

## Bible Study Psalm 77

### **The Text: READ Psalm 77**

We do not know what grief, or pain, or calamity, has befallen the psalmist of Psalm 77. All that we know is that he has been plunged into deep despair. His pain and grief all that he sees. Even his prayers to God seem to go unanswered. So he laments, he cries out to God in his pain and grief, disappointment and confusion.

When the Psalmist exclaims (v. 2) that his hand was outstretched in supplication (*as with Solomon in 1 Kings 8:22*) through the night “without ceasing” or “without wearying,” he is stating that his whole self (body, mind, spirit) is consumed in anguish. He laments in verse 3 that when he remembers God he moans. This word for “moan” also means “troubled.” He is crying out that *his trouble* is that he remembers God’s full-felt presence and protection, but now he cannot.

Even though the Psalmist knows that God hears him, he is so plunged into despair and depression all that he experiences as he prays is sorrow and grief. He is indeed a broken man. There are some today who teach that a spirit-filled Christian should always experience health, prosperity, and happiness. What they seem to advocate is a state of denial and call it “faith.” While God is still in the healing business, He never promises in this fallen world, dominated as it is by sin, to protect us from all loss, suffering, and grief. He does, however, promise to be with us and for us, and to take us through it. Jesus agonized in Gethsemane (*Luke 22:41-44*), Paul suffered continual calamity as an apostle (*2 Corinthians 11:22-30*). Paul even told the Philippians to expect suffering (*Philippians 1:29-30*), as did our Lord (*John 16:33*).

Yet for our psalmist, the very thought of God, who is the hope of deliverance, has become a source of pain and spiritual distress (v. 3). Verse 4 accuses God of causing the psalmist’s sleeplessness and confusion. So he sits in silence and broods. The questions in verses 7-9 are framed in terms of the creedal statement found in Exodus 34:6. For the moment, his current circumstances are difficult to reconcile with his faith, so he wrestles with the paradox that God’s word in Exodus 34:6 is true in spite of his own current circumstances.

In verse 10, the phrase, “I will appeal to this” also means (as rendered in the King James Version) “This is my anguish (or infirmity), the years of the right hand of the most high.” To be in God’s right hand would be to experience His power and His

protection and His redemption. In its absence, there is only anguish. So, the memory of God's presence, power, and protection bring him anguish when he no longer feels it.

In verse 11 he remembers God's mighty works, what it was like to be in God's right hand. For us, now that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father (*Ephesians 1:20*), we also dwell there at God's right hand (*Ephesians 2:6*) and receive His saving works and mighty interventions in our lives. Our prayers are answered in His name (*John 16:24*) and demons are expelled by the same authority (*Acts 16:18*). So the Psalmist will meditate on and talk about God's mighty deeds, as well we should also. In sum, God is the redeemer. He is the living God who performs signs and wonders. When we know God's presence and power, we also know His absence and silence as well.

But where then is God's work, way, and presence to be known? The psalmist's answer is "the Sanctuary" (v. 13), or holiness. Verse 13, "Your way, oh God, is holy," is also translated, "Your way, oh God, is in the sanctuary (KJV)". To know God's way we must seek His face. His will is revealed where His word is proclaimed and where worship is offered. For the psalmist, that place is the sanctuary. That is also the place for us, but for us the sanctuary is not in a fixed location. The sanctuary, the place of where God's presence abides, is wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus' name (*Matthew 18:20*).

With the technology available to us, two or three (or two or three thousand) can gather together in Jesus name without even leaving their homes, and Jesus' promise is that he is there in their midst. Isn't that a wonderful and glorious thought? It was just such a thought concerning God's presence, power, and holiness that prompts the psalmist to exclaim (v. 13), "**What god is great like our God?**" From this point forward our psalmist plunges himself into the remembrance of God's great deeds. His poetic remembrance (vv. 13-20) is based upon Moses' own song of praise found in Exodus 15:1-18.

This psalm has been handed down to us as an honest take on the suffering humans often experience, but it does not leave us in despair. Instead, it reminds us to remember that what God has done in the past, He will do again. That His faithfulness to the covenant (Old and New) never ceases and never fails. That in spite of our circumstances, God still reigns with justice and holiness, and will, even at the last, redeem, rescue, and vindicate His people.

**What do you remember of God's great deeds?**

## Psalm 77

### Questions for Further Reflection

Psalm 77 is a Psalm of Lament. Psalms of Lament are quite common in the book of Psalms. In fact, depending how one defines the characteristics of “lament”, there are between 70 and 80 of this type of psalm in the book of Psalms. When we recall that there are 150 psalms in the book of Psalms, this means that roughly half are laments. What might God be telling us by giving us so many songs of lament to recall and sing back to Him?

Have you ever complained to God like the psalmist of Psalm 77? Have you ever felt the depth of despair that he feels? Have you ever felt abandoned and unheard by God? According to this psalm (and 70 or so others like it) is it a sign of a failure in one’s faith to have these feelings when we experience deep grief or calamity?

What does the psalmist’s experience seem to suggest about the interplay between physical, emotional, and spiritual forces in managing stress and tumultuous personal events?

What question is at the bottom of his despair (vv. 7-9)? What do you think he remembers about God (vv. 3, 6)? What is the difference between the remembering of verses 3-6 and verses 11-15?

What are the “years of the right hand” (v. 10)? How can a meditation on God’s past actions actually help in one’s present circumstances? How does the psalmist’s meditation on the past answer his questions (vv. 7-9)? What is the answer?

How would you try to comfort someone who is feeling like our psalmist? Would you point to the past, present, or future? Is there an event in your past that you call to mind in times of trouble? Do you ever catch yourself living in the past?

Do you ever long for the “good old days?” Were they really that way, or is your hindsight viewed with rose-colored glasses? Could these days someday seem like “the good old days?” Were there any “good old days” in your relationship with God? How do you keep your relationship with God fresh so that “these days” could be “the good old days?”