

## Psalms 74-77 – Chapter Study

### Psalm 74

A Contemplation of Asaph.

Psalms 73 begins the 3<sup>rd</sup> scroll of the 5 Psalm scrolls.

These first few psalms were written by the worship-leader Asaph or by one of his descendants who was also named 'Asaph' & was a temple musician.

This psalm comes from great anguish over the defiling of the temple.

We're not sure exactly when this was written.

It may have been during the reign of David's grandson – Rehoboam, when the Egyptians sacked Jerusalem & the temple.

Or it may have been during the Babylonian exile.

The point is, it was **unthinkable** to Jews that the place where God's glory was manifested could be demolished by godless enemies.

**How was that possible?**

Did it mean Yahweh had failed or was weaker than the gods of their enemies?

**How** could God **let** his temple be sacked & defiled?

This psalm deals with the age-old dilemma that confronts people of faith when disaster strikes – Why?

<sup>1</sup> O God, why have You cast *us* off forever? *Why* does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?

Remember when reading the psalms to look for the emotion driving the words.

The emotion here is **despair**.

This trial has been going on for a long time – which seems all the longer for the fact that it's hard-times.

Good times **sail** by; hard times seem **glacial**.

The psalmist **knows** God is **sovereign**.

So he reasons the lingering trial could mean God has **abandoned** His people.

He expresses his despair & depressing thoughts in the form of a question – hoping God will respond by saying He HASN'T forsaken them.

<sup>2</sup> Remember Your congregation, *which* You have purchased of old, The tribe of Your inheritance, *which* You have redeemed— This Mount Zion where You have dwelt.

Israel had been God's chosen people for the previous 1500 years & Jerusalem had been the city where He put His name for 500 years.

<sup>3</sup> Lift up Your feet to the perpetual desolations. The enemy has damaged everything in the sanctuary.

<sup>4</sup> Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place; They set up their banners *for* signs.

<sup>5</sup> They seem like men who lift up Axes among the thick trees.

<sup>6</sup> And now they break down its carved work, all at once, With axes and hammers. [looting]

<sup>7</sup> They have set fire to Your sanctuary; They have defiled the dwelling place of Your name to the ground.

<sup>8</sup> They said in their hearts, "Let us destroy them altogether." They have burned up all the meeting places of God in the land.

The work of the enemy to loot & ruin the temple, specially the holy places, is described in shocked abhorrence. What perplexed Asaph is that the holiest place was so sacred only 1 person, the high priest, could enter it, once a year.

And he had to go thru an elaborate procedure to do so or he'd be struck dead by God.

Yet when **enemies** came to **destroy**, they marched brazenly in & did whatever they wanted.

How did they get away with it? Why didn't God roast them all?

<sup>9</sup> We do not see our signs; *There is* no longer any prophet; Nor *is there* any among us who knows how long.

God has stopped speaking & giving visions. No prophets brought His message.

Without the temple & the Word of God, the psalmist felt adrift.

<sup>10</sup> O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?

11 Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? *Take it* out of Your bosom and destroy *them*.  
The garments they wore in those days didn't have pockets like we have today.

So people would rest their hand in the folds of their robe or the sash they wore over their shoulder.  
The hand of God was an idiom for His power.

It was the hand of God that had smitten Egypt in the plagues.

It was the hand of God that had parted the Red Sea & let Israel pass through.

It was the hand of God that tumbled the mighty walls of Jericho.

The Psalmist says, "Take Your hand out of your pocket Lord & get to work once again."

Having made his prayer for God to return & redeem His people, Asaph turns to words of faith -

12 For God *is* my King from of old,  
Literally - 'He is **STILL** my King! He was, is & always will be.'

Working salvation in the midst of the earth.

13 You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters.

14 You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces, *And* gave him *as* food to the people inhabiting the wilderness.

15 You broke open the fountain and the flood; You dried up mighty rivers.

What is going on here?

