:4).

Or "my voice was unto God", "and I cried".

It was directed to Him, and expressed in a very loud and clamorous way.

"Even unto God with my voice":

Or "my voice was unto God".

Which is repeated to show that he prayed again and again, with great eagerness and earnestness, his case being a very afflicted one.

"And he gave ear unto me":

His prayer was not without success; God is a God that hears and answers prayer, according to His promise (Psalm 50:15).

This begins with an earnest prayer to God.

It possibly was repeated more than once, because of the statement, "even unto God".

We know also that this was not a silent prayer, but it was a vocal prayer, because he says, with my voice.

The best part of all is, He gave ear unto me.

We may pray and pray, until we know God has heard our plea.

Psalm 77:2 "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted."

"My sore ran in the night":

Meaning my hand was stretched out.

This was the posture for prayer.

The psalmist prayed throughout the night.

All believers could take a lesson from this.

In his trouble, he went to God for help.

The world has no answers for our problems.

Only God can help us.

It seems that the tribulation he was going through was so terrible, that he did not even get rest from it at night.

Perhaps he had a severe illness in his body.

I would tend to believe the problem was a spiritual problem however.

When you are sick to your soul, you can't sleep and your body hurts.

Psalm 77:3 "I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah."

Either the mercy, grace, and goodness of God, as Jarchi says.

How ungrateful he had been to him, how sadly he had requited him, how unthankful and unholy he was, notwithstanding so much kindness.

And when he called this to mind it troubled him.

He shows that we must patiently abide though God does not deliver us from our troubles at the first cry.

Or when he remembered the grace and goodness of God to him in time past, and how it was with him now, that it was not with him as then.

This gave him uneasiness, and set him praying and crying, that it might be with him as heretofore (Job 29:2).

Or rather he remembered the greatness and majesty of God, his power and his justice, his purity and holiness, and himself as a worm, a poor weak creature, sinful dust and ashes, not able to stand before Him.

He considered him not as his father and friend, but as an angry Judge, incensed against him, and demanding satisfaction of him.

"I complained":

Of sin and sorrow, of affliction and distress: or "I prayed", or "meditated".

He thought on his case, and prayed over it, and poured out his complaint unto God, but yet he found no relief.

"And my spirit was overwhelmed":

Covered with grief and sorrow, pressed down with affliction, ready to sink and faint under it.

It appears to me, that he feels he has done something that terribly displeased God.

Even the thought of God made him grieve the more.

He was aware that God's blessings were for those who had been obedient.

Whatever is wrong, he feels that he has disobeyed God.

He knows to disobey God, brings curses.

His spirit was overwhelmed with grief.

This looks like a man well on his way to repentance.

He has admitted he was wrong and is crying out to God to have mercy on him.

We truly must pause and think on this (Selah).

Psalm 77:4 "Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak."

“Holdest mine eyes waking”:

The psalmist was so upset that he could neither sleep nor talk rationally.

Perhaps his sorrow had extended to crying so much that words would not come to him.

Sometimes sorrow and sobbing are so great that we cannot talk.

Even if we could, we would not.

This is true depth of sorrow.

This is when there is no peace at all.

He would not be able to sleep, because of his troubled heart.

Psalm 77:5 "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times."

Either the former part of his life, the various occurrences of it, and how it had been with him in time past.

What experience he had had of the divine goodness.

So the Syriac version renders it, "I have considered my days of old".

Or the preceding age, and what has happened during that, which his ancestors had acquainted him with.

Or rather many ages past, from the days of Adam to the then present time.

At least it may include the Israelites coming out of Egypt, their passage through the Red sea and wilderness, and the times of the judges, and what befell them in their days, and how they were delivered out of their troubles.

As appears from the latter part of the psalm, and with which agrees the following clause.

"The years of ancient times":

The records and remembrances of past ages.

What is the testimony which the history of the world bears on this subject?

Does it prove that God is worthy of confidence or not?

Does it or does it not authorize and justify these painful thoughts which pass through the mind?

Perhaps he was looking back to better days.

These better days, it seems, were not just his own, but those of his ancestors.

