

Psalm 74

Maschil of Asaph.

Psalm 74:

Though the psalm contains no historical superscription, the content reveals that it was written when an enemy had invaded the temple (verse 3), and burned it (verse 7).

The occasion certainly seems to be the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the beginning of the Babylonian exile.

The speaker in the psalm is the nation itself, making it a national lament psalm.

There are two distinct parts to the psalm:

First, the lament of the present destruction is stated (verses 1-11); then, introduced by the word “For” (verse 12), the hope of the psalmist is voiced (verses 12-23).

His confidence is based on the Lord’s past interventions (verses 12-17), and issues in the psalmist’s current petition (verses 18-23).

Verses 1-23:

This community lament expresses the agony of the people in the midst of the most excruciating of circumstances.

It was bad enough that Israel’s enemies had destroyed the temple (compare 2 Kings chapter 25).

But even worse, it seemed to the psalmist that God had abandoned them.

In this prayer, he reminds God of His bond with Israel, His past supernatural deeds in the protection of Israel, and begs God to save His obedient nation now (compare Psalm 137 and Lamentations).

- I. The terror of abandonment (74:1-11)
- II. The Remembrance of Omnipotence (74:12-17)
- III. The Plea for Help (74:18-23)

Title: “Asaph”.

If this psalm reflects the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar (in 586 B.C.), Asaph would have been dead by then.

Thus, this title may mean that this psalm was written by or sung by a later Asaph choir (see notes on Psalms 50, 73 and Title).

Verses 1-11:

This psalm appears to describe the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Chaldeans.

The deplorable case of the people of God at the time, is spread before the Lord and left with him.

They plead the great things God had done for them.

If the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt was encouragement to hope that he would not cast them off, much more reason have we to believe, that God will not cast off any whom Christ has redeemed with his own blood.

Infidels and persecutors may silence faithful ministers, and shut up places of worship, and say they will destroy the people of God and their religion together.

For a long time, they may prosper in these attempts, and God's oppressed servants may see no prospect of deliverance.

But there is a remnant of believers, the seed of a future harvest, and the despised church has survived those who once triumphed over her.

When the power of enemies is most threatening, it is comfortable to flee to the power of God by earnest prayer.

Verses 1-8:

“O God, why hast thou cast us off”?

Is a typical lament construction (13:1)?

These difficult questions posed here are answered (in Psalm 75).

Psalm 74:1 "O God, why hast thou cast [us] off for ever? [why] doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?"

This the church supposed because of the prevalence, oppression, and triumph of the enemy, because of the hardships and afflictions she labored under, and because of the hidings of the face of God from her, which unbelief interpreted of a casting off (see Psalm 77:7).

When in reality, it was not so, only in appearance and according to a wrong judgment which was made of things.

For God never did nor never will cast off, nor cast away, his people whom he foreknew (see Romans 11:1).

"Why doth thine anger smoke?"

That is, why does it rise to such a degree, that all of us take notice of it, and ask, What meaneth the heat of this great anger? (Deut. 29:24; compare Psalm 74:20).

Where the anger of the LORD and His jealousy are said to smoke against sinners.

"Against the sheep of thy pasture":

Against thy chosen people.

So many times, it appears that God has cast off the church and that He is not going to help.

The sheep of thy pasture are the believers in Christ.

The church seems to be going through one of those difficult times now.

The faithful never give up, even when they are going through terrible problems.

Their faith remains strong.

Psalm 74:2 "Remember thy congregation, [which] thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, [which] thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt."

"Rod of thine inheritance":

The psalmist laments that even though God possessed Israel, He had not protected it.

The church (Zion), belongs to you God.

Jesus shed His precious blood to purchase the souls of the people.

This is His inheritance.

What is happening?

God, please do not forget us.

The plan from the foundation of the earth was that Jesus would come to this earth as Savior and redeem His creation.

Asaph is asking God, has He forgotten this?

