

Psalm 76: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 76. To the choirmaster were stringed instruments, a psalm of Asaph, a song. In Judah God is known. His name is great in Israel. His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion. There he broke the flashing arrows, the shield, the sword, and the weapons of war. Glorious are you, more majestic than the mountains full of prey.

The stout-hearted were stripped of their spoil. They sank into sleep. All the men of war were unable to use their hands. At your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both rider and horse lay stunned.

But you, you are to be feared. Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused? From the heavens you uttered judgment. The earth feared and was still. When God arose to establish judgment to save all the humble of the earth. Surely the wrath of man shall praise you.

The remnant of wrath you will put on like a belt. Make your vows to the Lord your God and perform them. Let all around him bring gifts to him who is to be feared, who cuts off the spirit of princes, who is to be feared by the kings of the earth. Psalm 76 is a song of triumph and victory.

The date of its composition is unclear, although a connection between it and the deliverance of Hezekiah from the Assyrian army was made from very early on. Its content is fairly straightforward.

[1 : 3 2] Derek Kidner writes, There is a strong simplicity in the pattern of this psalm, which first looks back to a great deliverance, verses 1 to 6, and then on to a greater judgment, verses 7 to 12. The former is local and defensive, with Zion, God's earthly base and residence under concerted attack. The latter half is cosmic, with heaven as God's seat, the world his kingdom, and all who suffer injustice his concern. So it is to some extent a miniature of the biblical story itself, from the circumscribed and fiercely fought beginnings to the end time when, through all man's opposition, God's salvation and judgment will have reached their climax and full spread. Alan Ross suggests that it might be better to be subdivided into the first three verses, as a hymn of praise to the Lord, followed by the next six verses, which give the reasons for the praise in two parts, concluding with a response to the Lord in the final three verses. The psalm begins with the fact that God is known in Judah and great in Israel. Israel and

Judah have a uniquely intimate relationship with the Lord, which is cause for praise. He dwells in the midst of his people, placing his name in Zion. Verse 2 describes God's dwelling place and abode using language redolent of a den or a lair. The Lord is like the lion who dwells on the mount, establishing peace as he destroys the weapons of war. Verses 4 to 6 describe a dramatic and great victory. Mighty warriors and their horses brought low at the rebuke of God. Perhaps developing the imagery of verse 2, verse 4 describes God's majesty from the mountains of prey, or of his majesty being greater than the mountains of prey. The Lord is like a mighty lion who would guard his territory against any incursion.

God stripped the enemies of their strength. Perhaps this is a description of the victory over the Assyrians in the days of Hezekiah. The preceding verses seemingly spoke about a specific deliverance at Jerusalem in the presumably recent past. Verses 7 to 9 expand the frame.

God is the fearsome God, the warrior who puts to flight the wicked. His judgment came from the heavens and silenced the earth. He judges on behalf of the humble of the earth.

The final verses of this psalm are more challenging to translate or to understand. Some have argued for references to specific places, to Edom and Hamath. Others suppose that we have metaphors that cannot easily be understood. What might putting on the remnant of wrath like a belt mean?

[4 : 1 2] The general point, it seems to me, is most likely that God uses the very anger and violence of his enemies to demonstrate his own power and judgment, in a manner that redounds to his glory. God is sovereign over all things, and even the fury of his enemies can be, as it were, rendered God's own battle garments. He can entirely subordinate their rebellion and wickedness to his own good ends.

The psalm concludes by summoning people to make and to perform their vows to the Lord, to bring tribute to him as the God who is the master over all of the rulers of the earth, cutting off the spirits of princes and being feared by kings.

A question to consider. What are some examples of the Lord using the wrath of man for his glory?