Grief in Historical Perspective

Psalm 77:1-20
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Commentary

by

Clyde M. Miller

Text:

Psalm 77:1-20,

1. I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me.
2. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted.
3. I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. Selah
4. You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak.
5. I thought about the former days, the years of long ago;
6. I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired:
7. "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again?
8. Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time?
9. Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" Selah
10. Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High."
11. I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.
12. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.
13. Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God?
14. You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.
15. With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah
16. The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed.
17. The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth.
18. Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked.
19. Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen.
20. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. NIV

Introduction:

I. “To the choirmaster” and “a psalm of Asaph” are explained in connection with Ps. 76.

A. “According to Jeduthun” (cf. Pss. 39; 62) refers either to a director of the temple choir (cf. 1 Chron. 16:41-42) or to a certain tune to which the psalm was to be sung.


3. 1 Chronicles 16:41-42, With them were Heman and Jeduthun and the rest of those chosen and designated by name to give thanks to the LORD, "for his love endures forever." 42 Heman and Jeduthun were responsible for the sounding of the trumpets and cym-
bals and for the playing of the other instruments for sacred song. The sons of Jeduthun were stationed at the gate. NIV

II. In this national lament, the psalmist voices both his and the nation's feelings in a time of crisis.

A. It is impossible to determine with certainty what that calamity was.

1. If the psalm is of north Israelite origin, it could fit the time between Tiglath-Pileser III's devastation of much of Israel in 732 B.C. and the final downfall of Israel in 722 B.C.

2. If Judean in origin, it could fit the time immediately prior to Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C., or the time of Jeremiah when it was becoming obvious that Judah would soon fall to the Babylonians.

3. The reference to Joseph and Jacob (Ps. 77:15) could mark the psalm as being from North Israel (cf. Amos 7:2,5; 5:6,15; Hos. 10:11), or it could refer to the twelve-tribe nation prior to the division between Israel and Judah (cf. Ps. 76:6; 78:5,21; Obad. 1:18).

a. Psalm 77:15, With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah NIV

b. Amos 7:2, 5, When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, "Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!" Then I cried out, "Sovereign LORD, I beg you,
stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!"
NIV

c. Amos 5:6, 15, Seek the LORD and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no one to quench it. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph. NIV

d. Hosea 10:11, Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh; so I will put a yoke on her fair neck. I will drive Ephraim, Judah must plow, and Jacob must break up the ground. NIV

e. Psalm 76:6, At your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both horse and chariot lie still. NIV

f. Psalm 78:5, 21, He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, When the LORD heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, NIV

g. Obadiah 1:18, The house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau." The LORD has spoken. NIV
III. This psalm is generally recognized as containing the seemingly antithetical elements of lament and praise.

A. This fact need not lead to the conclusion that two or more psalms or fragments have been pieced together, for the same feature is to be found in Ps. 9-10, where an alphabetic arrangement running through the two psalms demonstrates that they were originally one, as the LXX indicates by assigning only one number to them.

1. Psalm 9:1-20, I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. My enemies turn back; they stumble and perish before you. For you have upheld my right and my cause; you have sat on your throne, judging righteously. You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked; you have blotted out their name for ever and ever. Endless ruin has overtaken the enemy, you have uprooted their cities; even the memory of them has perished. The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice. The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you. Sing praises to the LORD, enthroned in Zion; proclaim among the nations what he has done. For he who avenges blood remembers; he does not ignore the cry of the afflicted. O LORD, see how my enemies persecute me! Have mercy and lift me up from the gates of death, that I may declare your praises in the gates of the Daughter of Zion and there rejoice in your salvation. The nations have fallen into the pit they have
dug; their feet are caught in the net they have hidden. The LORD is known by his justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands. Higgaion. Selah

The wicked return to the grave, all the nations that forget God. But the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish. Arise, O LORD, let not man triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence. Strike them with terror, O LORD; let the nations know they are but men. Selah