Well, remember that the Psalms are Hebrew poetry.

Sometimes poetry uses imagery & makes reference to contemporary stories as a way to express truth.

Several of the ancient civilizations presented creation as arising out of chaos.

Genesis 1 reveals God ordering creation over 6 original days of creation.

At some point near the beginning He put down Lucifer's rebellion.

These verses are a poetic recounting of all that.

But the **point** the Psalmist makes is that in light of the legendary battles God won in the past, why He doesn't fight for Israel **now** is a baffling mystery.

16 The day *is* Yours, the night also *is* Yours; You have prepared the light and the sun.

17 You have set all the borders of the earth; You have made summer and winter.

The very rhythm of nature flows at His bidding.

So, again— Why has Israel's trail gone on so long?

18 Remember this, *that* the enemy has reproached, O Lord, And *that* a foolish people has blasphemed Your name.

19 Oh, do not deliver the life of Your turtledove [Israel] to the wild beast [Babylon]! Do not forget the life of Your poor forever.

20 Have respect to the covenant;

Remember Your **promise** to Your people, Your beloved!

For the dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty.

Do You want to leave your beloved in this terrible place?

21 Oh, do not let the oppressed return ashamed! Let the poor and needy praise Your name.

Asaph knows how carefully God protects & defends the poor & oppressed, so he says Israel is just that - poor & powerless in the face of cruel enemies.

22 Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; Remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily.

Asaph knew God's reputation was tied to His people.

So redeeming Israel would glorify His name.

What Asaph says here is true - & it's why Israel had been defeated & Jerusalem & the temple were destroyed.

Because Israel **was** God's covenant people.

But they had committed **spiritual adultery** by turning to idols & practicing the most hideous forms of immorality as acts of worship to their false gods.

He'd spent decades warning them, sending prophet after prophet to talk them down from the ledge of their spiritual suicide.

But they wouldn't listen. They killed the prophets God sent them & grew more corrupt.

There was nothing left for them but judgment; because God keeps His word & He'd warned them if they would not repent, judgment would come.

But even in judgment there was grace – for God intended to use their exile in Babylon to cure them once & for all of idolatry.

Though Asaph laments the long time of the trial – it was precisely the length of it that moved the Jews to ask – “**Why** are we here & **when** can we go home?”

As they talked in the midst of the hardships of Babylon, they realized they were there **because** of idols.

And they came to **loathe** them!

They determined when they returned to their homeland they would NEVER allow them again.

So thoroughly was Israel purged of idols & so committed were they to God as the **only** God, they became known throughout the ancient world for their belief in only One God.

<sup>23</sup> Do not forget the voice of Your enemies; The tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually.

Confused by all that's happened as the Psalmist was, still he trusts God's doing something.

He asks God to rise up & turn it all around.

What most troubled Asaph was how God could let Jerusalem & the temple be destroyed.

It's his attitude that tips us off to WHY God DID let them go.

God is bigger than any city, temple, church, cathedral, kingdom, nation, movement, denomination, theology, program.

When we limit God to these things, for our sake, He **has** to let them go, detach Himself from them – lest we make Him small & limit Him.

Make it a regular prayer to submit your ideas & thoughts on God to Him to edit, alter, excise.

Always be willing to learn, grow, because God is bigger!!!

Psalm 75

To the Chief Musician. Set to “Do Not Destroy.” a Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

Like the previous, we don't know the precise setting of this Psalm but it may have been after the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem was miraculously lifted.

<sup>1</sup> We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks! For Your wondrous works declare *that* Your name is near.

This is a major turnaround from the previous psalm. God's come through & delivered His people from their distress.

Then God says -

<sup>2</sup> “When I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly.

Not only is God's **judgment** perfect – so is its **timing**.

<sup>3</sup> The earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved; I set up its pillars firmly. Selah

While the creation in itself is solid, when it's served its purpose & is needed no more, it will dissolve at the Lord's Word.

