

PSALMS

Chapter 77

I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me. 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. ³ When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints. *Selah* ⁴ You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I consider the days of old, the years long ago. ⁶ I said, "Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart." Then my spirit made a diligent search: ⁷ "Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? ⁸ Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? ⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" *Selah* ¹⁰ Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High." ¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. ¹² I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. ¹³ Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? ¹⁴ You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples. ¹⁵ You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah* ¹⁶ When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled. ¹⁷ The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side. ¹⁸ The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook. ¹⁹ Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen. ²⁰ You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Ps 77 Comforting reflections in a time of great distress. The interplay of verb forms in vv. 1–6 makes it uncertain whether the psalm is a prayer (in which case the verbs of these verses would have to be rendered in the present tense) or the recollection of a past experience (as the NIV understands it). The distress appears to be personal rather than national. Comparison of vv. 16–19 with Hab 3:8–10 suggests, but does not prove, a time late in the monarchy. The poetic development advances from anguished bewilderment (vv. 1–9) to comforting recollection (vv. 10–20). A striking and dramatic feature is the insertion of a four-verse stanza (vv. 16–19) between the third and fourth verses of another four-verse stanza (vv. 13–15, 20). (CSB)

Similarities of thought between vv 16–19 and Hab 3:8–10 suggest that this psalm comes from the time of Habakkuk. The author expresses certain struggles of faith and doubt, which plague many believers. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–3, crying to the Lord; vv 4–9, sleeplessness and doubt; v 10, an appeal; vv 11–15, God’s way is holy; vv 16–20, a path through the storm. (TLSB)

Psalm 77 repeats the message of the three preceding psalms. (PBC)

77:1–9 Anguished perplexity over God’s inaction, when he fails to respond to unceasing and urgent prayers. (CSB)

The psalmist is distressed when he contrasts the present suffering of Israel with their past blessings, but it is in this very recollection of past history that Asaph begins to find the solution to his problem. (PBC)

77:1–3 *cry aloud ... my hand is stretched out ... refuses to be comforted ... I moan ... my spirit faints.* Psalmist's impassioned words express the anguish he is experiencing. (TLSB)

These first three verses give a glimpse of the effect of the crisis on the psalmist, but they could also reveal the strength of his faith in his earnest prayer. The example is clear: in such overwhelming and disheartening difficulties, the faithful in all ages can only and must pray earnestly for God to help. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

77:2 *soul.* In this verse refers to the psalmist's entire being, equivalent to the personal pronoun. (CSB)

77:3–6 Remembrance of God's past mercies intensifies the present perplexity (as also in 22:1–11). God's failure to act now is so troubling that he cannot sleep (cf. 3:5; 4:8) and words fail (but see vv. 10–20). (CSB)

77:3 *selah* – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. "The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers" (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

77:4 *hold my eyelids open.* The distress has produced insomnia. (TLSB)

It must have been, therefore, that in his weariness and distress he prayed in his heart even though he could not formulate the words. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Romans 8:26 – "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for us."

77:5-6 *consider ... my song ... meditate ... search.* Even leaders of worship may be troubled by challenges to their faith. The psalmist seeks refuge in God's Word, in particular, God's Word regarding His past deeds of rescue, also as those recounted in Israel's psalms, some of which the psalmist himself may have written. Yet there remain challenges to his faith, as related in vv 7–9. (TLSB)

77:6 He would strengthen his faith by bringing to memory a glorious and happier past when God protected and provided for his people. The remembering is parallel with meditating, emphasizing that he would ponder it and simply recall it. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

77:7–9 Though words fail (v. 4), troubled thoughts will not go away. (CSB)

Psalmist feels that God has abandoned him and broken His promises. He feels tempted to abandon the faith altogether. The details may change, but all believers may find themselves from

time to time struggling with similar thoughts that tempt them to forsake the faith; cf Lk 8:13. (TLSB)

The questions are rhetorical; they lament the current dilemma, but they also imply that God has not forsaken them. The questions express the lament that God seems to have forgotten; but also expect a negative answer and therefore indicate that the psalmist knows God has not forgotten them. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

77:9 *anger*. God's anger is always an expression of his righteousness. (CSB)