Psalm 74:3 "Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; [even] all [that] the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary."

"Lift up thy feet":

An anthropomorphism meaning to hurry to come to examine the rubble.

The evil ones are not out in the world in this lesson.

They are in the church.

They are there to destroy the very structure of the church.

Psalm 74:4 "Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns [for] signs."

"Set up their ensigns for signs":

The ravagers had set up their military and pagan religious banners in God's temple.

We know that the devil, like a roaring lion, is going to and fro seeking whom he may devour.

This is saying the devil is on the pew with you at church.

Signs of the times are everywhere.

One of the signs is the Christian rock music in the church.

Has the rock music joined the church, or has the church joined the rock music?

Have we brought the world into the church?

Have we turned our worship services into a time of entertainment?

Would God examine our service and declare it holy?

The wolf came in when the sheep were asleep.

The signs of the enemy are everywhere.

Psalm 74:5 "[A man] was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees."

"Lifted up axes":

Like lumberjacks surrounded by trees, the enemy had furiously destroyed everything in sight in the temple of God.

The sad thing in our society today is that the axe is not used in building.

It is used in tearing down.

In the name of social progress, buildings are being burned and looted.

Are you sure this is progress, when we spend our time tearing down what someone else has constructed?

Psalm 74:6 "But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers."

Formerly it was an honor to be employed in cutting down a tree for the building of the temple; but now so little regard was paid to it.

That all its fine carved work, which Solomon made (1 Kings 6:18), was demolished at once in a rude and furious manner with axes and hammers.

Which was done either by the Chaldeans in Nebuchadnezzar's time, or by the Syrians in the times of Antiochus.

Or by the Romans in the times of Vespasian.

The first seems intended (see Jer. 46:22).

The beautiful carved work that took hundreds of hours to produce is being torn down and replaced with concrete.

Is this progress, or a society with no respect for beauty?

Our young people it seems, are tearing down the old establishment.

In the Bible that is rebellion, not progress.

Psalm 74:7 "They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled [by casting down] the dwelling place of thy name to the ground."

Or, "thy sanctuary into the fire"; which denotes the utter destruction of it by fire, which was done both by the Chaldean and Roman armies (see 2 Kings 25:9).

"They have defiled, by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground, or "to the earth they have defiled the habitation of thy name".

That is, to the last and lowest degree.

This Antiochus did when he set up an idol in the temple, and Titus when he laid it level with the ground, not leaving one stone upon another, as our Lord predicted (Matt. 24:1).

The aggravation of which was, that it was the place where the Lord had put his name.

Where his name was called upon, and where was the symbol of his presence.

We know that many of God's sanctuaries were destroyed by armies who conquered the land.

There seems to be no end to this type of problem.

Many churches today have been burned to the ground.

Psalm 74:8 "They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land."

“All the synagogues”:

God allowed only one sanctuary and during Josiah’s revival, the high places had been destroyed (compare 1 Kings chapters 22 and 23).

This may be a reference to the several rooms of the temple, or to non-sacrificial religious sites throughout the land.

We see that the enemy of the church believes that the thing to do, is destroy their meeting place and thereby destroy their faith.

They need to look at the history of the church.

Throughout history, the growth of the church has been the greatest in time of persecution.

When the Christians were forbidden access to the temple in Jerusalem, they scattered to the adjoining areas and started churches.

Many of them met in people's homes.

The church grew greatly during this time of persecution.

Psalm 74:9 "We see not our signs: [there is] no more any prophet: neither [is there] among us any that knoweth how long."

“Our signs”:

While hostile and pagan signs were everywhere, signs of true Jehovah worship, such as the altars for sacrifice, were missing.

It was not long after the crucifixion of Jesus, that the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.

Perhaps, this is speaking prophetically of this, but it could also, be speaking of now.

This could be speaking of the famine of the Word of God that is being experienced now.

It is very difficult to get people interested in true Bible study.