<sup>4</sup> “I said to the boastful, ‘Do not deal boastfully,’ And to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up the horn.

To trumpet, to **announce** your victory.

<sup>5</sup> Do not lift up your horn on high; Do *not* speak with a stiff neck.’”

This is looking back to the emissaries of the Assyrian King Sennacherib who'd appeared before Jerusalem's walls and boasted of their great power & how Jerusalem would fall like so many other cities already had.

The King of Judah had said – “Yeah? Well, don't count your chickens before they're hatched. You guys haven't faced our God yet.”

In contrast to the self-promotion of the enemies of God, the Psalmist says -

<sup>6</sup> For exaltation *comes* neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south.

<sup>7</sup> But God *is* the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another.

Exaltation, promotion, favor – comes not from east, west, or south – what's left out is the **North**.

That's where favor comes from – the North; because that's where God's throne is.

In Isa 14 when Lucifer declared his intent to usurp God's throne, he said he would **exalt himself** in the recesses of the north.

In Lev. 1:11 when someone offered a burnt offering to the Lord, they were to prepare it on the north side of the altar before putting it on the fire.

We ought not think of this idea of North in a geographical sense.

Promotion doesn't come from Sacramento, Portland or Seattle.

The idea is '**up – above**' – the heavens.

Getting ahead, advancement, success – is an ambition nearly everyone has.

The world has its own criteria for how to advance, succeed.

But **true promotion** isn't an award bestowed by man – it comes from God.

Seek first, the kingdom of God & His righteousness, and everything else will be taken care of.

We turn from reward to punishment in v. 8 -

8 For in the hand of the Lord *there is* a cup, And the wine is red; It is fully mixed, and He pours it out; Surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth Drain *and* drink down.

This is the wine of wrath & judgment.

This image moves us to 2 places in the NT.

1 - Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed that the cup be taken from Him.

2 - Revelation 14 which speaks of sinners drinking the wine of God's wrath.

[Explain]

9 But I will declare forever, I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.

Jacob's story is one of God's grace – which all the faithful have partaken of & will praise forever.

Then God says -

10 "All the horns [strength] of the wicked I will also cut off, *But* the horns of the righteous shall be exalted." In the end, God will set all things right.

Psalm 76

To the Chief Musician. On Stringed Instruments. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

This is another celebration of God's deliverance.

1 In Judah God *is* known; His name *is* great in Israel.

God has just done something remarkable, revealing His great power, & moving people to honor Him.

2 In Salem also is His tabernacle, And His dwelling place in Zion.

Salem is short for Jerusalem, the place where God chose to set His name.

3 There He broke the arrows of the bow, The shield and sword of battle. Selah

4 You *are* more glorious and excellent *Than* the mountains of prey.

5 The stouthearted were plundered; They have sunk into their sleep; And none of the mighty men have found the use of their hands.

6 At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob, Both the chariot and horse were cast into a dead sleep.

7 You, Yourself, *are* to be feared; And who may stand in Your presence When once You are angry?

8 You caused judgment to be heard from heaven; The earth feared and was still,

9 When God arose to judgment, To deliver all the oppressed of the earth. Selah

From this we glean that this is another psalm composed after Jerusalem's miraculous deliverance from the Assyrian siege which had brought great terror to the city.

[Describe Assyrians & siege. Deliverance – 185,000]

10 Surely the wrath of man shall praise You; With the remainder of wrath You shall gird Yourself.

God used the schemes of the Assyrians to bring great blessing to His people.

Yes they had to go through a tough time first – but few if any lamented the trouble in light of the benefits it produced.

What there were, was a whole bunch of people who wished they'd been more patient & trusting in God & not done or said the things they did when the heat of trial was on.

Many years ago, a miner was working a silver claim in Nevada.

He had a shaft tunneled back into a hill dozens of ft.

One morning he came back to his claim to find that a little tremor of the Earth had caused the roof of the

shaft to collapse.

