

Psalms 74

This evening - we're continuing our overview of the Old Testament book titled Psalms.

With this as our focus - let's open our Bibles to Psalms chapter 74 - and as we make our way to the 74th Psalm...

...I should take a moment to point out that - this is the second - of 11 consecutive songs - written by Asaph.

And as we consider the lyrical content of this Psalm - you might be interested to know that...

...there are some who believe this to be a work - written by a descendant of Asaph.

And the reason why is because - this song details the destruction of the sanctuary...

...which took place in 586 BC.

Seeing how Asaph lived during the days of King David - which was nearly 400 years before the destruction of the sanctuary...

...then - it only stands to reason that the Asaph who wrote the Psalm that we're studying tonight...

...was quite possibly a descendant of the famous worship leader - who shared his name.

It's also possible that the lyrics of this song were written by the same Asaph - who was appointed by King David - to lead worship at the tabernacle.

And in order to make my case - It'll help you to know that Asaph was not only a worship leader...

...he was also a Seer - who was provided with prophetic insights about future events.

With that being the case - it's possible that the Lord was using Asaph...

...to present a prophet picture - about the days of the Babylonian invasion.

As we make our way through the text before us tonight - we'll begin to see that the God Who created the heavens and the Earth...

...is the same God Who is able to save His people from every enemy.

And while there are times when it seems like the enemies of God's kingdom are victorious...

...we must not forget that - there's coming a day - when the Lord will cast down every enemy...

...and He places them under His feet forevermore.

And in this - we can rejoice.

With this as our focus - let's turn our attention to the lyrics that we find here in the 74th Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 1 - where Asaph writes...

Psa 74:1 A Contemplation of Asaph.

O God, why have You cast us off forever?

Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?

Psa 74:2 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.

Here in the beginning of this Psalm - we find Asaph - describing the days - when the anger of the Lord was burning against Israel.

It's for this reason that he asked - - have You cast us off forever?

Or in other words - he was asking - have You permanently rejected us.

As we continue to make our way through this chapter - we'll soon see that...

...Asaph was describing a time - when the enemies of Israel were invading the land of their inheritance.

And not only that - but - they were destroying the sanctuary - there on Mt. Zion.

And it's for this reason that Asaph asked the Lord - why He was allowing their enemies...

...to rise up against them - there in the land of their inheritance.

Now - before we consider the answer to this question - we should first notice how Asaph described Israel - here in this Psalm.

It's there in verse 1 - where He referred to Israel as the sheep of the Lord's pasture.

We find Asaph using the same metaphor - in the 78th Psalm - where he described the way that...

...the Lord made own people go forth like sheep,
And guided them in the wilderness like a flock;

It's in the 79th Psalm - where Asaph described the children of Israel...

...as God's people - and the sheep of His pasture.

And again - in the 80th Psalm - Asaph cried out to the Lord - as he declared...

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock.

With all of this in mind - I can't help but to wonder if this imagery was based on the 23rd Psalm...

...where King David referred to the Lord as Israel's Shepherd?

We can't say for sure - but - I'm guessing that Asaph was moved by this idea...

...of the Lord being the good Shepherd - - and Israel being His sheep.

We also find Asaph - describing the nation of Israel - as the congregation of the Lord.

Notice with me again - there at verse 2 - where he declared...

Psa 74:2a Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old...

That word - congregation - - can also be rendered - multitude - - or assembly.

And we must not fail to notice that - Asaph referred to Israel - as the congregation - which was PURCHASED of old.

In other words - the assembly of Israel was a possession which was purchased by the Lord.

And it's for this reason that he referred to Israel as the inheritance of God.

Look with me again - there in the middle of verse 2 - where Asaph referred to Israel as...

Psa 74:2b The tribe of Your inheritance, which You have redeemed— This Mount Zion where You have dwelt.

Now - the Hebrew word was was translated - tribe - could also be rendered - branch - in reference to a scion - or descendant.

And so we see that the congregation of Israel was also the family that the Lord redeemed...

...and placed there in the land of their inheritance.

Now - as we consider Asaph's perspective regarding the relationship between the Good Shepherd - and His sheep....

...it's no wonder why he was struggling to understand why the Lord was allowing their enemies to rise up against them.

It's for this reason that he cried out - why does Your anger burn against the sheep of Your pasture?

And as he considered the destruction of the sanctuary there on Mt. Zion - Asaph cried out...

...have You cast us off forever?

With this as our focus - let's consider how Asaph described the destruction of the sanctuary - here in our text tonight.

Let's pick up our study of the 74th Psalm - beginning there at verse 3 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 74:3 Lift up Your feet to the perpetual desolations.

The enemy has damaged everything in the sanctuary.

Psa 74:4 Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place;
They set up their banners for signs.

