



2024 Q1 Psalms Lesson 5 Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land

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ANNOUNCEMENTS:

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SABBATH

The memory verse for this week's lesson is Psalm 137:4, however the entire Psalm is about the captivity in Babylon and I thought it might be interesting to compare this nine verse psalm from the NIV and the REM, and as we do so to allow you to consider the difference in meaning that comes across—and consider not only the historical captivity of the ancient Israelites, but the object lesson meaning of prophetic captivity of God's people in Babylon as well.

My view of accurate Bible translation is primarily about bringing the meaning across, not the exact word for word translation across, especially if the new language word means something different than the old language word intended. And to bring across the most accurate meaning one needs to understand the truth about God's character, His design law, the nature of sin, God's solution for the sin problem—and if when translating one's understanding of those elements is tainted by the imperial, imposed, human law lie then the translation of the Bible, while being linguistically appropriate, will almost always be slanted to bring legal ideas into the text that are not reality-based and miss the larger reality of the plan of salvation.

So, consider these two versions:

- By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. (Psalm 137:1 NIV84).
- By the rivers of Babylon, as captives in this selfish world, we wept when we remembered Zion—God's fortress of spiritual health and wellness. (Psalm 137:1 REM).

The Remedy version expands the meaning from merely the literal historical people who were held captive in the historical kingdom of Babylon, to include the spiritual object lesson that both ancient Israel and Babylon represent—God's people enslaved by Satan's kingdom of fear and selfishness that operates upon imposed human law, a legal justice system of inflicted penalties, which stands in contrast to God's kingdom which as Jesus said is within you—the kingdom of spiritual health and wellness. Thus, the Remedy immediately draws the mind to consider the deeper lessons that the historical events in the OT were recorded to teach us.

What do you believe is the primary purpose of Scripture—what is the intention of the Holy Spirit in having the writers record what is written in the Bible? Is the Bible merely and only a history book, or is the purpose of the recorded history to reveal through the truth about our existence, the sin problem, and God’s solution for it, the plan of salvation?

- There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? (Psalm 137:2-4 NIV84).
- There on the willows we hung our harps while our captors told us to sing: they demanded songs of happiness and joy; they said, "Sing us a song of health about Zion!" How can our lives be songs revealing God’s character of love while our hearts are held captive to this selfish world? (Psalm 137:2-4 REM).

The Remedy again expands the meaning beyond the historical people in the land of Babylon to the larger meaning, that the song is not merely a tune that is sung from the mouth, but the song is the melody of our lives, that our lives are to be songs of truth and love that harmonize with God’s kingdom of truth and love.

But how can our lives be songs that resonates truth and love if our hearts are held captive to this selfish world? Which introduces the reality, that while we are in the world, we are not to be of the world. And even if we end up imprisoned by the powers of this world, like Jesus and so many of His faithful followers throughout history, the evil powers of this world cannot imprison our hearts and minds without our consent. The only way we can have lives that are songs of truth and love to God is by having our hearts circumcised by the Holy Spirit, hearts set free from the captivity to the fear and selfishness of this world.

Do you agree with my understanding of the true meaning of what the psalm is intended to lead us to understand?

- If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. (Psalm 137:5-6 NIV84).
- If I forget the truth about you, O Jerusalem—the center of God’s healing plan—may I write no more music. May I sing no more songs, if they are not about you; if they do not teach God’s healing plan centered in you, O Jerusalem, as my highest joy. (Psalm 137:5-6 REM).

What do you hear here? That the psalmist would rather be silent than use his talent to misrepresent God! This is our prayer, we at Come and Reason Ministries pray that we will only say of God what is right, that our classes, presentations, publications, programs will constantly improve and refine our ability to give ever more clear presentations about God, to advance and grow in truth, to eliminate any remnants of misunderstanding and falsehood that we have believed or taught. We would rather be silent than to teach things about God that are not true.

And now the final three verses, verses that have been very difficult for people to understand and explain, verses that confound people, and even those who say we should take the Bible just as it reads and apply it to our lives, don't want to do that with these verses—why? Because the way these verses are rendered doesn't fit with what we understand from Jesus, and that is because I believe the common translation misunderstands the true meaning that was intended...but let's compare the two versions.

- Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!" O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us—he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks. (Psalm 137:7-9 NIV84).

Do you think that this is true as it reads? Do you think that one can find true, genuine, godly happiness by killing the babies of one's enemies? In this world, the psalm could link a truth with killing of enemies babies—such as increased safety and reduced risk of future conflict if you wipe out all your enemies and kill their babies—but that isn't the same thing as happiness, or is taking vengeance oneself on one's enemies, which the Bible tells us not to do. So, on its face this version isn't translated in a way that, if taken as it reads, communicates truth.

Some scholars have then understood this to be a Psalm that rather than communicating the truth of how reality works, the true way to find happiness, it instead communicates the struggles of the psalmist, his anger, temptations, carnal desires for vengeance and then models going to God in prayer with such angry motives where in conversation with God they are worked out. This principle of going to God with our anger, ungodly desires and talking with God for heart change is absolutely a healthy action to take, yet if that was the intent of this psalm, I would expect a few more verses, like we see in other psalms where the psalmist goes from the despair, discouragement, anger, to hope and trust in God for the conclusion. This psalm doesn't do that, so while I think it is right to go to God with one's frustrations, anger, desire for vengeance and work it out with God, I do not think this psalm was written to model that, because I think it is a poetic description, inspired by the Holy Spirit of what brings true happiness in the plan of salvation. This is how I rendered it:

- Remember, O Lord, what the Edomites did the day Jerusalem—your spiritual treatment center—fell? They shouted, "Tear it down, tear it down to the ground!" O people of Babylon, who cling to selfishness, you are doomed to destruction! Happy are those who are finished with you, just as you deserve; who have weaned themselves from you. Happy are they who take your children to fall upon the Rock and be broken. (Psalm 137:7-9 REM).

Do you hear a difference between these two versions? Can you see two different laws being applied—the imposed law in the NIV and Design law in the REM? And which is most consistent with the plan of salvation? What is it that God is trying to do to sinners—destroy them or turn them from enemies into friends by bringing them to Jesus the Rock of our Salvation and have us fall upon Him and have our fear, selfishness, guilt, shame, and sinfulness broken up so we can be reborn in righteousness? And what brings genuine happiness? Isn't it when we turn our enemies into our friends by bringing them to Jesus and have them experience salvation and heart transformation?

Do you think the Remedy paraphrase has misrepresents the Scripture or brings a more accurate understanding, making the true meaning clearer?

Read first paragraph,

- We do not need to get deep into the book of Psalms in order to discover that the Psalms are uttered in an imperfect world, one of sin, evil, suffering, and death. The stable creation run by the Sovereign Lord and His righteous laws is constantly threatened by evil. As sin corrupts the world more and more, the earth has increasingly become “a strange land” to God’s people. This reality creates a problem for the psalmist: How does one live a life of faith in a strange land? (Adult SS Guide 1st Q 2024, Psalms p. 36).

What do you think of this paragraph?

What law lens do you hear “righteous laws” through?

Do we recognize the strangeness that sin has brought into the world, or do we see the sin, Satan’s methods, Satan’s structure, as normal and think God’s ways are strange?

- “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some **strange ideas** to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.” (Acts 17:18-20 NIV84, emphasis mine).

Why was the truth Paul presented in Athens considered strange to the people there? Because they had accepted false gods, with worldly methods, and Paul was presenting the truth about the Creator.

What about today? If we present the truth about God as Creator, that His laws are design laws, the protocols reality operate upon, that God’s laws are not the type of laws sinful humans make up, rules that require legal oversight and enforcement, do people complain that our view is strange, that it doesn’t make sense to them? Why is it strange to so many people? Because the lies about God’s law, God’s government, and God’s character have accepted and viewed as normal or true, thus when we present the truth the truth is not known, it seems strange—and what do people often do with strange or unknown ideas—feel threatened and resist or fight against them.