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77:10–20 Reassuring recollection of God's mighty acts in behalf of Israel in the exodus. (CSB)

Even in the midst of doubting God, the psalmist finds strength to believe God's Word regarding His mighty, saving deeds (cf Rm 1:16–17; 1Co 1:23–24). (TLSB)

77:10–12 Faith's decision to look beyond the present troubles—and God's bewildering inactivity—to draw hope anew from God's saving acts of old. (CSB)

He looked closely at the present trouble and could not help but contrast it with the past. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

77:10 *the right hand* – These are the years in which he used his almighty power to deliver his people from Egypt and lead them into their own land. (PBC)

Reflection (cf v 12) on the Lord's saving deeds would provide the power to rekindle and strengthen faith. (TLSB)

In Israelite thought, the right hand was the favored one. As such, it symbolized the place of privilege or strength. The chief court official was seated at the king's right hand as a symbol of his power and authority. The term can describe God's chosen servant (e.g., King David). (TLSB p. 843)

Most High. See note on Ge 14:19. (CSB)

77:13–20 God's mighty acts in the exodus recalled. (CSB)

77:13-14 Similar to the celebration of the Red Sea crossing in Ex 15:11. Such wonderful, mighty deeds show that the Lord alone is holy and is God. (TLSB)

77:13 Appears to echo Ex 15:11. (CSB)

77:15 *redeemed*. Here, as often, a synonym for “deliver” (see 74:2). (CSB)

Joseph. OT authors sometimes refer to the northern kingdom as “Joseph” (or “Ephraim,” Joseph’s son) in distinction from the southern kingdom of Judah (see 78:67; 2Sa 19:20; 1Ki 11:28; Eze 37:16, 19; Am 5:6, 15; 6:6; Zec 10:6). However, here and elsewhere (see 80:1; 81:5; Ob 18) Joseph—the one elevated to the position of firstborn—represents the whole of his generation and thus also all the descendants of Jacob. (CSB)

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77:16–19 A poetically heightened description of the majesty of God displayed when he opened a way through the Red Sea. Verses 16, 19 speak expressly of that event; the intervening verses (vv. 17–18) evoke the majesty of God displayed in the thunderstorm and earthquake. Ex 14:19 speaks only of God’s cloud, not of a thunderstorm or earthquake, but the Hebrew poets often associated either or both with the Lord’s coming to effect redemption or judgment—no doubt because these were the two most fearsome displays of power known to them (see 18:12–14; 68:8; Jdg 5:4–5; Hab 3:6, 10). Here the psalmist declares: It was the God of thunderstorm and earthquake who made his majestic way through the mighty waters of the sea to bring his people out of bondage. For Christians the display of God’s power in behalf of his people now includes the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (see Mt 28:2; cf. Eph 1:18–23). (CSB)

77:16 *waters saw You*. Personification gives a vivid description of Israel crossing the sea (Ex 14–15). (TLSB)

77:17–18 Ex 14:19–20 speaks of darkness and of a pillar of cloud that “lit up the night”; these verses describe the same event as a tremendous thunderstorm. “When he reflected on his own lust and desire for revenge, the poor sinner might have laughed rather than wept—unless he had either been truly struck by the lightning of the Law [Psalm 77:18] or had been tormented by the devil with a sorrowful spirit [1 Samuel 16:14]” (SA III III 18). (TLSB)

77:17 *arrows*. Lightning bolts. (CSB)

77:19 The unseen Lord led Israel through the sea. (TLSB)

77:20 Completes the thought of v. 15. (CSB)

led your people. Through the Desert of Sinai. (CSB)

In times of trouble we remember how the Good Shepherd gave his life for the sheep. If Christ loved us and gave himself to redeem us from our sins, no trial or disaster can separate us from his love. (PBC)

77:20 God's redemptive acts in the exodus give the believer a sense of calm and trust.

Ps 77 Even strong believers and spiritual leaders among God's people may find themselves troubled by times of weakness in their faith. But God's powerful Word strengthens us. As we focus on the Gospel, the message of God's mighty deeds for our redemption, He will strengthen our faith. • Lord, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mk 9:24). Amen. (TLSB)