Maybe some answer will come to him from looking back.

Psalm 77:6 "I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search."

"My song in the night":

The remembrance of happier times only deepened his depression.

"Spirit made diligent search":

His spirit continually meditated on possible solutions to his problems.

This appears to be saying that there were better times in the past.

He even remembers a joyous time of singing in the night.

He is talking to himself here.

He is telling his broken heart to look back with him on better times.

Then he says, the spirit within him is searching for better times to remember.

Psalm 77:7 "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favorable no more?"

This was the subject, and the substance, of his inquiry.

Whether it was a fair and just conclusion that God would show no mercy or would never be gracious again.

Evidently the thought passed through his mind that this seemed to be the character of God.

That things looked as if this were so; that it was difficult, if not impossible, to understand the divine dealings otherwise.

And he asks whether this was a fair conclusion.

Whether he must be constrained to believe that this was so.

"And will he be favorable no more":

Will He no more show favor to people?

Will He pardon and save no more of the race of mankind?

This is a question that many in our day are having to deal with.

They are saying, we belonged to God, and then we got caught up in the desires of the flesh and sinned against God.

Will God have us back?

Certainly!

He will not, until there is a truly repentant heart.

To repent means to turn completely away from that old sinful life style.

We must be a new creature in Christ.

Old things (bad habits), must be buried and the new creature that arises must choose to obey God in all things.

Psalm 77:8 "Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth [his] promise fail for evermore?"

The word rendered "clean gone" means to fail; to fail utterly.

The idea is, can it be that the compassion of God has become exhausted?

That no more mercy is to be shown to mankind.

And that henceforth all is to be left to stern and severe justice?

What would the world be if this were so?

What must be the condition of mankind if mercy were no more to be shown to the race?

"Doth his promise fail for evermore?":

Margin, as in Hebrew, "to generation and generation."

The original Hebrew rendered "promise" means "word."

And the question is, whether it can be that what God has spoken is to be found false.

Can we no longer rely on what He has said?

All the hopes of mankind depend on that, and if that should fail, all prospect of salvation in regard to our race must be at an end.

The answer is no.

1 Chronicles 16:34 "O give thanks unto the LORD; for [he is] good; for his mercy [endureth] for ever."

God has not, and will not, break a promise.

We break the covenant that He made, when we deliberately sin.

His promise, just like his mercy, endures forever.

His promise to us is conditional.

If we continue to disobey God, His promise will not be valid in our life.

Psalms 77:9 "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah."

He has not, is it possible that he should?

As the Targum says, it is not.

He cannot forget the purposes of his grace and mercy, nor the covenant and promises of it, nor people the objects of it.

And much less can He for His grace and mercy itself, so agreeable to His nature, what He delights in, and which He has proclaimed in Christ.

"Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?"

As a greedy man shuts up his hand, and will not communicate liberally?

Or as the sea is shut up with doors, that its waters may not overflow?

No, the mercies of God are not restrained, though unbelief says they are, at least asks if they are not (Isa. 63:15).

But Faith says they flow freely through Christ, and the people of God are crowned with lovingkindness and tender mercies.

God gives liberally, and upbraided not; and though He may hide His face in a little seeming wrath for a moment.

Yet with great mercies will He gather, and with everlasting kindness will He have mercy.

God never forgets to be gracious. God honors His word.

He will not bless us, unless our part of the covenant is kept.

He would have to break His word, and He will not do that.

These are ridiculous questions.

God's anger will subside, if we will only repent.

Certainly, pause and think on these things.

Verses 10-11: In times of despair is exactly when the anguished need most to “remember” the past “works of the LORD”.

Psalm 77:10 "And I said, This [is] my infirmity: [but I will remember] the years of the right hand of the most High."

“Right hand of the most High”:

The psalmist began to remember the times when God used His right hand (power), to strengthen and protect him.

Finally, it seems he has begun to stop this pity party.

He is in poor health, but now he remembers that the Right Hand of God is the Healer.

Verses 11-20:

The remembrance of the works of God, will be a powerful remedy against distrust of His promise and goodness.