Psa 74:5 They seem like men who lift up
Axes among the thick trees.

Psa 74:6 And now they break down its carved work, all at once,
With axes and hammers.

Psa 74:7 They have set fire to Your sanctuary;
They have defiled the dwelling place of Your name to the ground.

Psa 74:8 They said in their hearts,
"Let us destroy them altogether."

They have burned up all the meeting places of God in the land.

Psa 74:9 We do not see our signs;

There is no longer any prophet;

Nor is there any among us who knows how long.

Psa 74:10 O God, how long will the adversary reproach?

Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - describing the destruction of the sanctuary.

And while it's possible that this was written by another Asaph - after the destruction of the temple - in 586 BC...

...it's also possible that Asaph was prophetically describing a divinely inspired vision...

...of the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem - when the temple of Solomon was destroyed.

Not only that - but - it's also possible that Asaph was presenting a prophetic vision...

...of the day when the second temple in Jerusalem was destroyed - by the Romans.

Remember - it was after the Babylonian captivity - when the children of Israel returned to the land of their inheritance.

And in 535 BC - they began to build the second temple - there on Mt. Zion.

Sadly - the second temple - which came to be known as Herod's temple was destroyed in 70AD...

...according to the prophetic promise that the Lord Jesus presented in Luke 19 - - it's beginning at verse 42 where He declared...

Luk 19:42 "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

Luk 19:43 “For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side,

Luk 19:44 “and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

This prophecy was fulfilled in 70 AD - when the Romans razed Jerusalem to the ground.

And this included Herod's temple - which was completely destroyed.

One reason for why I think that Asaph was prophetically describing the destruction of Herod's temple...

...is due to the fact that - this was a point in time - when there were no prophets in Israel.

Look with me again - there at verse 9 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 74:9 We do not see our signs;
There is no longer any prophet;
Nor is there any among us who knows how long.

Here in this verse - we see that the destruction of the temple was corresponding to a time...

...when there were no prophets in Israel.

Being that Jeremiah and Ezekiel were both serving as prophets at the time when the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem...

...we can be certain that Asaph was NOT referring to the destruction of Solomon's temple.

As we consider this detail - you might like to know that some Bible teachers believe that...

...Asaph was possibly referring to the 400 year period of time - between the days of Malachi - and the birth of John the Baptist.

It was during this intertestamental period - when there were no prophets in the land of Israel.

And not only that - but - it was also during those days...

...when a Seleucid king named Antiochus Epiphanes - invaded Jerusalem - and defiled the temple.

According to the account that we find in the extra Biblical book of 1st Maccabees...

(Antiochus Epiphanes) plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls. They took captive the women and children and seized the livestock. Then they fortified the city of David with a large strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel. They stationed there a sinful nation, men who were renegades. These strengthened their position; they stored up arms and food, and, collecting the spoils of Jerusalem, they stored them there and became a great menace.

That's right - it was 168 BC - when the army of Antiochus Epiphanes plundered the city of Jerusalem.

Not only that - but - they also robbed the temple of God.

It's in 1st Maccabees chapter 1 - where we learn that...

He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. He took the silver and the gold and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found.

More simply put - Antiochus Epiphanes robbed the temple of God...

...and the reason why was because - the Jews refused to pay him tribute.

What's even worse is that - he defiled the temple of God with a blasphemous sacrifice.

Here's how first century Jewish historian named Josephus described it - in the first chapter of the Jewish War - where he writes...

For Antiochus the unexpected conquest of the city (Jerusalem), the looting, and the wholesale slaughter were not enough. His psychopathic tendency was exacerbated by resentment at what the siege had cost him, and he tried to force the Jews to violate their traditional codes of practice by leaving their infant sons uncircumcised and sacrificing pigs on the altar. These orders were universally ignored, and Antiochus had the most prominent recusants butchered. (The Jewish War, 1.34-35)

This is a summary of the account that we find in 1st Maccabees - where we learn that...

...the Jews were ordered to defile the Temple - with pagan altars - and the sacrifice of unclean animals.

And it's in 1st Maccabees chapter 1 - verse 54 - where we learn that it was...

1 Mac 1:54a On the fifteenth day of the month of Kislev in the year 145, King Antiochus set up "The Awful Horror" on the altar of the Temple...

This is a reference to the pig that he slaughtered - there in the temple of God.

And while I'm sure we all agree that this was a horrific period of time...

...it fails to fully line up with the prophecy that we find here in the 74th Psalm.

Notice with me again - beginning there at verse 3 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 74:3 Lift up Your feet to the perpetual desolations.
The enemy has damaged everything in the sanctuary.
Psa 74:4 Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place;
They set up their banners for signs.
Psa 74:5 They seem like men who lift up
Axes among the thick trees.
Psa 74:6 And now they break down its carved work, all at once,
With axes and hammers.
Psa 74:7 They have set fire to Your sanctuary;
They have defiled the dwelling place of Your name to the ground.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - describing the complete destruction of the sanctuary.

