

Psalm 75 is a response to Psalm 74 in several key ways. The negative “forever” reference in Psalm 74 is eclipsed by the psalmist’s positive declaration of praise to the God of Jacob – praise that lasts *forever* (Ps 75:9). In Psalm 75 God responds in the first person (Ps 75:2, 3, 4, 10) to the communal lament of Psalm 74. Instead of using the second person, “you” and “yours,” for God, the psalmist quotes God directly, saying, “I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge with equity” and “it is I who hold its pillars firm,” and “I will cut off the horns of all the wicked.” The psalmist feels God’s nearness, not his distance, because he is confident that the Lord will act, knowing that God has set the time for judgment and salvation.

The sequence of Psalms 73-75 may link Asaph’s worship tradition with Israel’s history of internal apostasy (Ps 73), followed by the Babylonian conquest (Ps 74), and climaxing in God’s judgment of Israel’s oppressors (Ps 75). Psalm 73 describes the failure of the people of God to maintain even a semblance of faithfulness. The true worshiper struggles against a growing tide of popular religiosity and fights through to faithfulness, concluding, “But as for me, it is good to be near God.” (Ps 73:28). Psalm 74 describes the total destruction of the temple, recounts the eternal sovereignty of God, and ends by pleading with God to remember his people and defend his cause. The personal and communal laments of Psalms 73 and 74 give way to praise and the assurance of God’s vindication in Psalm 75. The themes of the nearness of God and the certainty of divine judgment are celebrated.

The Nearness of God

*We praise you, God,
we praise you, for your Name is near;
people tell of your wonderful deeds.*

Psalm 75:1

The psalm opens with a burst of praise against the backdrop of personal pain and communal lament. With minimal words the psalmist introduces a sharp reversal of discouragement. The mood of desperation is swept aside and in its place, praise and thanksgiving for God’s nearness and wondrous deeds. All he needs to say is “your Name is near” to eclipse the darkness. The name of God represents who God is and what God has done. In a name it represents everything about God. For today’s worshipers the nearness of the Name is best understood in the person of Jesus, the Christ. Jesus is God’s autobiography to the world.¹ The only God to be known is the one true and living God revealed in Jesus Christ. God’s very own self-representation is manifest through Incarnation, Mission, Passion, Ascension, Intercession, and the coming Consummation. When Jesus says, “I have revealed your name,” he echoes his previous line, “I have glorified you” (John 17:4). Jesus has made God visible, his message clear, and his name known. We cannot know God apart from Jesus. The Bible is emphatic on this truth: “No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:23).

¹ Bruner, *John*, 967

Jesus refers to the Name six times in his high priestly prayer in John 17. The Name stands for the *personal* revelation of God, his character and his actions. The *Name* sums up everything about the person and work of the triune God. It is more testimony than the whole of doctrinal tradition and more personal narrative than all the wisdom of creedal confession. It is about *who* rather than *what*. Jesus said to Philip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. . . .Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. . .” (John 14:9-11).

The personal nature of the *Name* reminds us that Jesus’ legacy is not “a body of teaching preserved in a book – like the Qur’an. He does not leave behind an ideal or a program. He leaves behind a community – the Church.”² The story – the long story – behind the *Name* goes back to Exodus, when Moses asked God’s name. How could Moses be God’s representative to the people and not know the name of God? God said to Moses, “I Am Who I Am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exod 3:14). By revealing himself in this way, God empowered Moses *personally* to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. Similarly, the Son’s revelation of the Name, “If you really know me, you will know my Father as well,” empowers Christ’s disciples to be sent out on their mission.³

The apostles clearly understood the absolute claim of Jesus and declared, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The early church was convinced that Jesus was the revelation of God, the culmination of a long history of revelation, the very self-disclosure of God. The exclusive truth claim of the gospel fits with the purpose of God's promise from the beginning. God chose one, small, weak, insignificant nation through which to make himself known and bless the world. The exclusiveness of the gospel is consistent with the character of revelation and the nature of God's own self-disclosure.

There are not many gods to know, as the Canaanites or the Greeks or Hindus believed, but only one God. All the rest are idols. Neither is God a vague abstraction; a nameless, undefined, indistinguishable being or force or feeling or projection. God's self-disclosure is more definite, definable, specific and singular than we can fully grasp--more than we can completely comprehend, not less! If we consider our own personhood distinctive and unique, how could God, the very Author of Life, and the Maker of the Universe, be any less? If our sense of self recoils at the notion of being just one of the masses, we can be assured that the Lord God is no less the Person that we are. There is in fact only one you! And there is in truth only one God! The Word of God declares, "I am the Lord your God...You shall have no other gods before me...You shall not make for yourself an idol..."(Exod 20:3-4). "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut 6:4-5).

The apostles believed that the promise of God given to Abraham, that "all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you," is fulfilled in Jesus. And each subsequent stage of salvation history, from Moses to the Prophets, from Jeremiah to David, anticipated the Savior; not an ethnic

² Newbigin, *The Light Has Come*, 228.

³ Webster, *The God Who Prays*, 66-69.

Savior, not a cultural religion, nor a tribal deity, but the Savior of the world. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..." (John 3:16). The one and only way makes sense because of the one and only Son!⁴ We cannot celebrate the wondrous deeds of God without telling about the one who has made God known in the most personal way possible. God has drawn near in person.

