

# Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School  
Placerita Baptist Church  
2006

by  
William D. Barrick, Th.D.  
Professor of OT, The Master's Seminary



## Psalm 77 — Turning from Self to God

### 1.0 Introducing Psalm 77

- Psalm 77 continues the eleven psalms of Asaph that commenced with Psalm 73 and continue through Psalm 83.
- Several factors aid in understanding the structure and flow of Psalm 77:
  - ✓ “Selah” divides the psalm into four sections.
  - ✓ The psalmist’s personal references and references to God divide the psalm into two halves:

	1st Person References	Divine References
Verses 1-9	21	12
Verses 10-20	7	26

- Asaph’s experiences are often our very own. Consider Spurgeon’s testimony: “Some of us know what it is, both physically and spiritually, to be compelled to use these words: no respite has been afforded us by the silence of the night, our bed has been a rack to us, our body has been in torment, and our spirit in anguish.”—C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (reprint; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 2/1:312.

### 2.0 Reading Psalm 77 (NAU)

77:1 A Psalm of Asaph.

**My voice rises to God**, and I will cry aloud;  
**My voice rises to God**, and He will hear me.

77:2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord;  
In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness;

- My soul refused to be comforted.
- 77:3** *When I remember God, then I am disturbed;*  
*When I sigh, then my spirit grows faint.* **Selah.**
- 77:4** You have held my eyelids *open*;  
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
- 77:5** I have considered the days of old,  
The years of long ago.
- 77:6** I will remember my song in the night;  
I will meditate with my heart,  
And my spirit ponders:
- 77:7** Will the Lord reject forever?  
And will He never be favorable again?
- 77:8** Has His lovingkindness ceased forever?  
Has *His* promise come to an end forever?
- 77:9** Has God forgotten to be gracious,  
Or has He in anger withdrawn His compassion? **Selah.**
- 77:10** Then I said, “It is my grief,  
That the right hand of the Most High has changed.”
- 77:11** I shall remember the deeds of the LORD;  
Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.
- 77:12** I will meditate on all Your work  
And muse on Your deeds.
- 77:13** Your way, O God, is holy;  
What god is great like our God?
- 77:14** You are the God who works wonders;  
You have made known Your strength among the peoples.
- 77:15** You have by Your power redeemed Your people,  
The sons of Jacob and Joseph. **Selah.**
- 77:16** **The waters saw You, O God;**  
**The waters saw You, they were in anguish;**  
The deeps also trembled.
- 77:17** The clouds poured out water;  
The skies gave forth a sound;  
Your arrows flashed here and there.
- 77:18** The sound of Your thunder was in the whirlwind;  
The lightnings lit up the world;  
The earth trembled and shook.
- 77:19** Your way was in the sea  
And Your paths in the mighty waters,  
And Your footprints may not be known.
- 77:20** You led Your people like a flock  
By the hand of Moses and Aaron.



### 3.0 Understanding Psalm 77

#### 3.1 Outline

- I. Recollecting Better Times (vv. 1-9)
  - A. Asaph's Crisis (vv. 1-3)
  - B. Asaph's Questions (vv. 4-9)
- II. Resolving Bad Times (vv. 10-20)
  - A. Remember God's Deeds (vv. 10-15)
  - B. Remember the Red Sea! (vv. 16-20)



#### 3.2 Notes

- v. 1 “My voice *rises* to God”
  - The psalmist voices his complaint to God. Rather than allowing his depression to cause him to sink into his own self-centered morass, he verbalizes his problems before the throne of grace (cf. Hebrews 4:16).
  - By repeating this clause, the psalmist opens Psalm 77 emphatically.
  - Asaph will employ the same kind of repetition to open the final section of the psalm (v. 16).
  - Asaph's voice (*qol*) commences the psalm, but God's voice (“sound,” *qol*, verse 18) brings it to a close.
- v. 2 “my hand was stretched out”
  - Old Testament believers gestured freely in prayer.
  - “Stretched out” has the idea of being fully extended.
  - The verb can also mean “drip.” Thus, the KJV translators attempted to make sense with “my sore ran”—changing “hand” to “sore.”
- v. 3 “then I am disturbed”
  - Literally, “I moan.”
- v. 6 “my song in the night”
  - Are these the psalmist's former songs, in better days? Or, are these the songs he now sings in the midst of his trouble, because he cannot sleep?
  - Either way, singing the praises of God can dispel the darkness of torment. The “Song of the Sea” (Exodus 15:1-18) will provide a hymnic closure to this psalm.
  - Compare Acts 16:24-25.
- v. 9 “Has God forgotten to be gracious”
  - See Exodus 34:6-7.
  - How can God forget? Asaph's six questions are actually rhetorical questions. They all have an obvious negative answer.

