

Psalm 77:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.

Analysis

Hath God forgotten to be gracious? (הָשַׁכֵּחַ חִנּוֹת אֱלֹהִים). Shakach (שָׁכַח) means to forget, ignore, or neglect. Chanun (חִנּוֹת) from chanan (חִנּוֹת) means to show grace, mercy, or compassion. Can the God whose very nature is grace somehow forget His own character? The question borders on absurdity yet expresses the soul's desperate confusion when suffering contradicts theology.

Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? (הָקִפֵּץ בְּאָף כַּפְתִּים). Qaphats (קִפְתֵּץ) means to shut, draw together, or close off. Rachamim (רָחָם) derives from rechem (womb), suggesting motherly compassion, deep visceral mercy. Could God's womb-love be sealed off by anger? **Selah** marks another pause—let these terrible questions sink in. They represent the nadir of the psalm, after which comes the turn toward hope (v.10).

Historical Context

The tension between God's anger and mercy permeates Israel's history. The golden calf incident (Exodus 32) threatened national extinction, yet Moses appealed to rachamim successfully. The exile seemed to prove God's anger had overcome mercy, yet prophets promised restoration (Isaiah 54:7-8). The questions here anticipate Paul's doxology: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33). When God's ways are inscrutable, we trust His revealed character.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does it mean that God's mercy has a 'womb-like' quality that cannot ultimately be shut off?
2. How do you maintain faith when God's anger seems more evident than His mercy?
3. How does the cross resolve the apparent tension between God's wrath and His tender mercies?

Interlinear Text

נֶשֶׁב	נֶשֶׁב	נֶשֶׁב	נֶשֶׁב	נֶשֶׁב	נֶשֶׁב	נֶשֶׁב
forgotten	to be gracious	Hath God	H518	shut up	hath he in anger	
H7911	H2589	H410		H7092	H639	

סְלָה:	סְלָה:	סְלָה:
his tender mercies	Selah	
H7356	H5542	

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 40:11 (Parallel theme): Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.