

Psalm 75

Prayer during the Day Wednesday Week 3

This is a hymn of praise for God's just judgment. It fits well here after Psalm 74. The sudden change of speakers (see the abrupt change from verse one to verse two) suggests a liturgical setting. The title reads: 'To the leader: Do Not Destroy. A Psalm* of Asaph*. A Song.'

After giving thanks the assembly goes silent and hears YHWH speaking, through an oracle proclaimed in YHWH's name by the priest. The 'I' in verse two is emphatic. God will act in God's time.

Ah, you who say, 'Let him make haste, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the plan of the Holy One of Israel hasten to fulfilment, that we may know it!'

– Isaiah 5:19

Thus says the Lord YHWH: None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word that I speak will be fulfilled, says the Lord YHWH.

– Ezekiel 12:28

Here again the 'I' is emphatic. We can do nothing (as Psalm 74 makes clear). Not so YHWH.

When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

– Psalm 11:3

They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they grope in the dark; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

– Psalm 82:5

'Do not fancy yourselves', literally 'Do not lift up your horn'. The horn is symbol of power. The dragon in the Book of Revelation has ten horns (12:3), which we see again on the scarlet beast (17:3). The beast from the sea also has horns (13:1)

In the New Testament in the song of Zechariah, Jesus, the Messiah, is referred to as 'the horn of salvation' (Luke 1:69). He is the one who wields real power: the power of God, which is the power of love. In the Book of Revelation the risen Christ is portrayed as a Lamb 'with seven horns' (5:6), the perfection of divine power.

¹We give you thanks, O God, we give you thanks as we invoke your name, proclaiming your wondrous deeds.

²At the time that I determine I will judge* with equity*.

³Even were the earth to totter, with its inhabitants, I will keep its pillars steady.

[Selah*]

⁴I say to the boastful, 'Do not boast,' and to the wicked, 'Do not fancy yourselves.

⁵Do not oppose the One on high, or insolently confront the Rock'.

God is judge

‘For judgment is not from the east or the west or the wilderness or the mountains.

⁷It is God who executes judgment*, putting one person down, and lifting up another.

This is the response of the assembly to the word of YHWH. The wilderness refers to the Negev to the south. The mountains are those of Lebanon to the north.

YHWH overthrows the thrones of rulers, and enthrones the lowly in their place. YHWH plucks up the roots of the nations, and plants the humble in their place.

– Sirach 10:14-15

We recall the following from the New Testament:

The Lord has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

– Luke 1:51-53

Compare the following:

Hannah prayed and said, ‘My heart exults in YHWH; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory. There is no Holy One like YHWH, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for YHWH is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. YHWH kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. YHWH makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour. For the pillars of the earth are YHWH’s, and on them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail. YHWH! His adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven. YHWH will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed.

– 1Samuel 2:1-10

They shall drink and stagger and go out of their minds because of the sword that I am sending among them.

– Jeremiah 25:16

You shall be filled with drunkenness and sorrow. A cup of horror and desolation is the cup of your sister Samaria.

– Ezekiel 23:33

In his agony Jesus prayed that he would not have to drink from the ‘cup’ (Matthew 26:39,42). Recall also Jesus’ words to the sons of Zebedee: ‘Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?’ (Matthew 20:22), and to Peter: ‘Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?’ (John 18:11).

None of us can escape reaping what we have sown:

I took the cup from YHWH’s hand, and made all the nations to whom YHWH sent me drink it.

– Jeremiah 25:17

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the warriors. Let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up. Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weakling say, ‘I am a warrior.’ Come quickly, all you nations all around, gather yourselves there. Bring down your warriors, YHWH. Let the nations rouse themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the neighbouring nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of YHWH is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. YHWH shouts from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But YHWH is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. So you shall know that I, YHWH your God, dwell in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it.

– Joel 3:9-17

⁸For in the hand of YHWH* there is a cup, a jug filled with drugged wine. He will pour a draught from it,

and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it to the dregs.

God's judgment

⁹But I will rejoice forever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.

The leader of the liturgy proclaims this on behalf of the assembly. Those who are faithful have nothing to fear from God's judgment.

¹⁰The power ('horns') of the irreligious I will cut off, but I shall raise up the power ('horns') of the righteous.

For 'horns' as a symbol of power see verse 4.

The teaching in the New Testament on judgment continues that of the Old:

God the judge of all.

– Hebrews 12:23

There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy.

– James 4:12

If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile.

– 1Peter 1:17

Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?

– Revelation 6:10

God has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

– Acts 17:31

The day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.

– Romans 2:16

Jesus of Nazareth commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.

– Acts 10:42