This is what the Bible calls stiff-necked, an unwillingness to turn the mind, consider other possibilities, to learn, to examine the evidence, to follow the truth. It is the opposite of obedience—Biblical obedience is not about rule-keeping, it literally means a humble willingness to listen, be instructed with truth and follow the truth applying it to one’s life. But, when one accepts the imposed law lie then obedience becomes rule-keeping and righteousness becomes misrepresented as a stiff-necked resistance to advancing truth—to clinging to the traditions, or in Adventism claims of standing by the old landmarks which shuts out advancing truth—consider this historical quote from one of the

founders of the Adventist church after 1888, where the official leadership rejected the truth about God's design law and chose Romanism, the lie that God's law is imposed:

- In Minneapolis God gave precious gems of truth to His people in new settings. This **light from heaven by some was rejected with all the stubbornness the Jews manifested in rejecting Christ**, and there was **much talk about standing by the old landmarks**. But there was evidence they knew not what the old landmarks were. There was evidence and there was reasoning from the word that commended itself to the conscience; but **the minds of men were fixed, sealed against the entrance of light**, because they had decided it was a dangerous error removing the "old landmarks" when **it was not moving a peg of the old landmarks, but they had perverted ideas of what constituted the old landmarks**. (Counsels to Writers 30, emphasis mine).

The reality is that we are in a land that is enemy territory, all the kingdoms of the world are Satan's, they all run on made-up rules with judicial oversight and inflicted punishments—the laws that creatures make. Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world, it does not operate like these earthly governments. Yet, the church has become Romanized, infected with the lie that God's law is like human law, made up rules requiring God to use His power to inflict punishment for sin. Thus, rather than realizing the world is a strange place, they think the gospel is strange, the truth that God does not have to use power to inflict punishment for sin is strange. They don't know what to do with passages like:

- Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will **freely pardon**. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:7–9 NIV84, emphasis mine).

Freely pardon? This doesn't make sense, to pardon people freely, without a price being paid, without a penalty being inflicted, without someone taking the punishment is strange. Freely pardoning doesn't make sense to those who believe God's government functions like human governments.

But when we return to design law, we realize that God's pardon does not reverse the damage of sin, to reverse the damage of sin requires divine intervention in the heart and mind of the sinner to recreate them in righteousness and that requires they trust God and open their heart to Him.

So, God pardons everyone freely, but only those who trust God and receive His indwelling Spirit are reborn, healed, renewed, recreated, receive the mind of Christ, have the living law of God written into their heart and mind, become friends of God, have fear, selfishness, and distrust removed from their being and are reconciled, restored to at-one-ment with God. All those who reject the truth, who cling to the lies and distrust God will die from their sin-sickness, but God is still forgiving toward them, because that is who God is. Just like a doctor who forgives his patient who lied and didn't take the medicine, but despite the doctor's forgiveness, the patient still dies.

But this free pardon doesn't make sense if one believes God's law is like human law, made up rules, because our laws require external enforcement. And thus we have many church leaders, with sincere hearts, functioning like Saul of Tarsus, persecuting the followers of Christ who are advancing in the truth through various means of censure, removal from office, disfellowship, deplatforming, slander, labeling them as heretical and so forth. We pray for these sincere Sauls of our day that they may have a Damascus road experience and become powerful agents for the true gospel just like Paul became.

The second paragraph says,

- As we already have seen, the psalmists acknowledge God's sovereign rule and power, as well as His righteous judgments. (Adult SS Guide 1st Q 2024, Psalms p. 36).

What do you understand God's righteous judgments to be? What law lens do you hear judgments through?

Do you think human law and think judicial findings with the infliction of just punishments, or do you think Design law and think diagnosis of what is wrong and the reality-based judgment of what is the best therapeutic intervention to advance the plan of salvation—the plan of healing?

Consider this historical quote from *Patriarchs and Prophets* what type of judgment is described here, what law lens is used in this description?

- "How great is the long - suffering of God toward the wicked! The idolatrous Philistines and backsliding Israel had alike enjoyed the gifts of His providence. Ten thousand unnoticed mercies were silently falling in the pathway of ungrateful, rebellious men. Every blessing spoke to them of the Giver, but they were indifferent to His love. The forbearance of God was very great toward the children of men; **but when they stubbornly persisted in their impenitence, He removed from them His protecting hand.** They refused to listen to the voice of God in His created works, and in the warnings, counsels, and reproofs of His word, and thus **He was forced to speak to them through judgments.**" (Patriarchs and Prophets 587).

