



PSALM 74, PART 1

Remember God's Faithfulness in Your Life

This is Holly with Presence Point and welcome to our *Psalms for Shepherds* series. Today we're in *Psalm 74*, where the nation of Israel is in deep lament over the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the ravaging of the city, most likely by the Babylonians in 587-86 BC.

In fact, this psalm very much seems to be a community lament over what's happened. In other words, much like the people of our day come together and lay notes and flowers and sometimes even balloons at a location where a tragedy has struck the entire Jewish nation is together, mourning and sorrowful over what has taken place. Both the books of Lamentations – a full book of Jeremiah's lamenting – and the book of Jeremiah have parallel passages to the temple's destruction, so this was enormously grievous to the Israelites.

Even though the prophets had warned that judgment was coming, these were catastrophic events that shook the people's faith. The difficulty for the psalmist is that he knew that if the kings and leaders (their shepherd leaders), had listened to their prophets (the Word of God) and led the nation back to the Lord, all this carnage and destruction would have been averted.

You know, the Father will always pay attention to His covenant with His people and He was doing just that at this time with the Israelites. That was why He was chastening them in this situation. But just as what must happen in our lives when catastrophe strikes, whether it's due to our own decisions and behaviors and the Lord's chastening or simply a situation the Father is using to refine us into becoming more like Him so He can use us for what He has planned in the future, the author of this psalm moved from despair in the first 11 verses to confidence in verse 12 and he affirmed that God was in charge.

As I read this psalm and you hear this cry, this troubled, grief-stricken lament by the author on behalf of the Israelite community, think of a time in your life when it felt like all was lost. That will allow you to hear and feel and sense and, potentially, personalize this psalm in a much deeper way.

Psalm 74.

¹ O God, why have you rejected us so long?

Why is your anger so intense against the sheep of your own pasture?

² Remember that we are the people you chose long ago,
the tribe you redeemed as your own special possession!
And remember Jerusalem, your home here on earth.

³ Walk through the awful ruins of the city;
see how the enemy has destroyed your sanctuary.

⁴ There your enemies shouted their victorious battle cries;
there they set up their battle standards.

⁵ They swung their axes
like woodcutters in a forest.

⁶ With axes and picks,
they smashed the carved paneling.

⁷ They burned your sanctuary to the ground.
They defiled the place that bears your name.

⁸ Then they thought, "Let's destroy everything!"
So they burned down all the places where God was worshiped.

⁹ We no longer see your miraculous signs.
All the prophets are gone,
and no one can tell us when it will end.

¹⁰ How long, O God, will you allow our enemies to insult you?
Will you let them dishonor your name forever?

¹¹ Why do you hold back your strong right hand?
Unleash your powerful fist and destroy them.

¹² You, O God, are my king from ages past,
bringing salvation to the earth.

¹³ You split the sea by your strength
and smashed the heads of the sea monsters.

¹⁴ You crushed the heads of Leviathan
and let the desert animals eat him.

¹⁵ You caused the springs and streams to gush forth,
and you dried up rivers that never run dry.

¹⁶ Both day and night belong to you;
you made the starlight and the sun.

¹⁷ You set the boundaries of the earth,
and you made both summer and winter.

¹⁸ See how these enemies insult you, Lord.
A foolish nation has dishonored your name.

¹⁹ Don't let these wild beasts destroy your turtledoves.
Don't forget your suffering people forever.

²⁰ Remember your covenant promises,
for the land is full of darkness and violence!

²¹ Don't let the downtrodden be humiliated again.

Instead, let the poor and needy praise your name.

²² Arise, O God, and defend your cause.

Remember how these fools insult you all day long.

²³ Don't overlook what your enemies have said
or their growing uproar.

If while I read that psalm you were able to think of a time when you were in deep despair (and I know that for some people listening that could be how you feel right now) I hope you heard where this song's author moved from that despair to hope to remembering who God is and what God has done.

He lifted his eyes by faith from the burning ruins to the holy throne of God and with that, he received a new perspective on the situation. You see, confidence in God always flows from attention to God. And I believe that's one of the most important lessons this psalm has for us.

So, my challenge for you this week, dear fellow shepherd leader, no matter where it is you influence and impact, is to read through this psalm with a pad of paper next to you. As you read Israel's lament, write what you would like to say our God about what seemed like His absence when you struggled with tragedy. Then, list your lament for a situation you're facing or may have faced long ago but never addressed with the Father. Then, list how God has been faithful in your life, in days past. And, lastly, make another appeal to God regarding the tragedy or situation you're facing or still dealing with in your life.

In other words, think back and consider your feelings, your thoughts, in that tough moment and then look up and remember that the Almighty has been faithful in your life. In essence, write your own Psalm 74. And pray it to the Father and ponder it this week. Thank Him for what He has done and how you've seen Him be faithful and true in the past.

Consider the difference in your perspective when you turn your attention from your circumstances to God. See if your confidence in Him deepens in the process. Then, join us next week as we continue to walk through this psalm. I pray the destruction of the temple and the devastation of the city of Jerusalem over 2,600 years ago speaks to you today and you experience the application of this psalm in the 21st century. May you live deeply into your calling this week, my friend.