NIV

2. Psalm 10:1-18, Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD. In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty and your laws are far from him; he sneers at all his enemies. He says to himself, "Nothing will shake me; I'll always be happy and never have trouble." His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue. He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent, watching in secret for his victims. He lies in wait like a lion in cover; he lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net. His victims are crushed, they collapse; they fall under his strength. He says to himself, "God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees." Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, "He won't call me to account"? But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take
it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out. The LORD is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more. NIV

B. Ps. 44 also contains praise, lament and petition.

1. Psalm 44:1-26, We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago. With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our fathers; you crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish. It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them. You are my King and my God, who decrees victories for Jacob. Through you we push back our enemies; through your name we trample our foes. I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame. In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever. Selah
But now you have rejected and humbled us; you no longer go out with our armies. You made us retreat before the enemy, and our adversaries have plundered us. You gave us up to be devoured like sheep and have scattered us among the nations. You sold your people for a pittance, gaining nothing from their sale. You have made us a reproach to our neighbors,
the scorn and derision of those around us. You have made us a byword among the nations; the peoples shake their heads at us. My disgrace is before me all day long, and my face is covered with shame at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me, because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge. All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten you or been false to your covenant. Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path. But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals and covered us over with deep darkness. If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God have discovered it, since he knows the secrets of the heart? Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground. Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love. NIV

2. In Ps. 77 the order is reversed, the lament (1-9) preceding the praise (11-20).

a. Psalm 77:1-9, I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. Selah You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my
spirit inquired: "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" Selah NIV

b. Psalm 77:11-20, I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds. Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed. The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth. Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. NIV

c. Here the psalmist realizes that his wrong has been in supposing that God has changed from His steadfast love of old.

d. Having rediscovered the goodness of God, he now recounts God's glorious deeds.
e. The psalmist begins by talking about God, and it is only as he begins to talk to God that his attitude toward God changes significantly.

C. The paragraph divisions in this psalm are not easily discernible, but the following arrangement satisfactorily allows for the development of the theme.

Commentary:

Loud Cries of Distress

Psalm 77:1, 2, I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted. NIV

Note: This paragraph employs stair like (1) and synthetic (2) parallelism.

Psalm 77:1, I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. NIV

I. The emphatic clause “I cried out to God” is repeated in the second line for emphasis. The Hebrew is elliptical, and reads:

          My voice unto God, and I cry;
          My voice unto God, that he may give ear to me.

II. Our text compresses this thought into fewer words without destroying the essential meaning.

     A. The verbs to be supplied are better put in the present tense (cf. “I cry aloud” with NASB “My voice rises”) than in past time (KJV, NEB).
1. This verse seems to be an introduction stating his present circumstances.

2. Crying aloud to God as a result of deep distress is normal and was so done by the Savior (Heb. 5:7).

   a. **Hebrews 5:7**, During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. NIV

3. The last clause is best taken as a purpose clause, “that he may hear me”.

4. “I cry” (a Hebrew frequentative imperfect) indicates a continual crying.

5. “Hear” (a Hebrew perfect) suggests a decisive answer from God.

6. It is also better to translate the verbs in Ps. 77:2-5 in the present tense (ct. KJV, ASB, NEB), indicating a continuing state in the present.

   a. **Psalm 77:2-5**, When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untriesting hands and my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. Selah You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; NIV
Psalm 77:2, When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted.

I. He continuously implores God without receiving divine aid, yet his faith will not allow him to grow weary.

A. “In the day” and “in the night” (RSV) are Hebrew idioms indicating a continuous state or continuous action (cf. Ps. 19:2; 22:2).

1. Psalm 19:2, Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. NIV

2. Psalm 22:2, O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. NIV

B. Stretching out the hands describes a familiar gesture used in prayer to symbolize the longing of the heart for God's blessings (cf. Ps. 28:2; 141:2; Lam. 3:41).