For He is God, and changes not.

God's way is in the sanctuary.

We are sure that God is holy in all His works.

God's ways are like the deep waters, which cannot be fathomed; like the way of a ship, which cannot be tracked.

God brought Israel out of Egypt. This was typical of the great redemption to be wrought out in the fullness of time, both by price and power.

If we have harbored any doubtful thoughts, we should, without delay, turn our minds to meditate on God.

Who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, that with Him, He might freely give us all things.

Psalm 77:11 "I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old."

That is, I will call them to remembrance, or I will reflect on them.

I will look to what God has "done," that I may learn His true character.

That I may see what is the proper interpretation to be put on His doings in respect to the question whether He is righteous or not.

Whether it is proper to put confidence in Him or not.

Or, in other words, I will examine those doings to see if I cannot find in them something to calm down my feelings.

To remove my despondency; and to give me cheerful views of God.

"Surely I will remember thy wonders of old":

Thy wonderful dealings with mankind; those acts which thou hast performed which are suited to excite amazement and wonder.

God, who parted the Red sea and allowed the Israelites to cross over it, is surely able to help him in his need.

Do not forget the miracles in the past, if you hope to get help now.

Just to look back and remember all the wonderful works of the LORD brings courage and hope.

Psalm 77:12 "I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings."

Or "works", which were many.

He desired not to forget any of them, but remember the multitude of his tender mercies.

And not only call them to mind, but dwell upon them in his meditations and contemplations, in order to gain some relief by them under his present circumstances.

"And talk of thy doings":

For the good of others, and so for the glory of God.

As well as to imprint them on his own mind, that they might not be forgotten by him.

For all things that are talked of, which are frequently, are better remembered (see Psalm 145:4).

As the Targum states, "I will meditate on all of thy good works, and also speak of the causes of thy wonders."

Now, instead of moaning about his problems, he will remember all the miracles God has done for him in the past and tell others of how great the works of God are.

Psalm 77:13 "Thy way, O God, [is] in the sanctuary: who [is so] great a God as [our] God?"

Or "in holiness"; that is, is holy.

So the Syriac version, and to which the Targum agrees. "O God, how holy are thy ways" (see Psalm 145:17).

"In the sanctuary":

The temple, the church of God, where he takes his walks, and manifests himself, and where the reasons of his providence, and dealing with his people, are opened and made known unto them (see Psalm 68:24).

"Who is so great a God as our God?":

The Targum states, as the God of Israel; He is great in his persons, perfections, and works, and is greatly to be loved, feared, and praised.

God is Holy God.

The sanctuary teaches of the holiness of God.

The Israelites, more than any people of the world, know that there is no other god like their God.

He defamed Pharaoh and all the false gods of Egypt, when He brought the Israelites out of Egypt with His mighty Hand.

Psalm 77:14 "Thou [art] the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people."

In nature, providence, and grace. It seems chiefly to regard what was done for the Israelites in Egypt, and in the wilderness (see Psalm 78:12).

"Thou hast declared thy strength among the people":

The nations of the world, who heard what the LORD did for Israel by his mighty power, and with an outstretched arm, as follows.

The ten plagues that came upon Egypt declare this very thing.

The Israelites celebrated Passover every year to remind them of the night when God made a difference between them and the Egyptians.

All the first-born of the Hebrew children lived and all the first-born of the Egyptians died.

Egypt symbolizes the world.

God always makes a difference between His children and the world.

Psalm 77:15 "Thou hast with [thine] arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah."

The people of Israel out of Egypt, which was typical of the redemption of the LORD's people by Christ, the arm and power of God.

"The sons of Jacob and Joseph":

Joseph is particularly mentioned for honor's sake, and because he was the means of supporting Jacob and his family in Egypt.

And had special faith in their deliverance from there.

The Targum states, "the sons whom Jacob begot, and Joseph nourished."

This is speaking of the divine intervention of God, as when He brought the children of Israel out of Egypt.

All of the 12 tribes of Israel were brought out.

Their entire families came out with them.

Joseph had given instructions to bring his body out with them also.

