

Psalm 75: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Psalm 75 To the Choir Master, according to Do Not Destroy, a psalm of Asaph, a song. We give thanks to you, O God. We give thanks, for your name is near.

We recount your wondrous deeds. At the set time that I appoint, I will judge with equity. When the earth totters and all its inhabitants, it is I who keeps steady its pillars.

I say to the boastful, do not boast. And to the wicked, do not lift up your horn. Do not lift up your horn on high, or speak with haughty neck.

For not from the east or from the west, and not from the wilderness comes lifting up. But it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.

For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, with foaming wine well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs. But I will declare it forever.

[0 : 57] I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. All the horns of the wicked I will cut off. But the horns of the righteous shall be lifted up. Various commentators note the fittingness of Psalm 75 as a sequel to Psalm 74.

Conrad Schaefer argues that they share a key link word in the term used for holy place or sanctuary in Psalm 74 verses 4 and 8 and a set time for Psalm 75 verse 2.

Its reference to the set time of God's judgment is the answer to Psalm 74's question, how long? The used section in the middle of Psalm 74 is also answered in the I section of Psalm 75, where God himself speaks to the concern of his people and promises to act in judgment.

Schaefer argues that the shift in address and number likely indicates that the psalm belonged in the context of a liturgical celebration, where different people or groups would be voicing different parts. It begins with the voice of the gathered congregation in verse 1. It moves to an oracle from God himself in verses 2 to 5, which is followed by the psalmist's declaration about God and his determination to continue to sing his praises.

[2 : 09] Beth Tanner maintains that the divine oracle ends in verse 3, at which point the voice of the psalmist resumes. The psalm concludes with a final statement from God himself.

It begins like a typical hymn of communal thanksgiving and celebration. God is praised for his goodness and his wondrous deeds. In verses 2 and 3, and possibly even into verses 4 and 5, the voice of God enters.

At the set time, God's judgment will come. God is the creator who first set the earth upon its pillars. He is the one who will steady it when it totters, something that he will do as he judges with equity.

The God of creation is the God of justice. The God who establishes the physical foundations is the God who establishes the moral foundations. Whether it continues to be the voice of God, or whether it is the voice of the psalmist, verses 4 and 5 warn those who boast and are haughty.

Tanner argues from the presence of a sealer at the end of verse 3, and the introductory I said of verse 4, that there is likely a change of speaker in verse 4, suggesting that it is most likely a priest or official.

[3 : 18] The horn that is spoken of in verses 4 and 5 is a symbol of might, strength and honour. While we read of God lifting up people's horns on several occasions in the Psalms, the warning here is against lifting up one's own horn in a proud manner.

The danger of lifting up one's own horn is laid out in the verses that immediately follow. Lifting up of the horn doesn't come from an earthly or human source. God is the one who judges, and he is the one who will lift up the horn of the righteous.

It is his judgment that divides between the righteous and the wicked, lifting the one up and bringing the other low. The imagery of the cup is one that we encounter on several occasions in the Psalms, and in the prophetic material of scripture.

A person's cup is related to their portion and heritage. The cup can be a positive image, for instance when the psalmist speaks of the Lord himself as his portion and his cup in Psalm 16 verse 5, of his cup overflowing in Psalm 23 verse 5, or of the cup of salvation in Psalm 116 verse 13.

However, cup imagery can also be employed in a negative way. The psalmist speaks of fire and sulphur, and a scorching wind being the portion of the wicked's cup in Psalm 11 verse 6.

[4 : 36] The imagery of the cup is also found in the prophets. Isaiah chapter 51 verse 17. Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl the cup of staggering.

Jeremiah chapter 25 verses 15 to 16. Thus the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me, Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them.

The same sort of imagery can also be found in the book of Revelation, as the harlot drinks the cup of God's wrath.

In contrast to the way of the wicked is the psalmist's commitment to singing the praises of the God of Jacob, described in verse 9. There are two contrasting ways of life, and the psalmist has devoted himself to the way of trust and praise in the Lord.

The final words of the psalm seem to be from God himself. Once again they concern the lifting up of the righteous and the cutting off of the wicked, returning to the imagery of the horn.

[5 : 46] Horns will be lifted up, but they will be lifted up by God himself, not by the proud.