

PSALM 74

An Appeal against the Devastation of the Land by the Enemy

INTRODUCTION.

- A. From Roy H. Enoch (7-12-95).
- B. A Contemplation of Asaph. "A Lament Following the Fall of Jerusalem."
- C. This is the third of the "Asaph Psalms." His name became a clan or family name for a division of his tribe and often referred to his descendants as did the names of Jeduthun and Heman.
- D. Scholars usually select from three events to suggest the occasion for this psalm:
"(1) the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586BC (2Kgs. 24),
(2) the suppression of a Jewish insurrection by a Persian King Artaxerxes Ochus in 351BC,
(3) the profaning of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167BC."
(Coffman quotes L. Boldensperger)
- E. Many modern scholars pick the last event during the period between the testaments for this psalm, but I agree with Coffman and Ash that it seems to be more appropriate to accept the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, 586BC.

THE TEXT.

- 74:1** O God, why have You rejected *us* forever?
Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?
- 2** Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old,
Which You have redeemed to be the tribe of Your inheritance;
And this Mount Zion, where You have dwelt.
- 3** Turn Your footsteps toward the perpetual ruins;
The enemy has damaged everything within the sanctuary.
- 4** Your adversaries have roared in the midst of Your meeting place;
They have set up their own standards for signs.
- 5** It seems as if one had lifted up
His axe in a forest of trees.
- 6** And now all its carved work
They smash with hatchet and hammers.
- 7** They have burned Your sanctuary to the ground;
They have defiled the dwelling place of Your name.
- 8** They said in their heart, "Let us completely subdue them."
They have burned all the meeting places of God in the land.
- 9** We do not see our signs;
There is no longer any prophet,
Nor is there any among us who knows how long.
- 10** How long, O God, will the adversary revile,
And the enemy spurn Your name forever?
- 11** Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand?
From within Your bosom, destroy *them!*
- 12** Yet God is my king from of old,
Who works deeds of deliverance in the midst of the earth.
- 13** You divided the sea by Your strength;
You broke the heads of the sea monsters in the waters.
- 14** You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.
- 15** You broke open springs and torrents;
You dried up ever-flowing streams.
- 16** Yours is the day, Yours also is the night;
You have prepared the light and the sun.
- 17** You have established all the boundaries of the earth;
You have made summer and winter.
- 18** Remember this, O LORD, that the enemy has reviled,
And a foolish people has spurned Your name.

- 19** Do not deliver the soul of Your turtledove to the wild beast;
Do not forget the life of Your afflicted forever.
- 20** Consider the covenant;
For the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence.
- 21** Let not the oppressed return dishonored;
Let the afflicted and needy praise Your name.
- 22** Arise, O God, *and* plead Your own cause;
Remember how the foolish man reproaches You all day long.
- 23** Do not forget the voice of Your adversaries,
The uproar of those who rise against You which ascends continually.

COMMENTS.

[v1] “O God, why have you cast us off forever?” There is almost a sense of hopelessness in this lament. God’s patience with fleshly Israel was growing thin. The city of Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, and the faithful remnant was carried to Babylon, and God told Ezekiel that they were a disobedient and rebellious people.

[v2] “Remember thy congregation...” The “congregation” was now in Babylon and only a few of the poor and social outcasts were left in the land to keep it from being overrun by wild beasts. A rebellious gang killed the governor that was placed over the land by Nebuchadnezzar.

[v3] “...the perpetual desolations....damaged everything in the sanctuary.” These kinds of expressions would not have been appropriate at any time except when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city and temple. The temple was in ruins until it was rebuilt under Zerubbabel about 515BC (Ezra 6:15).

[v4] “Your enemies...set up their banners for signs.” The military standards or insignia were set up throughout the city.

[v5,6] This seems to be a description of the destruction of the temple by the soldiers before burning it. The temple was lined with cedar carved with cherubim, palm trees and flowers and the imagery here seems to be that they went in with axes and “chopped it down” as a forest before burning. The reason may have been that it was overlaid with pure gold and they were recovering the gold.

[v7] “They have set fire to Your sanctuary...” This confirms that this was at the time of Nebuchadnezzar since this was the only time the Temple was burned until the final destruction in 70AD.

[v8] “...They have burned up all the meeting places of God in the land.” The KJV and ASV have “synagogues” for “meeting places” and this is the main reason for placing it at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, 167BC. But many have contended that “synagogues” is not a correct rendering. The Septuagint or Greek translation, renders it “the feasts” indicating that the Jewish feast days were not observed during the captivity.

[v9,10] “...there is no longer any prophet...among us...” This is argued by some as proof of the period between the testaments when there were no prophets. But after Jeremiah was taken to Egypt, there was no prophet in the land of Canaan. Daniel and Ezekiel were in Babylon.

[v11] “Take Your hand out of Your bosom...” This metaphor is called an “anthropomorphism,” which means that the attributes of man are applied to God. This depicts God as having withdrawn His hand from helping Israel against their enemies.

[v12] “For God is my King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.” Since God is withholding his power of deliverance now, the psalmist can only review what God had done for His people when they were following Him. This is the beginning of a review in 74:12-17 of the great wonders God had performed for His people in the past.

[v13] “...You broke the heads of the serpents in the waters.” As the psalmist begins to recount the deliverance from Egypt, he gives this description. Coffman suggests that the “serpents” were the Egyptians who had been so deceitful in oppressing God’s people, and especially during the plagues in refusing to let the people go.

[v14] "...Leviathan..." may be used in the same sense as "serpents in the waters" of the previous verse to refer to the Egyptians. (Leviathan is usually understood as "crocodile".) "...and gave food to the people inhabiting the wilderness." This seems to refer to the Manna.

[v15] "You broke open the fountain and the flood..." He gave them water from the rock and other sources. "...You dried up mighty rivers." This describes their crossing the Jordan on dry ground at flood stage.

[v16] "The day is Yours, the night also is Yours..." This reminds me of His leading them with a pillar of smoke in the day and with a pillar of fire in the night.

[v18] After reviewing past deliverances, the psalmist appeals to the Lord to deliver His people again. His appeal is based on the enemy having reproached and blasphemed the Lord's name and His people. "...foolish people..." is the same word used in 14:1: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

[v19] "...do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beast!" This is similar to the thrust of other prophets--Why does the Lord use a nation more wicked to punish His people?"

[v20,21] "Have respect to the covenant..." It was Israel who had not respected God's covenant with them. "...the dark places..." may refer to the caves where they tried to hide from the Babylonians.

"...do not let the oppressed return ashamed!" It is remarkable that the psalmist continues to call upon God to ask for His help when it seems that there is no hope. God wants man to depend on Him for his needs and to ask for His will.

[v22,23] The psalmist closes the psalm with a continued appeal for God to hear the blasphemous reproaches of the enemy.