I believe that is why we see Joseph mentioned separately here.

Pause and think on this.

Psalm 77:16 "The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled."

"Waters ... they were afraid":

A dramatic picture of God's parting the waters of the Red sea (compare verse 19; also Exodus 14:21-31; 15:1-19).

I believe this is speaking of the presence of God which travelled with these Israelites, who was leading the way.

We know the Red sea parted at the command of God, but the Jordan river opened at the sight of the ark of the Covenant as well.

Psalm 77:17 "The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad."

“Thine arrows”:

A metaphor for lightning flashes.

Thundering, lightning, and rain come on the orders of God.

Many times when God spoke the people mistook it for thunder.

Psalm 77:18 "The voice of thy thunder [was] in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook."

Compare the notes at (Psalm 29:1-11).

The word rendered "heaven" here means properly "a wheel," as of a chariot (Isa. 5:28; Ezek. 10:2, 10:6; 23:24; 26:10).

Then it means a "whirlwind," as that which rolls along (Ezek. 10:13).

Then it is used to denote chaff or stubble, as driven along before a whirlwind (Psalm 83:13; Isaiah 17:13).

It is never used to denote heaven.

It means here, undoubtedly, the whirlwind; and the idea is, that in the raging's of the storm, or of the whirlwind, the voice of God was heard.

The deep bellowing thunder, as if God spoke to people.

"The lightnings lightened the world":

The whole earth seemed to be in a blaze.

"The earth trembled and shook" (see notes at Psalm 29:1-11).

Isaiah 29:6 "Thou shalt be visited of the LORD of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire."

All of the elements of the universe are at the command of Almighty God.

Psalm 77:19 "Thy way [is] in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known."

God is the ruler of every storm.

The "great waters" will not overcome His people, for those waters are no obstacle to Him.

He makes a pathway even in the storms (Psalms 18:16; 32:6; 144:7)

Psalm 77:20 "Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron."

Either through the Red sea, that according to R. Moses Hacoen, as Aben Ezra observes (see Isaiah 63:11).

Or rather, as he and Kimchi, through the wilderness, after they were led through the sea.

The people of Israel are compared to a flock of sheep.

The LORD is represented as the Shepherd of them, who took care of them, protected and preserved them from their enemies.

"By the hand of Moses and Aaron":

The one was their civil and the other their ecclesiastical governor, and both under the LORD.

And instruments of His, in guiding and conducting the people in all things needful for them.

The Arabic version adds, "Allelujah"; from all this the psalmist concluded, though it is not mentioned, that as God had delivered His people of old out of their straits and difficulties.

So he hoped and believed, that as he could, he would deliver him in his own time and way.

And by this means his faith was relieved and strengthened.

The way of God is past mere mortal man finding out.

Our desire should be to walk in the path that He has for us to walk, but to walk in the path He has for himself to walk is beyond mortal man.

Pharaoh found this out, when he ordered his men to follow in the sea.

Moses was symbolic of the great Deliverer, when he brought God's people out of Egypt (world).

Jesus Christ is the Great Deliverer of all who believe.

Psalm 77 Questions

1. How does this Psalm begin?
2. How do we know this prayer was not a silent prayer?
3. What is the best part of all in verse 1?
4. When did he seek the Lord?
5. Why does the author believe this was a spiritual problem?
6. The thought of God made him _____.
7. To disobey God, brings _____.
8. When does sorrow become so great that it is difficult to speak?
9. What is verse 5 speaking of looking at?
10. What is he telling his heart in verse 6?
11. What are many in our day doing that relates to verse 7?
12. What does repent mean?
13. How can we cause God's promises to not be valid in our life?
14. What would cause God's anger to subdue?
15. Who is the Healer?
16. What has he finally remembered in verse 11?
17. In verse 12, instead of moaning, he has begun to do what?
18. Thy way, O God, is in the _____.
19. What does the sanctuary teach us about God?
20. How had God declared His strength among His people?
21. Why is Joseph mentioned separately in verse 15?
22. What led the way for the Israelites?
23. The way of God is past _____ finding out.
24. What should be the desire of all of us?