
For the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun. A Psalm by Asaph.

PSALM 77: 1 My cry goes to God! Indeed, I cry to God for help, and for him to listen to me.

The psalmist's ardent prayer to God in the time of distress, Psa 77:1-4. The means he used to excite his confidence, Psa 77:5-12. God's wonderful works in behalf of his people, Psa 77:13-20.

The title, "To the chief Musician, (or conqueror), to Jeduthun, A Psalm of Asaph." On this title we may observe that both Asaph and Jeduthun were celebrated singers in the time of David, and no doubt were masters or leaders of bands which long after their times were called by their names. Hence Psalms composed during and after the captivity have these names prefixed to them. But there is reason to believe also, that there was a person of the name of Asaph in the captivity at Babylon. The author must be considered as speaking in the persons of the captive Israelites, It may however be adapted to the case of any individual in spiritual distress through strong temptation, or from a sense of the Divine displeasure in consequence of backsliding.

Verse 1

I cried unto God - The repetition here marks the earnestness of the psalmist's soul; and the word voice shows that the Psalm was not the issue of private meditation, but of deep mental trouble, which forced him to speak his griefs aloud.

PSALM 77: 2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord. My hand was stretched out in the night, and didn't get tired. My soul refused to be comforted.

Verse 2

My sore ran in the night, and ceased not - This is a most unaccountable translation; the literal meaning of *yadi niggerah*, which we translate my sore ran, is, my hand was stretched out, i.e., in prayer. He continued during the whole night with his voice and hands lifted up to God, and ceased not, even in the midst of great discouragements.

PSALM 77: 3 I remember God, and I groan. I complain, and my spirit is overwhelmed. Selah.

Verse 3

My spirit was overwhelmed - As the verb is in the hithpael conjugation, the word must mean my spirit was overpowered in itself. It purposed to involve itself in this calamity. I felt exquisitely for my poor suffering countrymen. "The generous mind is not confined at home;

It spreads itself abroad through all the public,

And feels for every member of the land."

PSALM 77: 4 You hold my eyelids open. I am so troubled that I can't speak.

Verse 4

Thou holdest mine eyes waking - Literally, thou keepest the watches of mine eyes - my grief is so great that I cannot sleep.

I am so troubled that I cannot speak - This shows an increase of sorrow and anguish. At first he felt his misery, and called aloud. He receives more light, sees and feels his deep wretchedness, and then his words are swallowed by excessive distress. His woes are too big for utterance. "Small troubles are loquacious; the great are dumb." *Curae leves loquuntur; ingentes stupent.*

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

Verse 5

I have considered the days of old - *חשבתי chishshabti*, I have counted up; I have reckoned up the various dispensations of thy mercy in behalf of the distressed, marked down in the history of our fathers.

PSALM 77: 6 I remember my song in the night. I consider in my own heart; my spirit diligently inquires:

Verse 6

I call to remembrance my song in the night - I do not think that *נְגִינָתִי neginathi* means my song. We know that *נְגִינָת neginath* signifies some stringed musical instrument that was struck with a plectrum, but here it possibly might be applied to the Psalm that was played on it. But it appears to me rather that the psalmist here speaks of the circumstances of composing the short ode contained in the seventh, eighth, and ninth verses; which it is probable he sung to his harp as a kind of dirge, if indeed he had a harp in that distressful captivity.

My spirit made diligent search - The verb *חפש chaphas* signifies such an investigation as a man makes who is obliged to strip himself in order to do it; or, to lift up coverings, to search fold by fold, or in our phrase, to leave no stone unturned. The Vulgate translates: "*Et scopebam spiritum meum.*" As *scopebam* is no pure Latin word, it may probably be taken from the Greek *σκοπεω scopeo*, "to look about, to consider attentively." It is however used by no author but St. Jerome; and by him only here and in Isa 14:23 : And I will sweep it with the besom of destruction; *scopabo eam in scopa terens*. Hence we see that he has formed a verb from a noun *scope*, a sweeping brush or besom; and this sense my old Psalter follows in this place, translating the passage thus: And I sweped my gast: which is thus paraphrased: "And swa I sweped my gaste, (I swept my soul), that is, I purged it of all fylth."

PSALM 77: 7 "Will the Lord reject us forever? Will he be favourable no more?"

Verse 7

Will the Lord cast off for ever? - Will there be no end to this captivity? Has he not said, "Turn, ye backsliders; for I am married unto you: I will heal your backsliding, and love you freely." Will he then be favorable no more? Thus the psalmist pleads and reasons with his Maker.

PSALM 77: 8 Has his loving kindness vanished forever? Does his promise fail for generations?

Verse 8

For evermore? - לדר ודר ledor vador, "to generation and generation." From race to race. Shall no mercy be shown even to the remotest generation of the children of the offenders?

PSALM 77: 9 Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he, in anger, withheld his compassion?" Selah.

Verse 9

Hath God - in anger shut up his tender mercies? - The tender mercies of God are the source whence all his kindness to the children of men flows. The metaphor here is taken from a spring, the mouth of which is closed, so that its waters can no longer run in the same channel; but, being confined, break out, and take some other course. Wilt thou take thy mercy from the Israelites, and give it to some other people? This he most certainly did. He took it from the Jews, and gave it to the Gentiles.

PSALM 77: 10 Then I thought, "I will appeal to this: the years of the right hand of the Most High."