And seeing how Antiochus Epiphanes left Herod's temple standing...

...I find it difficult to believe that this prophecy was fulfilled during that intertestamental period of time.

Instead - I would place the fulfillment of this prophecy in 70 AD.

I should also remind you that - John the Baptist was the last man to occupy the office of Old Testament prophet.

And seeing how John the Baptist was beheaded - 40 years before the destruction of Herod's temple...

...it seems to me that Asaph was referring to the days after the death of John the Baptist...

...when Herod's temple was completely destroyed - and burned to the ground.

This was the event that lines up with the details found here in the 74th Psalm.

With that being the case - we should consider the question that Asaph posed - there in verse 10 - where he cried out...

Psa 74:10 O God, how long will the adversary reproach?
Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?

I don't know about you - but - I can totally relate with this question.

As we look at the state of this sinful world - and as we consider the way that the enemy is stealing - killing - and destroying...

...I can't help but to wonder how long - until He raptures His church.

How long - until He places His enemies under His feet?

We can't say for sure - but what we do know is that - the Lord is being patient...

...because - He's not willing that any should perish - but wants all to come to repentance.

And what this means is that - His delay - is not based on some sort of inability.

In order to explain my point - let's how Asaph explained it - here in the 74th Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 11 - where he cried out...

Psa 74:11 Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand?
Take it out of Your bosom and destroy them.

Psa 74:12 For God is my King from of old,
Working salvation in the midst of the earth.

Psa 74:13 You divided the sea by Your strength;
You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters.

Psa 74:14 You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces,
And gave him as food to the people inhabiting the wilderness.

Psa 74:15 You broke open the fountain and the flood;

You dried up mighty rivers.

Psa 74:16 The day is Yours, the night also is Yours;

You have prepared the light and the sun.

Psa 74:17 You have set all the borders of the earth;

You have made summer and winter.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - singing the praises of the One - Who has the ability to destroy His enemies.

He acknowledged the fact that - God is the One Who divided the sea by His almighty strength.

The chances are - Asaph was referring to the day when the Lord saved the Children of Israel from the Egyptians...

...by dividing the waters of the Red Sea - so that they could cross over on dry land.

The Lord then used the same waters - to destroy the Egyptian army.

Without a doubt - the Lord has the power to save His people from the enemy.

Asaph also praised the Lord - for the way that he broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters.

And in verse 14 - he referred to the way that the Lord broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces...

...gave him as food to the people inhabiting the wilderness.

And while commentators offer many different ideas about these sea serpents - and Leviathan...

...which include crocodiles - or metaphors for the Egyptians...

...I can't help but to wonder if Asaph was referring to literal dragons...

...which we would call - dinosaurs.

We know that dinosaur fossils have been found in Egypt - and the Sinai Peninsula.

Not only that - but - there is also empirical evidence - that supports the Biblical belief - that dinosaurs lived along side of humans.

And as we consider the description of Leviathan - found in Job chapter 41.

It's beginning at verse 1 - where the Lord asked...

Job 41:1 "Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook,
Or snare his tongue with a line which you lower?

Job 41:2 Can you put a reed through his nose,
Or pierce his jaw with a hook?

Job 41:3 Will he make many supplications to you?
Will he speak softly to you?

Job 41:4 Will he make a covenant with you?
Will you take him as a servant forever?

Job 41:5 Will you play with him as with a bird,
Or will you leash him for your maidens?

Job 41:6 Will your companions make a banquet of him?
Will they apportion him among the merchants?

Job 41:7 Can you fill his skin with harpoons,
Or his head with fishing spears?

Job 41:8 Lay your hand on him;
Remember the battle—
Never do it again!

Job 41:9 Indeed, any hope of overcoming him is false;
Shall one not be overwhelmed at the sight of him?

Job 41:10 No one is so fierce that he would dare stir him up.
Who then is able to stand against Me?

Here in these verses - we find the Lord - describing the massive monster - known as Leviathan.

And as we consider this description - it seems to me that Leviathan was some sort of Dinosaur...

...which was able to devour people with no problem.

In light of these things - it seems to me that - the Lord literally killed a Leviathan...

...and then provided the meat of that creature - to the children of Israel - as they wandered in the wilderness.

And in this way - Asaph was singing the praises - of the One Who is powerful to save.

It's there in verses 15 thru 17 - where Asaph also acknowledged God's power over creation - by declaring...

Psa 74:15 You broke open the fountain and the flood;
You dried up mighty rivers.