The 34th chapter of Ezekiel, speaking prophetically of our time, speaks harshly of the shepherds.

It speaks of the judgement of God which falls.

There has begun again, to be a move in much of the world for small groups to meet in homes, or even out in open fields.

Many church buildings have been sold and used for purposes other than church.

We need an awakening to the Word of God today in our land.

We must get into God's Word and find out what the will of God is for our lives.

Psalm 74:10 "O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?"

The name of God, as in the next clause.

The divine Persons and perfections, the purposes and providence of God, his people, ways, worship, truths, and ordinances.

"Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?":

The "adversary" and "enemy" being in the singular number, may intend some particular one, as antichrist; who is emphatically and eminently "the enemy" of God.

He opposing himself to, and exalting himself above, all that is called God.

And the adversary of Christ, as his name shows; not only setting himself in his stead, but undermining him in all his offices.

Changing his laws as a King, dishonoring his sacrifice and intercession as a priest, and doing injury to his word and ordinances as a Prophet.

And who has a mouth speaking blasphemies against God, his name, and tabernacle, heaven, and they that dwell therein, angels and saints (Rev. 13:5).

The enemy will reproach and blaspheme the name of Christ, by denying his deity, eternal Sonship, and distinct personality, and by speaking contemptuously of his righteousness, blood, and sacrifice.

And they do despise unto the Spirit of grace, and speak evil of his person, and the operations of his grace on the souls of men.

And such a day of rebuke and blasphemy is the present one.

And these things give good men that observe them a great concern for the name of God, who are ready to fear there will be no end to these reproaches and blasphemies.

But there will as the time is coming when the name of the Lord will be excellent in all the earth, and the Lord alone shall be exalted.

But it is not known how long it will be until then.

Just as Asaph asks here, how long will this go on, we must ask too?

The only chance for us is for the Word of God to sweep across our land and fill us with the knowledge of God.

Our glass or cup is empty.

We must let God fill our cup to overflowing with His Word and His Spirit and then renew our faith in Him.

The enemy cannot steal the Word of God that you have stored away in your heart.

Please get yourself a King James version of the Bible and study it every day.

The reason I believe in this Bible is because, it was the very first Bible widely used by the common people.

Some of the new versions of the Bible are connected with the new age movement.

Be careful reading them.

Psalm 74:11 "Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck [it] out of thy bosom."

Why dost thou suspend or forbear the exercise of that power, which thou hast so oft put forth on the behalf of thy people?

"Pluck it out of thy bosom":

In which thou now seems to hide it, as idle persons use to do (Prov. 19:24; 26:15).

Arouse thyself on the behalf of thy people.

The Right Hand of God is Jesus Christ.

It may appear that Jesus has folded His arms and stopped helping us.

This is not so.

Jesus never walks away from any of us, we have walked away from Him.

The seemingly inactivity of Jesus is because of our lack of time spent in prayer.

Verses 12-17:

The church silences her own complaints.

What God had done for his people, as their King of old, encouraged them to depend on him.

It was the Lord's doing, no one else could do it.

This providence was food to faith and hope, to support and encourage in difficulties.

The God of Israel is the God of nature.

He that is faithful to his covenant about the day and the night, will never cast off those whom he has chosen.

We have as much reason to expect affliction, as to expect night and winter.

But we have no more reason to despair of the return of comfort, than to despair of the coming day and summer.

And in the world above we shall have no more changes.

Verses 12-15:

These verses demonstrate God's power over all things (see Psalm 105:41; Exodus 17:5-6; and Joshua 2:10).

Bodies of water represented threat and chaos to the Israelites.

For God to break the “heads” of “the dragons” and “Leviathan” vividly demonstrated His power over all kinds of evil.

Giving these creatures as food to “the people inhabiting the wilderness”.

Psalm 74:12 "For God [is] my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth."

That is, the king, or ruler of his people.

The people had acknowledged him as their king and ruler, and he had showed himself to be such.