1. Psalm 28:2, Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place. NIV

2. Psalm 141:2, May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. NIV

3. Lamentations 3:41, Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say: NIV

C. “Untiring hands” is literally “and was not numbed”.

D. “My sore ran in the night, and ceased not” (KJV) and “I lay sweating and nothing would cool me”(NEB) employ alternative
meanings of the key words, which results in translations which make little sense in the present context.

E. His “soul refuses to be comforted” until a favorable answer comes from God.

**Mournful Musing about God**

**Psalm 77:3-10**, I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. Selah You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired: "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" Selah Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High." NIV

**Note:** This paragraph employs synonymous (3,5-9) and synthetic (4,10) parallelism.

**Psalm 77:3**, I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. Selah NIV

I. His thoughts of God, who has not acted on his behalf, cause him to groan and faint.

**Psalm 77:4**, You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. NIV

I. His trouble makes him sleepless and speechless.

**Psalm 77:5**, I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; NIV
I. He tries to bolster his faith and calm his spirit by reflecting upon God's help in the past.

**Psalm 77:6**, *I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired:* NIV

I. Ps. 77:6 has been emended and partially deleted in our text. NIV

A. The NASB faithfully renders the Hebrew, except that the present tense fits the context better than the future tense.

1. Hence, we derive the following translation:

   I remember my song in the night;
   I meditate with my heart;
   And my spirit ponders.

2. This translation yields a synonymous triplet which expands the thought of Ps. 77:5, *I thought about the former days, the years of long ago;* NIV

**Psalm 77:7-9**, "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" Selah NIV

I. Here the content of his musing is given in three synonymous couplets, all of which say in effect: Will God never again bless Israel?

**Psalm 77:10**, *Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High."* NIV

I. The psalmist indicates the turning point in his quest for understanding of the divine riddle.
A. The startling thought strikes him that it is he and not God who has changed.

1. Now he recognizes that though the ways of God are sometimes incomprehensible to man, nevertheless God does act according to recognizable principles.

2. The principle of historical continuity, which the psalmist is able to bring to bear on the situation at hand, enables him to preserve his faith and to wait patiently for God's deliverance from the present distress.

II. Mitchell Dahood (Psalms II, The Anchor Bible, pp. 228-29) takes quite a different view of Ps. 77:10.

A. He suggests that in Ps. 77:9-10 three synonyms are used, all conveying the literal idea of ‘drying up’ but metaphorically expressing the thought that God's compassion and power have become inefficual.

1. He takes the suffixes as third masculine singular, as he does in Ps. 77:2, *When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted.* NIV

2. Thus, he translates:

(9) Have the inmost parts of God dried up, or his bosom shrunk in His anger?

(10) Perhaps his sickness is this: the right hand of the Most High has withered.
3. This should be compared with the translation of the New English Bible:

(10) ‘Has His right hand’, I said, ‘lost its grasp? Does it hang powerless, the arm of the Most High?’

4. This would deny that a change of heart has come over the psalmist in Ps. 77:10.

1. However, there does seem to be a transition in thought in Ps. 77:10, since in the rest of the psalm there is a noticeable confidence and also an absence of the complaints found in Ps. 77:1-9.

2. Psalm 77:1-10, I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untriring hands and my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. Selah You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired: "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" Selah Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High." NIV
Fruitful Reflection upon the Past

Psalm 77:11-15, I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds. Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah NIV

I. This paragraph employs synonymous (11-12,14-15) and synthetic (13) parallelism.

A. The psalmist resolves to reflect upon the past in a more positive way by looking at God's works of the past.

B. In each verse there is a parallel between God's general deeds and work on the one hand, and His wonders and mighty deeds on the other.

