

Psalms 74:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name.

Analysis

O let not the oppressed return ashamed—The Hebrew *dāḵ* (דָּחַ, oppressed) means crushed or beaten down, describing those ground to dust by violence and injustice. **Return ashamed** (*yāshūḥ niḵlām*, יָשׁוּחַ נִכְלָם) carries the force of being sent away humiliated, their prayers seemingly unheard. Asaph pleads that those who come to God in desperation not depart empty-handed, their shame compounded by divine silence.

Let the poor and needy praise thy name—This moves from petition to promise. The *ʿānî wəʿebyôn* (עָנִי וְעִבְיֹן, poor and needy) are Israel's remnant, stripped of all pretense and earthly security. When God intervenes, their *yəhallālū shəmeḵā* (יְהַלְלֵי שְׁמֶךָ, "let them praise your name") transforms lament into worship. The Name that enemies blasphemed (v. 18) will be exalted by those whom God delivers.

This verse anticipates the gospel's reversal: blessed are the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3), the last shall be first (Matthew 20:16), God chose the poor of this world to be rich in faith (James 2:5). The oppressed who refuse to return ashamed but persist in faith will ultimately sing praises around God's throne (Revelation 7:9-17). The cross itself demonstrates God's commitment: Christ was oppressed and afflicted, yet through Him, the ransomed sing (Isaiah 53:7; 35:10).

Historical Context

Post-exilic return from Babylon fulfilled this prayer partially—God did not let the oppressed remain in permanent shame (Ezra 1-2). Yet the full answer awaits the new exodus when God gathers all His dispersed people. The psalm teaches Israel to persevere in prayer through the darkest nights, trusting God's eventual vindication.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. When have you been tempted to 'return ashamed' from prayer, and what keeps you persevering despite apparent divine silence?
2. How does your spiritual poverty position you to praise God's name more authentically than self-sufficient religion ever could?
3. What would it look like for the oppressed in your community to find such refuge in God that they become His loudest worshipers?

Interlinear Text

אֶל	יָשׁוּב	אֲלֵךְ	נִכְלָם	עַנִּי	אֶבִּי וְ	יְהַלֵּל וְ
H408	return	O let not the oppressed	ashamed	let the poor	and needy	praise
	H7725	H1790	H3637	H6041	H34	H1984

שְׁמִי:
thy name
H8034

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 12:5 (Resurrection): For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.

Psalms 103:6 (Parallel theme): The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

Psalms 9:18 (Parallel theme): For the needy shall not alway be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever.

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