Psa 74:16 The day is Yours, the night also is Yours;
You have prepared the light and the sun.

Psa 74:17 You have set all the borders of the earth;
You have made summer and winter.

The God of Israel is the One Who flooded the Earth - and He is the One Who dried up the Jordan river.

He is the One Who created light - as well as the Sun...

...and He is the One Who created the seasons - including the summer - and winter.

And in light of these things - Asaph was certain that the Lord could save them from their enemies.

Let's consider how he explained it - here in the 74th chapter of Psalms.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 18 - where he declared...

Psa 74:18 Remember this, that the enemy has reproached, O LORD,

And that a foolish people has blasphemed Your name.

Psa 74:19 Oh, do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beast!

Do not forget the life of Your poor forever.

Psa 74:20 Have respect to the covenant;

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

Psa 74:21 Oh, do not let the oppressed return ashamed!

Let the poor and needy praise Your name.

Psa 74:22 Arise, O God, plead Your own cause;

Remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily.

Psa 74:23 Do not forget the voice of Your enemies;

The tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually.

Here in the final verses of this chapter - we find Asaph - asking the Lord to consider the conflict that they were enduring.

He not only asked the Lord to remember how the enemy was reproaching them...

...but - he also asked the Lord to respect to the covenant that He made with the children of Israel.

And just to be clear - the Lord promised to protect them - their in the land of their inheritance...

...providing that they were keeping the covenant - to circumcise their sons on the eighth day.

Here's how the Lord explained it - in Genesis chapter 17 - it's beginning at verse 6 - where the Lord spoke to Abraham - and said...

Gen 17:6 "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

Gen 17:7 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

Gen 17:8 "Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

Gen 17:9 And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.

Gen 17:10 "This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised;

Gen 17:11 "and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.

Here in these verses - we find the Lord - describing the details of the Abrahamic covenant.

And while it was required of Abraham's sons - to receive the sign of circumcision...

...it was the Lord's obligation - to provide the children of Israel - with the everlasting inheritance of their land.

And so - Asaph was reminding the Lord - about the covenant that He made with the.

And the reason why was because - the world was already getting darker - there in his days.

Not only that - but - Asaph was also concerned about the way that the poor - and oppressed were being treated.

It's there in verse 21 - where he declared...

Psa 74:21 Oh, do not let the oppressed return ashamed!
Let the poor and needy praise Your name.

Asaph was praying for those who were poor - and those who were persecuted.

He asked the Lord to protect the persecuted - - and to provide for the poor.

And in light of his example - we too should pray for the protection of the believers who are persecuted...

...and the provision of those who are struggling in poverty.

And not only that - but - we should also pray for the day...

...when the Lord will place every enemy under his feet.

Let's consider how Asaph prayed for this end here in the final verses of this psalm.

It's beginning there at verse 22 - where he declared...

Psa 74:22 Arise, O God, plead Your own cause;
Remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily.

Psa 74:23 Do not forget the voice of Your enemies;
The tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually.

Here in the last two verses of the Psalm - we find Asaph - asking the Lord to arise...

...and punish those who were insulting our Savior - and mocking our Messiah.

As we consider how he encouraged the Lord to deal with those who were rising up against our God...

...I have no doubt that many of us have prayed similar prayers.

It might be that you're exhausted with the way that the enemies of the Lord - continue to blaspheme our God.

And it's possible that there are many here tonight - who are prayerfully asking the Lord...

...to punish the people - who are publicly reproaching our Redeemer.

And much like Asaph - we constantly cry out - how long oh Lord - until unrepentant sinners are brought to submission?

Unfortunately - - I don't know God's predetermined timetable.

But what I do know is that - there is coming a day - when every enemy will be conquered.

I like the way that Paul explained it - in 1st Corinthians chapter 15 - it's beginning at verse 22 - where he declared...

1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

1Co 15:23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

1Co 15:24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

1Co 15:25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.

1Co 15:26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

According to Paul - those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ can rejoice in knowing that...

...there's coming a day - when the enemies of God - will be brought into complete submission.

And while there are times when it seems as if the Lord will never accomplish this promise...

...Paul assured us that this day is coming - when He will put all enemies under His feet - including death.

With that being the case - let's become those believers who are singing the praises of the Lord...

...as we look forward to the day - when the enemies of our God - will receive the justice punishment that they deserve.

And until that day comes - let's look for every opportunity to proclaim the gospel of grace...

...so that those who have been take captive by the enemy - might escape the bondage of unbelief...

...according to the faith by which sinners are forgiven - through sacrifice of our Savior - Jesus.

And in this way - those who trust in Jesus have entered into the covenant of grace...

...according to the everlasting promise of God.

And in this - we can rejoice.

COMMUNION