He was furious because it would take him days to clear the debris & re-shore the tunnel.

But a week later as he wheeled another barrow full of rock out into the sunlight, he saw a yellow glint.

Looking closer he realized it was a little vein of gold.

As he examined the other rocks in the barrow he found more.

He went over to the dump where he'd been emptying the barrow and began to sift through the rocks & found dozens more with gold in them.

The cave in of a week before had turned from disaster to delight.

It may look like things have caved in on you. Hold on – God is at work.

11 Make vows to the Lord your God, and pay *them*; Let all who are around Him bring presents to Him who ought to be feared.

12 He shall cut off the spirit of princes; *He is* awesome to the kings of the earth.

The Assyrians were thought to be an unstoppable force. But God stopped them.

Their king, Sennacherib was a terror, but God dispensed with him as so much dandruff on His shoulder.

We don't need to be fearful of the great power of people in City Hall, Sacramento, Washington DC.

They are but pawns doing God's will.

Psalm 77

To the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun. A Psalm of Asaph.

Both Jeduthun & Asaph were worship leaders in the temple.

They each led worship at a different time.

Asaph wrote this for Jeduthun to play during his rotation, probably for a special occasion.

1 I cried out to God with my voice— To God with my voice; And He gave ear to me.

Sometimes Caryn will be talking to Charley while his mind is somewhere else; football, gardening, some manly project in the garage.

He hears the sound of her voice but is oblivious to what she's saying.

He's not ***giving his ear*** to her.

I had to use him as the example because I ***never*** do this with Lynn.

We need never worry that God is distracted by other things when we cry out to Him.

He never says, "Huh? Can you repeat that? I was listening to the news."

God hears us. He's ***attentive*** to us – far more than we are to Him even ***while we're speaking!***

2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; My soul refused to be comforted.

The psalmist was determined to get his answer from God, not something lesser.

He wasn't going to drown his pain in alcohol or drugs.

He wasn't going to turn to some entertainment as a distraction.

Only God's intervention would suffice.

3 I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah

The times in the past when God came through added to his distress on why now He delayed.

4 You hold my eyelids *open*; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

The stress is so great he can't sleep or form a clear line of thought.

5 I have considered the days of old, The years of ancient times.

6 I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart, And my spirit makes diligent search.

The psalmist scans his memory & thinks of all the times God has come through in the past.

Both the history of Israel & his own experience are a memorial to the power & faithfulness of the Lord.

So why now does it seem as though deliverance is late?

7 Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favorable no more?

8 Has His mercy ceased forever? Has *His* promise failed forevermore?

9 Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Selah

These questions were reflexive; they weren't accusations he hurled at heaven.

They were challenges to his own mind & heart.

- Will the Lord cast off forever? No!
- Has His mercy ceased forever? Hardly!
- Has God forgotten to be gracious? No way!

10 And I said, “This *is* my anguish; *But I will remember* the years of the right hand of the Most High.”

11 I will remember the works of the Lord; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.

12 I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds.

While he waited for present deliverance, he would console himself by dwelling on God’s historic faithfulness.

13 Your way, O God, *is* in the sanctuary; Who *is* so great a God as *our* God?

The word ‘sanctuary’ means holy place. Everything God does is holy.

14 You *are* the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples.

15 You have with *Your* arm redeemed Your people, The sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

16 The waters saw You, O God; The waters saw You, they were afraid; The depths also trembled.

17 The clouds poured out water; The skies sent out a sound; Your arrows also flashed about.

18 The voice of Your thunder *was* in the whirlwind; The lightnings lit up the world; The earth trembled and shook.

19 Your way *was* in the sea, Your path in the great waters, And Your footsteps were not known.

20 You led Your people like a flock By the hand of Moses and Aaron.

And it ends – abruptly, as though lines are missing.

Because that’s the idea, the reader, those who sing this, were to go on and add their own memories of God’s historic faithfulness to it – making it personal.