C. The latter could refer to miracles or other extraordinary deeds.

Psalm 77:13-15, Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah NIV

I. Only God can rightly claim to be the holy wonder-worker and redeemer.

II. Emphasis is here placed on the period of the exodus from Egypt when God redeemed “the sons of Jacob and Joseph”.
Elaboration on the Scene of the Exodus

Psalm 77:16-20, The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed. The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth. Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. NIV

Note: This paragraph employs four synthetic triplets (16-19) and one synthetic couplet (20).

Psalm 77:16-19, The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed. The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth. Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. NIV

I. It would appear that the psalmist moves from an allusion to God's separation of the waters in the creation (16) to the parting of the waters of the Red Sea at the time of the exodus (17-19).

A. The thread which ties these two events together is the divine appearance which reveals the majesty of God.

B. This majesty should be recognized by the peoples contemporary with and contiguous to Israel (cf. 12-15).

1. Psalm 77:12-15, I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds. Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? You
are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah  NIV

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

I. God, the chief shepherd, led His people through the wilderness by means of the leadership of His servants, “Moses and Aaron” (cf. Ezek. 34; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

A. Ezekiel 34:1-31, The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them. "'Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds
and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. "As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. I will place over them one
shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken. "I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety. I will bless them and the places surrounding my hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. They will know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them. They will no longer be plundered by the nations, nor will wild animals devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid. I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations. Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD." NIV

B. 1 Peter 5:1-4, To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. NIV
EXCURSUSES:

Canaanite Baalism

In Ps. 77:13-15 (Psalm 77:13-15 Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah NIV), the psalmist enters sympathetically into the prophetic tradition reflected in several psalms as he engages in a polemic against Canaanite Baalism. Israel had frequently lapsed into Baalism, primarily because of a double attraction which this cult held out to degenerate man. First, it was supposed that Baal controlled the fertility of the field, animals, and persons. Therefore, to please Baal meant to insure prosperity. Second, the fleshly attraction of cult prostitution corrupted Israel's morals. Israel's pre-exilic history is discolored with Baalism. At Baal-peor before the conquest of Canaan (Hosea 9:10, "When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree. But when they came to Baal Peor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved. NIV Numbers 25:1-18, While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD's anger burned against them. The LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the LORD's fierce anger may turn away from Israel." So Moses said to Israel's judges, "Each of you must put to death those of your men who have joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor." Then an Israelite man brought to his family a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of
Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear through both of them—through the Israelite and into the woman's body. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped; but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000. The LORD said to Moses, "Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them. Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites." The name of the Israelite who was killed with the Midianite woman was Zimri son of Salu, the leader of a Simeonite family. And the name of the Midianite woman who was put to death was Cozbi daughter of Zur, a tribal chief of a Midianite family. The LORD said to Moses, "Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them, because they treated you as enemies when they deceived you in the affair of Peor and their sister Cozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader, the woman who was killed when the plague came as a result of Peor." NIV Deuteronomy 4:3, You saw with your own eyes what the LORD did at Baal Peor. The LORD your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor, NIV Psalm 106:28-31, They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods; they provoked the LORD to anger by their wicked deeds, and a plague broke out among them. But Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was checked. This was credited to him as righteousness for endless generations to come. NIV), during the period of the Judges (Judges 2:13, because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. NIV Judges 6:25, 31, That same night the LORD said to him, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. 26 Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole
that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering." But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, "Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar." NIV), in the ninth century (1 Kings 16:31, He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. NIV 1 Kings 18:21-40, Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing. Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the LORD's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire—he is God." Then all the people said, "What you say is good." Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire." So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "O Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention. Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which
was in ruins. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel." With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood." "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD-he is God! The LORD-he is God!" Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there. NIV), and throughout the Prophets, Baalism is emphatically condemned.