What type of judgment is being described? What law in operation? Why does God intervene like this? Is it judicial or is it remedial, healing, discipline, redemptive, teaching by experience how reality works, and in OT times God working to protect the branch of the human family tree through whom Jesus will be born?

Read the question from the bottom of THURSDAY's lesson:

- How does the promise of God's judgment upon the world, and upon all its evil, give you comfort when so much evil now goes unpunished? (Adult SS Guide 1st Q 2024, Psalms p. 41).

What law lens is this question presenting? Is this question even true? Do the unrepentant ever get away with evil? Why or why not?

What happens in the heart, mind, character, soul of a person who sins? Every choice to sin, whether in heart, mind, or deed, damages the person, perverts the mind and soul of the sinner, hardens the heart, sears the conscience, corrupts the character, incites fear, guilt, shame, and if the person doesn't repent and experience God's healing power in their lives, then their sin eventually sears the conscience and destroys the faculties that are sensitive to the Spirit of God, to truth and love.

The idea that sin goes unpunished is an idea that presents Satan's lie from the beginning, that sin doesn't harm, but God harms you for it by inflicting punishment—which leads people to solve the false-problem that we are in legal trouble with a punishing god by telling more lies, like god requires appeasement, assuaging of His wrath, a legal penalty to be paid, and we must have someone interceded with this god to protect us, hide us, erase our records of sin so this god won't punish us.

These lies undermine love and trust and prevent hearts and minds from being healed, from being restored to unity or at-one-ment with God. It may lead people to cognitive conversion, the legal conversion of claiming legal justification, but it does not lead to spiritual renewal, the new covenant where the living law of God is written upon the heart and the character of Christ is reproduced within.

SUNDAY

Read the second paragraph,

- The problem of evil in the Psalms is primarily theological; it inevitably concerns questions about God. Thus, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple is seen principally as a divine scandal because it provided an opportunity for the heathen to blaspheme God. God's inheritance (the people of Israel) is the sign of His divine election and covenant (Deut. 4:32-38; Deut. 32:8, 9) that will never fail. The concept of God's inheritance also contains an end-time dimension, as one day all nations will become God's inheritance and will serve Him. The notion that the nations invaded God's inheritance threatens these divine promises. (Adult SS Guide 1st Q 2024, Psalms p. 37).

What do you think? The problem of evil is primarily theological—it concerns questions about God is well said, Satan lies about God to undermine our trust in God. So, what are the questions that have arisen and what are the answers?

What are the questions that need answering as you understand them?

The lesson makes a suggestion and a suggested answer in the fourth paragraph,

- However, more important than the restoration of Israel's fortunes is the defense of God's character in the world (Ps. 79:9). If the evil actions of the nations go unpunished, it will appear that God has lost His power (Ps. 74:18-23, Ps. 83:16-18, Ps. 106:47). Only when God saves His people will His name be justified and uplifted. (Adult SS Guide 1st Q 2024, Psalms p. 37).

The lesson is absolutely right to focus our attention on God's character, but what character does the lesson suggest God has, and is presenting God as a punishing god, who will inflict punishment, as the lesson suggest, defending God's true character or misrepresenting God and supporting Satan's charges against God?

Here is a quote from the book *The Desire of Ages* that details one of the charges of Satan:

- In the opening of the great controversy, Satan had declared that the law of God could not be obeyed, that justice was inconsistent with mercy, and that, should the law be broken, it would be impossible for the sinner to be pardoned. **Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan; and if God should remit the punishment of sin, He would not be a God of truth and justice.** (The Desire of Ages 761, emphasis mine).

Hmmm....if we present God as a powerful being who uses power to inflict punishment for sin are we defending the character of God or are we advancing Satan's rebellion by perpetuating his lies about God?

