

LESSON 8

PSALMS 73—77

PSALM 73:

A STRUGGLE TO BELIEVE

This psalm of wisdom addresses the same theme as Psalms 10, 37, and 49: “Why does a just God allow the wicked to prosper while the righteous suffer from oppression?” Old Testament wisdom literature frequently wrestles with this bewilderment.

The beginning of the psalm tells of the writer’s despair. He had become overwhelmed by the prosperity, popularity, and pleasure of the evil people around him.

While the psalm begins on a negative note, it culminates with praise and a more appreciative commitment to righteous living. In this sense, the psalm may be compared to the story of Job, a narrative that shifts from poverty to prosperity. Its progression is also comparable to the analysis of life made by the writer of Ecclesiastes, who first pictured the futility of being good and then moved to the conclusion that obedience is the whole duty of man.

1. Why do you think this psalm was chosen as the first in Book III?
2. What problem is most disturbing to this psalmist?
3. Based on this psalm, what should we do about our doubts?
4. Where do we see the psalmist’s shift in attitude?

PSALM 74:

IN THE MIDST OF DESTRUCTION

Something terrible has happened to God’s people. They have undergone a calamity of unparalleled proportions and are overwhelmed by the tragedy. Jerusalem has fallen and lies in a state of “perpetual ruins” (v. 3). The temple has been destroyed; the prophets are gone (v. 9). An enemy has overcome them and is controlling the land (vv. 10, 23). As foreigners in their own land, the people

look to God from their despair, asking Him to place His hand of favor upon them again. They have not abandoned God, even when it looks as if He has abandoned them.

The psalm must have been composed sometime after the forces of Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586(7) B.C., the only time known to us when the temple was burned to the ground. The conditions behind the writing of this psalm, therefore, are similar to those that are described in Lamentations. In that sense, then, we can call this psalm a lamentation.

5. What is the tragedy in this psalm thought to be?
6. How does this writer react to his circumstances?
7. Which verses show the writer's trust and hope in his God's care for Israel?
8. What does this writer ask God?

**PSALM 75:
PRAISING THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH**

One unique characteristic of the psalm is that the stanzas are spoken by different speakers: the writer, God, and perhaps the congregation—all speak at different times. Because of this fact, its messages are set in a type of dramatic or antiphonal arrangement. Verse 1 is spoken by the congregation or the writer; verses 2 through 5 are spoken by God Himself; and verses 6 through 9 are the words spoken by the psalmist as he responds to God's declaration. Finally, verse 10 may be spoken by the Lord or may be the resolve of the psalmist as he fulfills what God has said.

The psalm is usually classified as a hymn of praise or thanksgiving. However, neither its title nor its contents give us any solid information about the time or occasion of its composition. Perhaps it was written to celebrate a major deliverance.

The central thought that runs throughout the psalm is the sovereignty of God and how He will judge the proud and boastful. In His judgment, He will debase the wicked and exalt the righteous. Within its lines, God, the Great Judge, is pictured as pouring out the cup of His wrath when He calls nations and people into account.

9. What titles does this writer give God?
10. Why is God speaking in verses 2 through 4?

11. How does the psalmist use imagery to show God's power?
12. What warnings are given to the wicked?
13. How can we show both fear and joyful praise to God?

**PSALM 76:
GOD, THE GREAT DELIVERER**

The celebration that gave rise to this psalm must have been a momentous victory that God gave them over a dreaded enemy. The psalm virtually rings with the praise of the One who gave the conquest. In style and mood, it reminds the reader of Psalms 46, 48, and even 75. It is a kind of victory hymn.

Possibly the hymn was created for the purpose of commemorating the triumph over the Assyrian king Sennacherib who threatened to destroy Jerusalem in 701 B.C. His attack of Judah and Jerusalem is recounted in 2 Kings 18:13—19:37 and Isaiah 36 and 37.

The writer of this psalm extols the power and strength of the One who has saved Israel, giving the characteristics of their (and our) heavenly Warrior in detail. He brings before us—on the notes of a song/prayer—the glory of God, the great Deliverer of all who trust in Him.

14. What positive aspects of God's power do you see?
15. What negative aspects of God's power do you see?
16. After reading verse 10, think about some of the ways you have seen God use something negative for His purpose.
17. How does the psalmist give praise to God in this psalm?

**PSALM 77:
WHEN PRAYERS GO UNANSWERED**

The psalm clearly grew out of a time when God, for some reason, had chosen to be silent toward His people. In spite of their continual prayers for restoration, the people had not heard from Him. The writer was raising the question "Why do You, O God, let oppression continue without giving us any expressions of Your concern?"

The psalm's prayer gives an approach to handling a situation in which all appearances indicate that God has not responded to His servant's desperate cry for help. In the beginning the writer focuses more or less on himself, but in the

latter part he focuses on God. One implication of the psalm is that when we focus upon ourselves, when we look at our own brokenness and pain, we become discouraged; but when we put our eyes on God, we are able to sing, even in the darkest night.

18. How does the psalmist describe his troubled spirit?
19. Why does the writer continue to trust that God will answer his prayer and bring back His mercy?
20. What should we do when it seems as if God is silent?
21. Where do we see the speaker's shift in attitude?