Because of the syncretistic nature of Baalism which allowed men to cling to their old gods but also include Baal, it was necessary for the prophets (cf. Hosea 2:5-13, Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace. She said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.' Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.' She has not...
acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold— which they used for Baal. "Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my new wine when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her nakedness. So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands. I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days—all her appointed feasts. I will ruin her vines and her fig trees, which she said were her pay from her lovers; I will make them a thicket, and wild animals will devour them. I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot," declares the LORD. NIV Hosea 4:11-14,

"To prostitution, to old wine and new, which take away the understanding 12 of my people. They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God. They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery. "I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes— a people without understanding will come to ruin! NIV Hosea 9:10-14, "When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree. But when they came to Baal Peor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved. Ephraim's glory will fly away like a bird— no birth, no pregnancy, no conception. Even if they rear children, I will bereave them of every one. Woe to them when I turn away from them! I have seen Ephraim, like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place. But Ephraim will bring out their children to the slayer." Give them, O LORD— what will you give them? Give them wombs that miscarry and
breasts that are dry. NIV Hosea 11:1-4, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them. NIV Hosea 13:4-6, "But I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Savior except me. I cared for you in the desert, in the land of burning heat. When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me. NIV) and the psalmists (Psalm 86:8-10, Among the gods there is none like you, O Lord; no deeds can compare with yours. All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name. For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God. NIV Psalm 95:3-5, For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. NIV Psalm 96:3-6, Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary. NIV Psalm 97:7-9, All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols—worship him, all you gods! Zion hears and rejoices and the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments, O LORD. For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. NIV. Psalm 115:3-11, Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot
walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them. O house of Israel, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield. You who fear him, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield. NIV) to insist that Yahweh is the only God who through His works has demonstrated His reality.

Universalism

God has manifested His might among the peoples (Psalm 77:14, You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. NIV), not merely in Israel; hence, universalism is a frequent theme in the Psalms. God wants all men to know and worship him (Psalm 96:2, 3, 7-9, Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. NIV). God has revealed Himself to the peoples through the created world (Psalm 97:6, The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. NIV) and through His dealings with Israel (Psalm 98:1-3, Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. NIV). All people are depraved sinners (Psalm 14:1-3, The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is
no one who does good, not even one. NIV), and no one is righteous before God (Psalm 143:1, 2, O LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief. Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you. NIV). But God's grace, mercy and love resulting in forgiveness are extended to all who call upon him throughout the whole world, the realm of His dominion (Psalm 103:1-22, Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits- who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children- with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts. The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, O my soul. NIV).
The psalmists were not narrow-minded nationalists. They understood God's interest in all humanity.

The Supplementation of History in the Psalms

Frequently, the Psalms mention things which are omitted from the historical books of the Old Testament. For instance, in 77:17-18 (Psalm 77:17, 18, The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth. Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. NIV) the psalmist refers to a thunderstorm in connection with the parting of the waters of the Red Sea, which is omitted in Exodus. Some think that the psalmist has exercised poetic license in embellishing the text, while others suggest that he is filling in the history from extra-Biblical sources. There is nothing inconsistent with either view. Similarly, Ps. 105:18 (Psalm 105:18, They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, NIV) mentions Joseph's neck being put in a collar of iron, 105:22 (Psalm 105:22, to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom. NIV) recalls that Joseph taught Pharaoh's princes, 137:7 (Psalm 137:7, Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!" NIV) tells of a day when Edom encouraged the Babylonians as they razed Jerusalem, 132:1-2 (Psalm 132:1, 2, O LORD, remember David and all the hardships he endured. He swore an oath to the LORD and made a vow to the Mighty One of Jacob: NIV) refers to David's oath in connection with his plans to build a temple, and 110:4 (Psalm 110:4, The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." NIV) mentions God's oath to David concerning his perpetual dynasty. None of these items is included in other parts of the Old Testament. The historical books do not propose to give every detail of Israel's history, but the authors indicate that they have selected material from extant written records (cf. 1
Kings 11:41, As for the other events of Solomon's reign—all he did and the wisdom he displayed—are they not written in the book of the annals of Solomon? NIV 1 Kings 14:29, As for the other events of Rehoboam's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? NIV 1 Kings 15:7, As for the other events of Abijah's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. NIV (etc.). The psalmists could easily have had access to these written records or to the oral tradition taught by the priests and Levites.