Consider these historical quotes, which document what the Adventist Reformers wanted the church to teach, but which got rejected in 1888 and instead the institutional church has embraced and still is teaching the imposed Roman view of law with its imperial punishing false god:

- **We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin.** The sinner brings the punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure result. Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character, and makes it more easy for him to transgress again. **By choosing to sin, men separate themselves from God, cut themselves off from the channel of blessing, and the sure result is ruin and death.** (Selected Messages vol. 1, p 235, emphasis mine)
- The Jews had forged their own fetters; they had filled for themselves the cup of vengeance. In the utter destruction that befell them as a nation, and in all the woes that followed them in their dispersion, they were but reaping the harvest which their own hands had sown. Says the prophet: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself;" "for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." Hosea 13:9; 14:1. **Their sufferings are often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God. It is thus that the great deceiver seeks to conceal his own work.** By stubborn rejection of divine love and mercy, **the Jews had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn from them, and Satan was permitted to rule them according to his will. The horrible cruelties enacted in the destruction of Jerusalem are a demonstration of Satan's vindictive power over those who yield to his control.** (The Great Controversy 35, emphasis mine).
- **From the beginning** it has been Satan's studied plan to cause men to forget God, that he might secure them to himself. Hence he has sought to **misrepresent the character of God**, to lead men to cherish a false conception of Him. **The Creator has been presented to their minds as**

clothed with the attributes of the prince of evil himself,--as arbitrary, severe, and unforgiving,--that He might be feared, shunned, and even hated by men. Satan hoped to so confuse the minds of those whom he had deceived that they would put God out of their knowledge. Then he would obliterate the divine image in man and impress his own likeness upon the soul; he would imbue men with his own spirit and make them captives according to his will. (Testimonies volume 5, p 738, emphasis mine)

And how does Satan do this? By getting us to accept the lie that God's law function like human law. When we do this, we **always** teach that God is required by law to use His power to inflict death as punishment for sin. We deny the plain teachings of Scripture that death comes from sin when it is full grown James 1:15, or as the wages of sin (Romans 6:28), or that death is Satan's power (Hebrews 2:14), or that Jesus destroyed death (2 Tim 1:10), or that God did not use power to execute Jesus on the cross. This one single lie about law causes the clearest evidences of Scripture to be twisted, denied, and distorted.

And thus the quarterly rightly teaches that God's character is under assault and God's character must be revealed in truth, but then sadly turns around and presents Satan's lies about God to misrepresent God's character as punishing.

When one believes God's law functions like human law, then the issue becomes one of power, which god is most powerful, because that god can overthrow all the others and enforce his ways through punishment—but this was never the question, the devils believe in God's power and they tremble in fear. The question was over God's trustworthiness, can we trust the one with the power to not to use His power to coerce, force, compel, and inflict punishment, for all such use of power destroys love and individuality and creates either rebels, or slaves, mindless drones doing what the master says without question.

Read the bottom green section,

- “The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671. How do you understand this important truth and what it should mean in your own Christian life? (Adult SS Guide 1st Q 2024, Psalms p. 37).

How is God honored? How does God get His character restored into people? Can character be created by God? Can God use power to force people to love Him, to trust Him, to be loyal in heart to Him, to actually be His friends?

How does God get what He wants, His character restored into us?

- Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty. (Zechariah 4:6 NIV84).

And how does the Spirit work? Truth and love—truth presented in love while leaving us free to choose. It is our choice to respond to truth and love and then when we choose yes, we receive divine power to succeed and thus our characters are transformed by a trusting/faith connection with God!

It is by beholding we are changed, the design law of worship—but when we replace the truth of God as Creator, with a Roman god who makes up laws and uses power to inflict punishment, we become like that false god and do not glorify the Creator, but the enemy, just like so many religious people through history who have used power over others to punish heretics.

MONDAY

The lesson asks us to read Psalm 41:1-3:

- Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble. The LORD will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes. The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness. (Psalm 41:1-3 NIV84).

What does this text mean?

From what trouble does the Lord deliver these righteous people? Is this a promise to deliver from earthly enemies, disease, and death?

Many Jews went into the gas chambers in Nazi Germany claiming promises like this one—and what happened? And in the aftermath of the Holocaust, many Jews stopped believing in God because of promises like this when God didn't deliver from their enemies.

What about Christians, does God protect all Christians who are faithful and loyal to Him from earthly enemies and disease and death?