- **v. 10** “the Most High”
  - The God-centered second half of the psalm uses a variety of names for God. Asaph employs the following names of God in Psalm 77:
    - ✓ *'Elohim* (“God”), verses 1, 3, 13, 16
    - ✓ *'Adonai* (“Lord”), verses 2, 7
    - ✓ *'El* (“God”), verses 9, 14
    - ✓ *'Elyon* (“the Most High”), verse 10
    - ✓ *Yah* (“the LORD”), verse 11
  
- **v. 10** “the right hand of the Most High has changed”
  - Has God changed? Have the circumstances changed? Has the psalmist himself changed?
    - ✓ “my appeal” or “my grief”
    - ✓ “years” (cp. verse 5) or “changed”
  - Asaph is saying: “Then [as a logical sequence to my questions] I said, ‘It is my affliction [my mental and spiritual distress and depression] that [I dare to imagine that] the right hand of the Most High has changed.’”
  
- **v. 15** “redeemed Your people”
  - “Redeemed” is the Hebrew term with a focus on family. It is the same root word as *go’el* (kinsman redeemer) in the book of Ruth.
  - In this context it alludes to the divine deliverance of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt.
  
- **v. 15** “Jacob and Joseph”
  - Mention of Jacob and Joseph is a characteristic of Asaph’s psalms.
    - ✓ Jacob: 75:9; 76:6; 77:15; 78:5, 21, 71; 79:7; 81:1, 4.
    - ✓ Joseph: 77:15; 78:67; 80:1; 81:5 (105:17 is the only other mention of Joseph in Psalms).
  
- **v. 16** “The waters saw You”
  - See note on verse 1, above.
  - The Red Sea’s waters reacted to the presence and actions of the invisible God who controlled them.
  - See Exodus 15:1-18.
  - See Habakkuk 3.
  
- **v. 19** “Your footprints may not be known”
  - No other writer in Scripture brings out this detail in the Red Sea crossing.
  - God is invisible. His power, however, has visible results.
  
- **v. 20** “like a flock”
  - The shepherding motif occurs in Psalms 77–80.
  - God is holy and great (verse 13), but He also cares for His people.



#### 4.0 Singing Psalm 77

##### **In Time of Tribulation** (Tune: “The Church’s One Foundation”)



In time of tribulation, hear, Lord, my feeble cries;  
With humble supplication to Thee my spirit flies;  
My heart with grief is breaking, scarce can my voice complain;  
Mine eyes with tears kept waking, still watch and weep in vain.

The days of old, in vision, bring banished bliss to view;  
The years of lost fruition, their joys in pangs renew;  
Remembered songs of gladness, through nights lone silence brought,  
Strike notes of deeper sadness, and stir desponding thought.

Hath God cast off forever? Can time His truth impair?  
His tender mercy never shall I presume to share?  
Hath He His loving kindness shut up in endless wrath?  
No; this is mine own blindness, that cannot see His path.

I call to recollection the years of His right hand;  
And, strong in His protection, again through faith I stand;  
Thy deeds, O Lord, are wondrous; holy are all Thy ways;  
The secret place of thunder shall utter forth Thy praise.

Thee, with the tribes assembled, O God, the billows saw;  
They saw Thee, and they trembled, turned, and stood still with awe;  
The clouds shot hail and lightning; the earth reeled to and fro;  
Thy fiery pillar brightened the gulf of gloom below.

Thy way is in great waters, Thy footsteps are not known;  
Let Adam’s sons and daughters confide in Thee alone:  
Through the wild sea Thou leadest Thy chosen flock of yore;  
Still on the waves Thou treadest, and Thy redeemed pass o’er.

— Words: James Montgomery

#### 5.0 Praying Psalm 77

- Comfort me, Lord, for I am deeply troubled. [vv. 1-2]
- Father, give me songs of praise during those nights when I am sleepless. [v. 6]
- Help me to express my doubts to You, rather than to hide them. [vv. 7-9]
- Oh God, cause me to focus on You rather than on myself. [vv. 11-14]
- 
- 

#### 6.0 Applying Psalm 77

- Shift focus from yourself to God, in order to get through a crisis in your faith.
- Even when it seems like God has forgotten you, He continues to care for you.