Application:

I. Recalling past history can help us not to repeat the errors of the past that brought upon its perpetrators the wrath of God.

II. It can also help us to be encouraged by the faith and obedience of God’s faithful that brought upon the practitioners the rich blessings of God.

III. These reflections can help us see the justice and mercy of God (cf. v. 9).

A. Psalm 77:9, Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" Selah NIV

B. They can cause us to have faith in God’s “unfailing love” (v. 8).

   1. Psalm 77:8, Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? NIV

C. Dwelling on the miraculous works of God can cause us to recognize his infinite power and care for mankind.
IV. All of these things should give comfort to the weary oppressed traveler on life’s highway.
Questions

Psalm 77:1-20

(Questions based on NIV text.)

1. “I _______________ ________________ to _______________ for _______________; I _________________ __ _____________ to _______________ me. When I was in ____________, I ____________ the _______________; at ___________ I ___________ out ___________ __________ and my ____________ ___________ to be _______________.”

2. “I _____________ you, O ___ __________, and I _____________; I _______________, and my _______________ _______________ _______________. You kept my ___________ from _____________; I was too _______________ to _______________.

3. “I _____________ my _______________ in the _______________. My _______________ __ _____________ and my _______________ _____________: ‘__________________ the _______________ ______ _________?  Will he never show his _____________ again? Has his _______________ _______________ _______________? Has his _______________ _______________ for _______________ _______________ _______________? Has he in _______________ withheld his _______________?’”

4. Then I thought, “To this I will _________________: the _______________ of the _______________. I will _______________ the _______________ of the _______________; yes, I will _______________ your _______________ of _______________ _______________. I will _______________ on all your _______________ and _______________ all your _______________ _______________.

5. Your _____________, O _____________, are _____________.
What _____________ is so _____________ as our _____________?
You are the _____________ who _______________ _____________;
you _____________ your _____________ among the _____________.
With your _____________ _______________ you _______________
your _____________, the _______________ of _______________
and _________________.

6. The _____________ saw you, O _____________, the _____________
saw you and _______________; the very _______________ were
_____________ The _______________ _______________
______________, the _______________ _______________ with
_____________; your _______________ _______________
and _________________.

7. Your _____________ was _______________ in the _______________,
your _______________ _______________ up the _______________; the
_______________ _______________ and _______________.
Your _______________ led _______________ the _______________,
your _______________ _______________ the _______________
______________, though your _______________ were ______________
_______________.

8. You led your _______________ like a _______________ by the
_______________ of _______________ and _______________.

9. To whom/what does Jeduthun refer? What do other references say
about Jeduthun? __________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
10. In regard to what crisis was this national lament written? Give various possibilities. ______________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

11. What parts of Psalm 77 are a lament and what parts are praise? __
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

12. What was the psalmist’s mistake? ________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

13. List God’s glorious deeds as mentioned by the psalmist after he had rediscovered the goodness of God. ______________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

14. Outline Psalm 77. ______________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
15. Explain the meaning and significance of “stretching out the hands.”

16. What effect did the psalmist’s trouble have on him?

17. The psalmist tried to _________ his _________ and _________ his _________ by _________ upon _________’s _________ in the _________.

18. What was the divine riddle and what turning point led to the psalmist’s resolution of his perplexity?

19. Why were Israelites so often led to serve Baal? Give scriptures that attest to the evils of serving Baal.
20. Explain God’s universalism in view of Israel’s being his chosen people.

21. List historical events mentioned in psalms that are not otherwise found in scripture.

22. What human evils in the past have brought forth God’s wrath?

23. Give biblical examples of faith and obedience bringing God’s rich blessings upon God’s people.

24. Contrast God’s wrath with his love, mercy and justice.
25. How can we best recognize God’s infinite power and care for all mankind?