This is given as a reason why he should now interpose in their behalf.

It is an argument, proper always to be urged, drawn from the faithfulness and unchangeableness of God.

"Working salvation in the midst of the earth":

Salvation for his people.

The reference here particularly is to what he had done for his people in delivering them from bondage in Egypt, and conducting them to the Promised Land, as stated in the following verses.

One of the good things about looking back to their faith of old is, the fact that God came through for them in their need.

He did not fail them, and He will not fail us.

Salvation is still offered to whosoever will.

The falling off is on our part, not His.

Psalm 74:13 "Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters."

“Divide the sea”:

Most likely a reference to God’s creation activity, rather than to the parting of the Red sea (compare Gen. 1:6-8; Exodus 14:26-31).

“Dragons”:

This identifies whales, sharks, and other large sea creatures, including dinosaurs.

Now we see some remembrance of the deliverance by the Right Hand of God.

The Red sea parted and delivered the Israelites, while the evil ones of Egypt were destroyed in this same sea.

The dragons here are the warriors of Pharaoh.

Psalm 74:14 "Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, [and] gavest him [to be] meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness."

On the meaning of the word "leviathan" (see the notes at Job 41:1).

The word is used here as descriptive of sea monsters.

"And gavest him to be meat":

Gavest him for "food."

"To the people inhabiting the wilderness":

That is, the sea monsters were killed, and, being thrown on shore, were gathered for food.

The "inhabitants of the wilderness" or the desert, may refer either to the wild and savage tribes of men that lived on the shores of the sea, and that subsisted mainly on fish, or it may refer to the wild animals of the desert that consumed such sea monsters as they were cast up on the shore.

There is no allusion to the Israelites considered as passing through the desert, as if they had fed on these sea monsters.

The essential idea is, that these monsters were put to death, or were so removed but of the way as to offer no obstruction to the passage of the Israelites through the sea.

It was as if they had been killed.

The image is entirely poetic, and there is no necessity for supposing that such a thing even literally occurred.

The birds of the air ate the drowned bodies of the Egyptians killed in the Red sea.

I do not believe the people ate the bodies.

This must mean that they spoiled the riches of the bodies that washed up on the shore.

Psalm 74:15 "Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood: thou driedst up mighty rivers."

"Cleave the fountain and the flood":

This may be a reference to the universal flood (compare Gen. 7:11), or it may describe creation (Gen. 1:6-8).

We know that when they stepped into the water with the ark of the Covenant at the river Jordan, it parted like the Red sea.

It seemed that the necessary thing to do to get the water to part, was to enter the edge of the water with the ark.

Joshua 3:13 "And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, [that] the waters of Jordan shall be cut off [from] the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon a heap."

Psalm 74:16 "The day [is] thine, the night also [is] thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun."

Thou hast universal dominion.

All things are under thy control.

Thou hast power, therefore, to grant what we desire of thee.

"Thou hast prepared the light and the sun":

Seeing that God by his providence governs and disposes all things, he gathers that he will take care chiefly for his children.

He who has made the sun, that greatest and noblest object of creation to the view of man, must have almighty power, and must be able to give what we need.

It was God that established an evening and a morning making up a day.

Notice that the Light and the sun are two different things.

Study Genesis to fully understand the difference.

I will just say here that the Light of the world is Jesus Christ.

He is the source of all Light.

The sun is a fixture that we see light in.

Psalm 74:17 "Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter."

Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast fixed the bounds, both of the habitable world in general; so as the seas, though they do encompass and assault them, yet they shall never be able to remove them; and of all the countries and people upon earth, whom thou hast confined to such bounds as thou sees fit.

Thou hast made summer and winter – literally, as in the margin, “Summer and winter, thou hast made them.”

That is, he has so made the earth that these various seasons will occur.

Verses 18-23: The psalmist begs that God would appear for the church against their enemies.

The folly of such as revile his gospel and his servants will be plain to all.