Verse 10

And I said, This is my infirmity - The Hebrew is very obscure, and has been differently translated: ואמר חלותי היא שנות ימימן עליון vaomar challothi hi shenoth yemin elyon; "And I said, Is this my weakness? Years the right hand of the Most High." If חלותי challothi comes from חלה chalah, and signifies to pray, as De Dieu has thought, then his translation may be proper: Precari hoc meum est; mutare dextram Altissimi. "To pray, this my business; to change the right hand of the Most High." I can do nothing else than pray; God is the Ruler of events. Mr. N. M. Berlin translates, "Dolere meum hoc est; mutare est dextra Altissimi." To grieve is my portion; to change (my condition) belongs to the right hand of the Most High. Here שנות shenoth, which we translate years, is derived from שנה shanah, to change. This latter appears to me the better translation; the sum of the meaning is, "I am in deep distress; the Most High alone can change my condition." The old Psalter, following the Vulgate, - Et dixi, Nunc coepi: haec mutatio dexterarum Excelsi, - translates: And I said, Now I began this chaunchyng of ryght hand of hihegh (highest) Alswa say, God sal noght kast al man kynde fra his sigt with outen ende: for nowe I began to understand the syker; (the truth); that man sal be brogt to

endles; and thar fore, now I said, that this chaunchyng fra wreth to mercy, is through Ihu Criste that chaunges me fra ill to gude, fra noy to gladnes.

Once more, Coverdale, who is followed by Matthews and Becke, takes the passage by storm: "At last I came to this poynte, that I thought; O why art thou so foolish? The right hande of the Most Hyest can change all."

PSALM 77: 11 I will remember the LORD's deeds; for I will remember your wonders of old.

Verse 11

I will remember the works of the Lord - I endeavor to recollect what thou hast done in behalf of our fathers in past times; in no case hast thou cast them off, when, with humbled hearts, they sought thy mercy.

PSALM 77: 12 I will also meditate on all your work, and consider your doings.

PSALM 77: 13 Your way, God, is in the sanctuary. What god is great like God?

Verse 13

Thy way - is in the sanctuary - See Psa 73:17. I must go to the sanctuary now to get comfort, as I went before to get instruction. What a mercy to have the privilege of drawing near to God in his ordinances! How many doubts have been solved, fears dissipated, hearts comforted, darkneses dispelled, and snares broken, while waiting on God in the means of grace!

Some understand the words, Thy way is in holiness - all thy dispensations, words, and works are holy, just and true. And as is thy majesty, so is thy mercy! O, who is so great a God as our God?

PSALM 77: 14 You are the God who does wonders. You have made your strength known among the peoples.

Verse 14

Thou - doest wonders - Every act of God, whether in nature or grace, in creation or providence, is wondrous; surpasses all power but his own; and can be comprehended only by his own wisdom. To the general observer, his strength is most apparent; to the investigator of nature, his wisdom; and to the genuine Christian, his mercy and love.

PSALM 77: 15 You have redeemed your people with your arm, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.

Verse 15

The son. of Jacob and Joseph - "The sons which Jacob begat and Joseph nourished." says the Chaldee. The Israelites are properly called the sons of Joseph as well as of Jacob, seeing Ephraim and Manasseh, his sons, were taken into the number of the tribes. All the latter part of this Psalm refers to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt; and the psalmist uses this as an argument to excite the expectation of the captives. As God delivered our fathers from Egypt, so we may expect him to deliver us from Chaldea. It required his arm to do the former, and that arm is not shortened that it cannot save.

PSALM 77: 16 The waters saw you, God. The waters saw you, and they writhed. The depths also convulsed.

Verse 16

The waters saw thee - What a fine image! He represents God approaching the Red Sea; and the waters, seeing him, took fright, and ran off before him, dividing to the right and left to let him pass. I have not found any thing more majestic than this.

The depths also were troubled - Every thing appears here to have life and perception. The waters see the Almighty, do not wait his coming, but in terror flee away! The deeps, uncovered, are astonished at the circumstance; and as they cannot fly, they are filled with trouble and dismay. Under the hand of such a poet, inanimate nature springs into life; all thinks, speaks, acts; all is in motion, and the dismay is general.

PSALM 77: 17 The clouds poured out water. The skies resounded with thunder. Your arrows also flashed around.

Verse 17

The clouds poured out water - It appears from this that there was a violent tempest at the time of the passage of the Red Sea. There was a violent storm of thunder, lightning, and rain. These three things are distinctly marked here.

1. "The skies sent out a sound:" the Thunder.
 2. "Thine arrows went abroad:" the Lightning.
 3. "The clouds poured out water:" the Rain. In the next verse we have,
 4. An Earthquake: "The earth trembled and shook," Psa 77:18.
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PSALM 77: 18 The voice of your thunder was in the whirlwind. The lightnings lit up the world. The earth trembled and shook.

PSALM 77: 19 Your way was through the sea; your paths through the great waters. Your footsteps were not known.

Verse 19

Thy way is in the sea - Thou didst walk through the sea, thy path was through a multitude of waters.

Thy footsteps are not known - It was evident from the effects that God was there: but his track could not be discovered; still he is the Infinite Spirit, without parts, limits, or passions. No object of sense.

PSALM 77: 20 You led your people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Verse 20

Thou leddest thy people like a flock - This may refer to the pillar of cloud and fire. It went before them, and they followed it. So, in the eastern countries, the shepherd does not drape, but leads, his flock. He goes before them to find them pasture, and they regularly follow him.

By the hand of Moses and Aaron - They were God's agents; and acted, in civil and sacred things, just as directed by the Most High.