Then what does this mean? Is it just a psalm of wishful thinking? A psalm of what God can do, but not something we can have faith in?

Or is it about the central theme of Scripture?

What is the central theme of Scripture? Is the Bible narrative about earthly dominance and earthly delivery, or is it about deliverance from sin and the restoration of righteousness?

Then could the psalm, inspired by the Holy Spirit, be about something larger than earthly deliverance?

Here is how I paraphrased it:

- Happy and spiritually-healthy are those who care for the helpless; in the time of trouble, the Lord will deliver them. The Lord will preserve their individuality and give them eternal life; they will live and be happy upon the earth. The Lord will not give them up to die from selfishness — their enemy. He will provide remedy to their sin-sickness and restore them back to his perfect design. (Psalm 41:1-3 REM).
- Did Stephen experience happiness and spiritual health?
- Did Stephen get delivered from his time of trouble—what law lens and what do we understand his true time of trouble to be? Was his time of trouble merely physical persecution, or was his real battle the temptation to hate his persecutors, the fear of death, and any temptation to retaliate with earthly means against his enemies, to curse them, a desire for vengeance upon them?
- Did Stephen, by being delivered from fear, selfishness, evil retaliation, with a heart of love that forgave those who stoned him, have his individuality preserved and will he receive eternal life?
- Will Stephen live happily upon the earth—the earth made new?
- Will Stephen be given up to die of selfishness and decay in an eternal grave?
- Will Stephen benefit from the Remedy Jesus procured and be restored to God’s perfect design?

Do you think the Psalm could really mean this larger view?

TUESDAY

Read Psalm 42:1-3

- As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” (Psalm 42:1-3 NIV84).

Read third paragraph,

- It is remarkable that the psalmists resolve not to keep silent in the face of God’s silence. The psalmists unswervingly believe in prayer because prayer is directed to the living and gracious God. God is still there, even when He is apparently absent. He is still the same God who heard them in the past, and so, they are confident that He hears them now. (Adult SS Guide 1st Q 2024, Psalms p. 39).

What do you think of God keeping silent? Does God sometimes keep silent? What would be the reason for this? Are there times when God is trying to communicate to us but something on our end prevents us from hearing Him and so it seems to us He is keeping silent? What kinds of things interfere with our ability to hear God?

- Mind altering substances
- Entertainments
- Busyness
- Anger, frustration, powerful feelings
- Denial, fear of hearing what God wants to tell us
- Not taking time to listen, not even considering God is trying to talk to us
- Not believing in God, or not believing God is good

But what about when people are seeking God and it seems like He is silent, what might that mean?

Could God keep silent because God has already provided the answer, the evidence, the direction, the truth but we didn't like it and are petitioning for a different answer?

Could God keep silent because in some way the struggle we are in is part of our growth, our journey, our development?

WEDNESDAY

The lesson points our attention to Psalm 77 and notes that the psalm begins with a plea to God for help, but notes “remembering God appears to intensify his anguish” and asks “How can remembering God produce such strong feelings of distress?” And then notes the psalmist asks a series of troubling questions.

Let's compare Psalm 77:1-9 from the NIV and the REM:

And you will note it really does depend on what law lens one sees the Bible through, because that determines how we diagnose the problem, and then understand the struggle or problem to be.

- I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted. (Psalm 77:1-2 NIV84)
- I cry out to God — Help me, please help me! I cry out to God — O hear my plea! When I was in trouble, overwhelmed and afraid, I ran to the Lord; all night I prayed with my hands reaching out toward heaven, but my heart resisted his comfort. (Psalm 77:1-2 REM)
- I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. (Psalm 77:3-4 NIV84).
- I thought of you—your methods of love and truth—and I groaned; I brooded, clinging to my selfish desires, and I became even more overwhelmed. You opened my eyes to my true condition; it was so upsetting I couldn't talk about it. (Psalm 77:3-4 REM)

- I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired: “Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?” (Psalm 77:5–9 NIV84).
- My thoughts went back to better times, to years long ago; at night I remembered my songs from the past. My heart searched deeply; my mind thought intensely about the differences. “Will the Lord let me go my own way forever? Will he never be pleased with my choices again? Has his perfect love disappeared from my heart completely? Has his promise to heal me been permanently hindered? Has God forgotten his merciful plan? Has he given up on me and withheld his remedy?” (Psalm 77:5-9 REM).

