

## PSALMS 73-89

### Book Three

#### **Psalm 73: Rescue from near despair**

This reflective psalm is full of diverse emotions: despair and envy as the psalmist sees how the wicked prosper. “As for me, I lost my balance.... I was envious of the arrogant when I saw how they prospered” (2-3). I said: “Is it in vain that I kept my heart clean” (13). Later he says: “My heart was embittered and my soul deeply wounded...” (21). But then the psalmist realizes that in and through all his pain and despair “God was with him” (23). (See NAB for more.)

#### **Psalm 74: Prayer at the destruction of the Temple**

This is a communal lament after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 587 B.C. (See NAB for more.)

#### **Psalm 75: God judges the boastful**

“A conviction runs through all of Scripture that boasting is an offense to the divine majesty, that the arrogance of self-importance and autonomous power stands under the judgment of God. Psalm 75 is a song to praise God who judges the boastful wicked.” (James Mays) (See NAB for more.)

#### **Psalm 76: God, the defender of Zion**

Our warrior God is revealed as the creator who defeats forces hostile to Israel.

#### **Psalm 77: Confidence in God during a time of national distress**

This is a community psalm in which the speaker describes the anguish of Israel at God’s silence when its very existence is at stake. Commenting on this psalm, Sr. Glavich writes:

*Psalm 77 is a good lament to pray when we are in trouble or faced with a problem. How easy it is to identify with the psalmist who seeks God’s help but isn’t comforted. He doesn’t sleep at night. He can’t talk. He wonders if God has stopped loving him. But then the psalmist remembers how God led the people on a perilous walk through the Red Sea, amid lightning and earthshaking thunder. Though the*

*mountains of water were piled up on either side of them, ready to crash down, the Israelites came through safely. We need to ride out the storm, trusting in God’s providence to bring about good.”*(The Catholic Companion to the Psalms, p. 27)

#### **Psalm 78: That the next generation may know**

Concerning this long psalm, Bertrand Buby, S.M., writes: “This psalm is classified as historical; it is also didactic, for it teaches the importance of learning the history of God’s actions among God’s chosen people Israel. The pattern so common to the Torah is present in this psalm as it recalls the mighty acts of God. The giving of the covenant, then failure, repentance, and a return to the covenant are seen in the ebb and flow of God’s story with Israel. This psalmist narrates in great detail the marvels of the Exodus and continues the pilgrimage of Israel into the land of Canaan, and finally ends with the reign of David as king under God. Thus a period of time extending from 1200 to 1000 B.C. is the scope of this psalm. The poet encourages the community gathered in the Temple to pass on the presence of God to their children and to future generations. It is a history of their traditions and life with God as leader. This excellent storyteller may be a priest or a Levite concerned with the worship in the Temple” (With a Listening Heart, p.93). (See NAB for more.)

#### **Psalm 79: A communal lament following the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple**

This communal lament complains to God that the nations have defiled the Temple and murdered the holy people, leaving their corpses unburied (vv 1-4). The situation is apparently that which existed after the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. The people ask “how long” the withdrawal of divine favor will last (v.5). They acknowledge that their sins have brought the suffering upon them (vv 8-9).

#### **Psalm 80: “Restore us, O Lord.”**

A communal lament in a time of military defeat. (See NAB for more.)

### **Psalm 81: Sermon from God**

*“Psalm 81 begins with the praise of God and then turns quickly to preaching. The sermon is delivered as the voice of God! Its text is the first commandment. The pathos of the sermon is the yearning of God for a people whose faithfulness answers his choice of them.”* (James Mays) (See NAB for more.)

### **Psalm 82: Trial of false gods**

The psalmist paints a vivid picture of a heavenly assembly in which God presides over a court where the gods are on trial. Instead of praying to God, we have God speaking.

### **Psalm 83: “God, do not be silent.”**

The people cry out to God to be silent and inactive as the nations seek to destroy and usurp God’s place on earth. They ask God to destroy their current enemies as he destroyed their former enemies.

### **Psalm 84: “How lovely is your dwelling place.”**

This psalm expresses the joy of the pilgrims who travel to Zion (Jerusalem) for one of their big feasts.

### **Psalm 85: “Restore your favor, Lord.”**

The people remind God of past favors and forgiveness, and plead once again to come to their rescue.

### **Psalm 86: “Save your servant who trusts in you.”**

In this individual lament, the psalmist cries out to God for help.

### **Psalm 87: “Glorious things are said of you, O city of God.”**

A Zion psalm that focuses on the city of Jerusalem. The situation seems to be the exile or its aftermath, when Zion’s citizens are scattered over Babylon and Egypt.

### **Psalm 88: Prayer of a person terrified of dying**

This is the only lament in the Psalter in which the psalmist sees no u-turn. He is terrified of death and calls out to God, but in the end he is a man without hope of deliverance. (See NAB for more.)

### **Psalm 89: Crisis of faith caused by the defeat of the king**

The psalm begins by recounting God’s promises to David’s dynasty: *“I will make your dynasty stand forever”* (5). But then the king is defeated: *“Now you have rejected your anointed...renounced your covenant with your servant”* (39-40).

The chosen one has become the rejected one. The defeat of the king causes a crisis of faith. How could God go back on his promise? Despite its grief, the community hangs in there and has enough faith to hold God to the original promise.