

Psalms

Psalms 77- When God Does Not Respond

- Before we read the psalm- I want you to get a piece of paper and at various points I want you to jot down the type of psalm you think we have before us; I will prompt you to note the type of psalm
- Individual Lament
- Communal Lament
- Praise Hymn
- Meditation-Reflection

Psalm 77 NKJ

- I cried out to God with my voice-- To God with my voice; And He gave ear to me. ² In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; My soul refused to be comforted. ³ I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. *Selah* ⁴ You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. ⁵ I have considered the days of old, The years of ancient times. ⁶ I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart, And my spirit makes diligent search. ⁷ Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favorable no more? ⁸ Has His mercy ceased forever? Has *His* promise failed forevermore? ⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? *Selah* ¹⁰ And I said, "This *is* my anguish; *But I will remember* the years of the right hand of the Most High." ¹¹ I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. ¹² I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds. ¹³ Your way, O God, *is* in the sanctuary; Who *is* so great a God as *our* God? ¹⁴ You *are* the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples. ¹⁵ You have with *Your* arm redeemed Your people, The sons of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah* ¹⁶ The waters saw You, O God; The waters saw You, they were afraid; The depths also trembled. ¹⁷ The clouds poured out water; The skies sent out a sound; Your arrows also flashed about. ¹⁸ The voice of Your thunder *was* in the whirlwind; The lightnings lit up the world; The earth trembled and shook. ¹⁹ Your way *was* in the sea, Your path in the great waters, And Your footsteps were not known. ²⁰ You led Your people like a flock By the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Psalm 77 Mixed Genre

- Individual Lament vv 1-6
- Thanksgiving vv 1-6
- Communal Lament vv 7-9
- Hymns vv 11-15 (Historical) and vv 16-20 (Cosmological with Historical Application)

Book 3 of Psalms Genres

- Thanksgiving Hymns: 75
- Individual Laments: ~~77~~, 86, 88, 89
- Community Laments: 74, ~~77~~, 79, 80, 83, 85
- Wisdom Psalms: 73, 78
- Liturgical Psalms: 81, 82,
- Royal Psalms: 78, 89
- Zion Hymns: 76, 84, 87

What missing from Psalm 77 as lament?

This psalm is not easy to read or categorize because of uncertainty about the tense (time), mood, and aspect of the verbs

NKJ

- **77:1** I cried out to God with my voice-- To God with my voice; And He gave ear to me.
- **77:2** In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; My soul refused to be comforted.
- **77:3** I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.
- **77:4** You hold my eyelids *open*; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
- **77:10** And I said, "This *is* my anguish; *But I will remember* the years of the right hand of the Most High."
- **77:11** I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.
- **77:15** You have with *Your* arm redeemed Your people, The sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

NRS

- **77:1** I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me.
- **77:2** In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted.
- **77:3** I think of God, and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints.
- **77:10** And I say, "It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed."
- **77:15** With your strong arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

Interpretive Translation

NKJ

- **77:1** I cried out to God with my voice-- To God with my voice; And He gave ear to me.
- **77:2** In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; My soul refused to be comforted.
- **77:3** I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.
- **77:4** You hold my eyelids *open*; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
- **77:10** And I said, "This *is* my anguish; *But I will remember* the years of the right hand of the Most High."
- **77:11** I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.
- **77:15** You have with *Your* arm redeemed Your people, The sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

- In the NKJ The psalmist is using the past tense, which is the language of thanksgiving
- Except vv 4-6 are in the present tense, which undermines a thanksgiving classification
- *But I will remember . . .* Presents a disjunctive clause— as a solution to the previously described solution
- The perfect tense reflects the completed work of God that impacts the perspective of the psalmist

Interpretive Translation

- In the NRS, the psalmist uses the present tense, which is the language of lament
- The psalmist summarizes his grief—in verse 10; the change of the “right hand of the Most High”
- What follows in the vv 11-15 and then vv 16-20 is the language of praise; which again still seems to function as the solution to the lament, the concerns raised in vv 1-5, but the psalmist does not suggest a changed current condition

NRS

- **77:1** I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me.
- **77:2** In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted.
- **77:3** I think of God, and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints.

- **77:10** And I say, "It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed."
- **77:11** I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD; I will remember your wonders of old.
- **77:15** With your strong arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selāh

Option 1- When God does not respond

- Lament, communal, that expresses deep angst in the faith relationship, but that is resolved by reflecting on God's prior works
- It's a communal lament because it is a communal problem that caused the distress, but the paradigm is still applicable to our individual situations
- Reflecting on this history of God's lovingkindness, not just his promises, but what we offer as testimony of our experiences with God could be a bulwark against despair when life moves sideways.
- Reflecting on the cosmological power of God- the one who subdues chaos and the deep sea— can provide assurance during our moments of insecurity
- This is the conclusion of several biblical scholars- (e.g. Brueggemann, Mays, Schaefer, and Gerstenberger); change our focus from our situation to attention to God—deeper meditation

Concerns with Option 1

- The problem faced by the psalmist is not addressed– the existential challenge persists as a challenge to the faith of the community
- Not attentive to the unique features of this psalm as a lament:

What missing from Psalm 77 as lament? Invocation, Affirmation of Confidence, Petition, and Vow

Psalm 77 has moved beyond pleasantries and nice God talk

Structure of Psalm 77

- Complaint vv 1-9
- Justification vv 10-20

Alternative Reading / Translation of Psalm 77

- Complaint vv 1-4

My voice is unto God, I am crying out

My voice is unto God, he has heard it

In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord

My hand in the night was extended and did not cease

my soul refused to be comforted

I remember God

I moan

I think

my soul becomes faint

Alternative Reading / Translation of Psalm 77

- Complaint (cont'd) vv 5-9

I considered the days of old,
years long ago

I remember my music in the night
with my heart I reflect
I search with my soul

Will the Lord reject forever?

Not again will he be pleased?

Is his lovingkindness gone forever?

Speech completed for generation and generation

Has God forgotten to be gracious?

Has anger shut up his compassion?

Alternative Reading / Translation of Psalm 77

- Explanation of the Psalmist Perspective v 10

And I say, "It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed."

- Break from Historical Favor vv 11-15

I remember all the deeds of –Ya

I will remember all you wonders

I will meditate on all you wonders

And all your deeds I meditate

God your way is holy, what god is great like God?

You are God

The one doing wonders

You declared your strength with the peoples

With your strong arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph

Alternative Reading / Translation of Psalm 77

- Break from Cosmological Exercises with Communal Impact vv 16-20

When the waters saw you, O God,
 when the waters saw you,
 they were afraid; the very deep trembled. ¹

The clouds poured out water;
 the skies thundered;
 your arrows flashed on every side.

The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;
 your lightnings lit up the world;
 the earth trembled and shook. ¹⁹

Your way was through the sea,
 your path, through the mighty waters;
 yet your footprints were unseen.

You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.