The Sovereignty of God

*You say, "I choose the appointed time;
it is I who judge with equity.
When the earth and all its people quake,
it is I who hold its pillars firm.
To the arrogant I say, "Boast no more,"
and to the wicked, "Do not lift up your horns.
Do not lift up your horns against heaven;
do not speak so defiantly."*

Psalm 75:2-5

By referring to God as Elohim the psalmist may be emphasizing the universal truth and testimony of God's sovereignty. God's set time for judgment and salvation is not peculiar to the people of God, but universally applicable for all people everywhere. The psalmist quotes God's direct address to everyone not just to the people of God. Four first-person "I" statements emphatically declare that God is sovereign over the timing of judgment, the administration of justice, the moral order of the universe, and the bravado of the wicked.

The "set time" of judgment has never been in doubt but the day and hour remains a mystery. Jesus said, "But about that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come" (Mark 13:32-33). Even "when the earth and all its people quake," God is in control of the physical universe and the social and political structures of the human race.⁵ The earth is in its God-ordained orbit and "he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:17). The apostles attributed this sovereignty to the Son through whom God made the universe, "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb 1:2-3).

The psalmist quotes God's staccato commands to the arrogant and the wicked *verbatim*. The image of the ram's "horn" stands for strength and power (Deut 33:17; 1 Sam 2:1, 10) and stiff-necked arrogance symbolizes smart aleck resistance. But with God nothing is left to chance. His commands are emphatic. There is no ambiguity in "Boast no more!" There is no doubt in God's "do not's": "Do not lift up your horns against heaven; do not speak so defiantly" (Ps 75:5). The voice of God renders the wicked power brokers powerless. Psalm 75 echoes Hannah's prayer (1 Sam 2:1-10) against the arrogant talk of the wicked and foreshadows Mary's song of deliverance (Luke 1:46-55). God brings down the wicked and exalts the poor.

⁴ Webster, *The God Who Prays*, 59.

⁵ Wilcock, *Psalms*, vol. 2. 15.

The Just Judgment of God

*No one from the east or the west
or from the desert can exalt themselves.
It is God who judges:
He brings one down, the exalts another.
In the hand of the Lord is a cup,
full of foaming wine mixed with spices;
he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth
drink it down to its very dregs.*

*[But] As for me, I will declare this forever;
I will sing praise to the God of Jacob,
who says, "I will cut off the horns of all the wicked,
but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up."*

Psalm 75:6-10

Israel's kings tried to establish alliances with surrounding nations for protection and security. Since Babylon is the enemy from the north, Israel may very well be tempted to look east, west, and south for help.⁶ The psalmist, like the prophets, counseled against these alliances. Israel's only hope must be in the Lord alone. Humble dependence upon God was essential for their deliverance. Jesus' Beatitudes echo this theme. We cannot save ourselves. Blessed are those who know they are poor and needy and who see themselves as completely dependent upon the Lord for their salvation. Any effort toward self-salvation exposes the myth of self-sufficiency. The implication being that we are quick to measure our lives by what we achieve rather than what we receive from the Lord. We prefer our own means and methods to the mercy of God and the state of grace.

The psalmist reminds us that God alone saves and judges: "He brings one down, he exalts another" (Ps 75:7). The cup of wrath symbolizes God's judgment against the arrogant and wicked who refuse to turn to God for mercy. The metaphor of the cup of judgment is used throughout Scripture (Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15-38; 49:12; 51:7; Rev 16:19; 18:6). In the end, Babylon the Great, the biblical symbol for all cultures and peoples that are antithetical to the kingdom of God are given "the cup filled with the wine of the fury of [God's] wrath" (Rev 16:19).

The end of evil will not come about through legal reform or advances in education or a thriving global economy or international efforts for world peace. Evil will only come to an end in God's final judgment. The will to power and the weapons of this world will not achieve the end of evil. With that said, the Christian is called to be salt and light in a decaying and dark world, not because of the promise of reform, but because of the promise of salvation. The world needs help. Jesus intended for his followers to penetrate their culture the way salt was rubbed into meat to prevent it from going bad. Jesus does not say, "You are the sugar of the earth" or "You are the

⁶ See. Ross, Psalms, 603; Delitzsch, Psalms, 340.

honey of the world.” German theologian Helmut Thielicke speaks of the biting quality of true Christian witness: There is a natural temptation for Christians “to sweeten and sugar the bitterness of life with an all too easy conception of a loving God.”⁷ Jesus expected his followers to be an essential preservative in a culture bent on evil. We enter into this mission for the good of the world, knowing that the evil of the world will not end until God’s wrath is poured out.⁸

The Asaph tradition characteristically casts a large vision that is applied personally (Ps 73:28; 74:12; 75:9). Psalm 75 concludes decisively: “But as for me, I will declare this forever; I will sing praise to the God of Jacob” (Ps 75:9). The hopeless fear of rejection forever (Ps 74:1, 19) is overcome in the psalmist’s personal declaration to praise the God of Jacob forever. The emphatic “I” statements of God (Ps 75:2, 4) inspire the psalmist’s “I” statements. He is empowered to say, “I will declare. . . . I will sing praise,” because God is sovereign over judgment and salvation: “I will cut off the horns of all the wicked, but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up” (Ps 75:10). The psalmist’s emphatic “I” statements point forward to the apostle Paul’s “I” statement: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect” (1 Cor 15:10).

⁷ Thielicke, *Life Can Begin Again*, 28.

⁸ Webster, *Follow the Lamb*, 224.