Do you see a difference? Which is more consistent with the central theme of Scripture?

Now let’s look at verse 10:

- Then I thought, “To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High.” (Psalm 77:10 NIV84)
- It sickens me to think that I could obstruct the plan of the Creator God to heal me. (Psalm 77:10 REM)

Do these sound even close or similar? What is going on?

Consider these translations:

- And I said, “This is my fate; the Most High has turned his hand against me.” (Psalm 77:10 NLT).

Does God ever turn against us? Doesn’t Paul write:

- If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32).

Is God truly against us, or is God for us? So perhaps the NLT isn’t the best translation.

- And I say, “It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed.” (Psalm 77:10 NRSV)

Does God change, or is God the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8)? So maybe this isn’t the best translation. And are you noticing how different these various translations are?

- Then I said, “What hurts me most is this—that God is no longer powerful.”^t (Psalm 77:10 GNT) (footnote: ^t “Verse 10 in Hebrew is unclear”).

Is it true that God is no longer powerful? But the footnote is quite helpful, it tells us the Hebrew is unclear. People are making their best educated guess as to what it means and they struggle because they really don't understand design law.

So my paraphrase, what is actually happening in the salvation process? Where is the tension between God's power and our healing? Isn't always with our willingness to cooperate with God or not? So, I paraphrase it as:

- It sickens me to think that I could obstruct the plan of the Creator God to heal me. (Psalm 77:10 REM)

THURSDAY

The lesson points our attention to Psalm 73 which teaches the foolishness of looking at the apparent blessings of the godless as evidence of success. Let's read from the Remedy:

1 We know that God is good to the upright —
to those who are pure in heart.
2 But I almost tripped myself up;
I nearly slipped away from the truth:
3 I began to envy the arrogant
when I saw how the selfish prospered in this world.
4 They don't suffer with physical disabilities;
their bodies are strong and healthy.
5 They are privileged — not burdened with the problems of ordinary people;
they do not have the daily struggles that others endure.
6 Their pride and arrogance are flaunted like a necklace;
violence and exploitation cover them.
7 They go about draped in extravagant riches,
intoxicating themselves with whatever their selfish hearts can imagine.
8 They belittle others and speak harmful words designed to injure;
they exalt themselves, lording over others and threatening oppression.
9 They claim to speak for heaven,
and with their decrees they seek to rule the earth.
10 People turn to them
and sadly, have the water of life drained away from them.
11 These haughty ones say, "God will not know.
The Most High will not find out."
12 Look at what the selfish are like:
concerned only with self, they get richer and richer.
13 I wondered, "Has my pure living been for nothing?
Did I keep myself innocent for no reason?
14 All day long I am touched by problems and temptation;

every day is a struggle."

15If I had shared these ideas as truths with others,
I would have betrayed all who are loyal to you.

16When I tried to understand why the selfish seem to prosper,
it made no sense to me

17until I studied the lessons revealed in the holy places of God:
then I understood their inevitable end.

18Truly you gave them the freedom to slip around your design for life;
you surrender them to their own terminal condition.

19Their desolation is swift —

they are consumed completely by the terrors of unremedied selfishness.

20Selfish success is like a dream when one awakes:

When the Creator restores earth to his design of love,
all will realize that selfish prosperity is mere fantasy.

21When my heart was sour,
discontented and torn up inside,

22I was ignorant and didn't understand reality at all;
I must have seemed like a dumb animal to you.

23Nevertheless, I have always stayed close to you,
and you hold my hand as I journey through life.

24With your wise counsel, you lead me in the way of life
to the complete restoration of your glory within me.

25There is nothing in all the heavens
or anything on earth that I desire besides you.

26My mind and body may grow weak,
but God is my remedy —
my source of eternal life.

27Those who separate from you will perish;
all who choose selfishness betray you and your kingdom of love —
they will be severed from life and cease to exist.

28But as for me, being united with God is my greatest delight —
to find healing and restoration with my Creator,
and to proclaim all that you have done!

Thoughts?