Let us call upon our God to enlighten the dark nations of the earth.

And to rescue his people, that the poor and needy may praise his name.

Blessed Savior, thou art the same yesterday, today, and for ever.

Make thy people more than conquerors.

Be thou, Lord, all in all to them in every situation and circumstances; for then thy poor and needy people will praise thy name.

Psalm 74:18 "Remember this, [that] the enemy hath reproached, O LORD, and [that] the foolish people have blasphemed thy name."

Though we deserve to be forgotten and destroyed, yet remember thyself, and do not suffer thine and our enemies to reproach and blaspheme the name of that great and glorious God.

The Creator and sovereign Lord of the whole world, with whom they ought always to reverence and adore.

"The foolish people have blasphemed thy name":

Who, though they think themselves and are thought by others to be wise, yet in truth are fools.

And herein show their stupendous folly, that they vilify and provoke that God whose powerful anger they can neither resist, nor escape, nor endure.

For us to know who the foolish are, we would first have to know who the wise are.

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God.

We see then, that the foolish are those who do not fear God.

Just before the return of the Lord, the evil will wax worse and worse.

Using God's name in vain has become a daily affair with many.

2 Timothy 3:13 "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived."

The third chapter of second Timothy is about the end time.

The chapter begins by saying,

2 Timothy 3:1 "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come."

The description of this time continues in this chapter.

Read it all. It is our time.

The blaspheming of the name of God should tell us, if nothing else does.

Psalm 74:19 "O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude [of the wicked]: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever."

I.e. the life.

Thou hast delivered thy people into captivity; do not deliver them to death, nor suffer their enemies utterly to destroy them.

"Of thy turtledove":

I.e. of thy church, which is fitly compared to a turtledove, because of the great resemblance of their dispositions and conditions.

Being simple, and harmless, and meek, and faithful, and mournful.

And exposed to manifold injuries, and unable to defend itself from them.

"Unto the multitude of the wicked":

Or, to the wild beast, as this word oft signifies.

Or to the troop, to wit, of her enemies.

"Forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever":

The church of God is a congregation of men gathered out of the world by effectual grace, and consists chiefly of such who are literally poor.

And all of them are spiritually so, and are sensible of it.

For the most part, they are a poor and "afflicted" people, as the word may be also rendered, which the church is made up of.

And may seem by themselves and others to be forgotten of God, when under divine desertions, or under afflictions, and immediate help is not given.

But they are not forgotten, and still less forever (see Isa. 49:14).

A turtledove is harmless.

The church is to be as harmless as a dove.

We must always remember that the enemy cannot do anything to God's people at all without God's permission.

Judgement begins at the house of God.

Has God allowed this to happen, to wake us up?

Psalm 74:20 "Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty."

“The covenant”:

The people had apostatized (compare Exodus 16:3-8).

God, however, was still in an eternal covenant (the Abrahamic Covenant) with the nation (compare Gen. 17:1-8).

I cannot believe that Asaph is reminding God of His covenant with Abraham.

It is not God that has forgotten the covenant.

It is God's people.

That covenant had 2 sides to it.

There were blessings, if the people obeyed God.

There were curses, if they disobeyed God.

It seems the whole world is almost dark today.

The way to do away with darkness is turn on the Light.

Christians, let your Light shine.

Do away with the dark places.

Matthew 5:16 "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Psalm 74:21 "O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name."

From the throne of grace, not having an answer of their prayer, but still continuing under the oppressions of their enemies.

"Let the poor and needy praise thy name":

Let them have occasion for it, by the destruction of their enemies, and their deliverance from them, as they will have before long (see Rev. 19:1).

If we need God, cry out to Him.

He never turns a deaf ear to His children.

Before you call on Him, make sure He will not be ashamed to call you His child.

Psalm 74:22 "Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily."

The church's cause being the cause of God; and therefore, she desires that he would arise and exert himself, and take vengeance on his and her enemies.

This is an interesting argument, and a forcible one.

"Remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily":

This being so frequently repeated, as in (Psalm 74:10), shows how much the name and glory of God lay near her heart.

The Targum says: "remember the reproach of thy people by a foolish king all the day"?

Perhaps the man of sin is meant, the king of the locusts, and angel of the bottomless pit.

There will come a time when this very thing will happen, but it will be during the wrath of God.

How horrible to be left here to live through such a terrible time:

Every judgement that comes upon the people of the earth at that time is followed by, and they repented not.

God will plead His cause with fire and wormwood for water.

This will not be a pleasant time at all.

In fact, the Bible says this time of trouble is worse than has ever been known upon this earth. Please awake while there is yet time.

Don't wait until God has to plead His own case.

Preachers, tell the people now, while there is still time to repent.

Blow the warning on the trumpet.

Don't sit back, knowing this is about to happen and not warn the people.

Pray on the porch of the church.

Get them into the kingdom, if you have to go and drag them out of the fire by their feet.

Awake! America, judgement is coming.

Psalm 74:23 "Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually."

Their roaring in the midst of the sanctuary and the congregation (Psalm 74:4).

Their reproaching and blaspheming voice (Psalm 74:10).

"The tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually":

Or "ascends"; goes up to God, and is taken notice of by Him.

The cry of their sins, like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of the city of Nineveh (Gen. 18:20), was continually going up to God.

Wherefore it might be hoped and expected that vengeance in a little time would come down (see Revelation 18:5).

The Septuagint, and the versions that follow that, render it, "the pride of those", etc.

All these petitions are prayers of faith, and are, or will be, heard and answered.

Upon which will follow thanksgivings, with which the next psalm begins.

See the signs.

Know that the enemy is a fierce opponent.

Be ready to fight the good fight.

Prepare for the battle.

Learn the Word of God, so that when you open your mouth the two edged sword will come flying out to divide the Word properly.

There is tumult everywhere we look.

Prepare for war.

This is a holy war.

Our weapon is the two-edged sword.

This is the Word of God.

Keep your powder dry.

DO NOT WATER DOWN THE WORD OF GOD.

Keep your weapon at your side.

Put on the whole armor of God.

Wear the knees of your garment out, by praying on your knees.

Lay your life on the line for the army of God.

We must not let the enemy win.

Psalm 74 Questions

1. What does the Psalmist say, smokes against the sheep of the pasture?
2. Who are the sheep it is speaking of?
3. Who does Zion belong to?

4. What was the plan from the foundation of the earth for the church?
5. Where are the evil ones in this lesson?
6. The devil, like a roaring lion, is going to and fro trying to do what?
7. What are some of the signs in the church that there are problems?
8. What is the axe used for now?
9. What should it be used for?
10. What is being done in the name of social progress?
11. Is this really progress?
12. What is a sign of society with no respect for beauty?
13. What is it really, when young people go against the establishment?
14. How were many of the sanctuaries destroyed?
15. What does the enemy of the church believe is the thing to do?
16. When is the greatest time of growth for the church?
17. What happened when the Christians were forbidden access to the temple in Jerusalem?
18. What chapter in Ezekiel speaks harshly of the shepherds?
19. What can turn this around?
20. The enemy cannot steal
21. the Word of God that is stored _____.
_____.
22. Why does the author recommend the King James version of the Bible?
23. Who is the Right Hand of God?
24. Why is Jesus seemingly inactive in our lives?
25. What is good about looking back at the faith of old?
26. What ate the drowned bodies of the Egyptians?
27. What caused the water to part at the Jordan river?
28. Who established the evening and morning making a day?

- 29. Who is the Light of the world?
- 30. Who has blasphemed His name?
- 31. What are the 2 conditions of the covenant?
- 32. How can we do away with the darkness?
- 33. When will God plead His own cause?
- 34. Awake America _____ is coming.