

**Rhema Christian Center  
Triumphant Tuesday-Bible Study  
Tuesday, November 22, 2022  
Carolyn Johnson, Bible Teacher  
The Book of Psalms 74**

**Psalms 74 (ESV)**

A Maskil of Asaph.

1 O God, **why** do you cast us off forever?  
**Why** does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?

**Remember**

2 **Remember** your congregation, which you have purchased of old, which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage! **Remember** Mount Zion, where you have dwelt.

3 Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins; **the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary!**

**They Destroy**

4 Your foes have roared in the midst of your meeting place; they set up their own signs for signs.  
5 They were like those who swing axes in a forest of trees.

6 And all its carved wood they broke down with hatchets and hammers.



7 They set your sanctuary on fire; **they profaned the dwelling place of your name,** bringing it down to the ground.

Central Theme of Part 1

8 They said to themselves, "We will utterly subdue them"; they burned all the meeting places of God in the land.

9 We do **not** see our signs; there is **no** longer any prophet, and there is **none** among us who knows **how long**.



**How Long?**

10 **How long** O God, is the foe to scoff? is the enemy to revile your name forever?

11 **Why** do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the fold of your garment and destroy them!

12 **Yet** God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.

*The only part not directed to God*

13 **You** divided the sea by your might; **you** broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters.  
14 **You** crushed the heads of Leviathan; **you** gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.  
15 **You** **split** open springs and brooks; **you** **dried up** ever-flowing streams.

**You Deliver and Create**

16 **Yours** is the day, **yours** also the night; **you** have established the heavenly lights and the sun.  
17 **You** have fixed all the boundaries of the earth; **you** have made summer and winter.

18 **Remember** this, O Lord, how the enemy scoffs, and a foolish people reviles **your name**.  
19 **Do** not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild beasts; **do not** forget the life of your poor forever.

Central Theme of Part 2

**Remember**

20 **Have regard** for the covenant, for the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence.  
21 Let not the downtrodden turn back in shame; let the poor and needy praise your name.

22 Arise, O God, defend your cause; **remember** how the foolish scoff at you all the day!

23 Do not forget the clamor of your foes, the uproar of those who rise against you, which goes up continually!

Central Theme: Verse 12

Psalms 74 is a Chiasma - the thoughts are mirrored from the middle outward.

- Remember (Psalm 74:1-3)
- They Destroy (Psalm 74:4-9)
- How Long? (Psalm 74:10-12)
- You Deliver and Create (Psalm 74:13-17)
- Remember (Psalm 74:18-23)

**Who was Asaph?**

Asaph, son of Berachiah, was a descendant of Gershon the son of Levi, and he is identified as a member of the Levites; who provided assistants to the priests during worship in the Jewish temple. He is also known as one of three, commissioned by David, to be in charge of singing in the house of *Yahweh*. In 1 Chronicles 6:31, David appoints a man named Heman as the main musician or singer and Asaph as Heman's right hand assistant. Asaph is also credited with performing at the dedication of Solomon's temple in 2 Chronicles 5:12. He authored Psalm 50, and Psalms 73 to 83.

**Asaph ... Music Integral to Israel's Foundation**

Recall 1 Chron. 6:31, **These are the men DAVID PUT IN CHARGE of the music in the House of the LORD after the ark came to rest there.**

Heman & Asaph, and their associates the Merarites

Heman wrote Psalm 88  
Asaph wrote Psalms 50 & 73-83

David means "**Beloved**," writing 73 of the 150 psalms—HALF, perhaps others—Dead Sea Great Psalms Scroll saying 4,050  
**David—only person so named in Bible—not merely the King**

**David was the Music Director!**

## Background: When was Psalm 74 written?

Since Asaph is named in the superscription of this psalm, you might expect it to have been written during David's reign. This may be so, if it was written as a prophecy for a future time, but the writer appears to have written this psalm of lament, after one of Israel's enemies "**damaged everything in the sanctuary**" (v. 3) and "**...burned Your sanctuary to the ground**" (v. 7). There are two periods recorded in the Bible when the Israeli Temple was destroyed, 586 B.C. and 70 A.D. Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple before His crucifixion.



Yahweh chose Solomon, to build His earthly sanctuary. A place where He could visit His congregation, and where they would worship Him. The blueprint was given by God. The Bible tells us in 1 Kings 6:1 "**In the four hundred eightieth year after the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the Lord.**"

It is said that it took 150,000 workers and 3,300 overseers, seven years to complete the Temple. The Temple housed the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments, that was given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, manna, the bread that came from Heaven, and Aaron's rod, that budded.



Many commentators believed that the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C., is the background of this psalm. There is no record that any of Israel's enemies ever destroyed Israel's central sanctuary in David's day, or the Temple in Solomon's day, to the extent that this psalm implies.

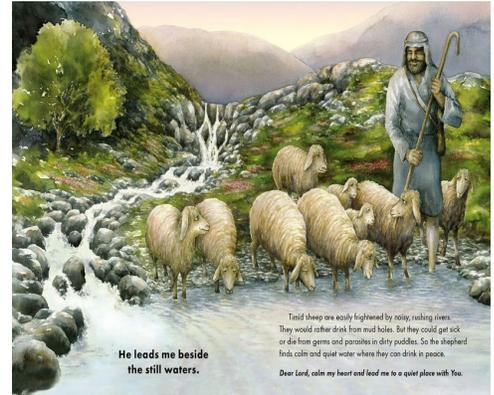
So how Asaph's name connects with this psalm is a mystery. Perhaps it was written in the style of the psalms of Asaph. The author is probably not the Asaph of David's day but a namesake among his descendants. It is a psalm all about the exile of the Jews.

According to Josephus, the historian, who lived in the 1st Century A.D., the Temple stood for 470 years before it was destroyed. In the year 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, captured Jerusalem and all the Kingdom of Judea. He ravaged Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple.

Asaph asked God “Why”. He asked God to Remember His people 74:1-2 (New Living Translation)

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.”

Israel was suffering under the oppression of a foreign enemy. The writer prayed that God would **stop** disciplining His chosen people and remember, (act on their behalf) to bless the nation that He had redeemed. He uses endearing terms like, the sheep (v. 2) of Your pasture. Sheep, is a metaphor, a picture, that stresses the helpless and weak condition of the people.



He leads me beside the still waters.

Tired sheep are easily frightened by noisy rushing rivers. They would rather drink from mud holes. But they could get sick or die from germs and parasites in dirty puddles. So the shepherd finds calm and quiet water where they can drink in peace. Dear Lord, calm my heart and lead me to a quiet place with You.

Psalm 100:3 “**Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us, and we are His. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.**”

“Your congregation, the tribe of Your inheritance, You have purchased, You have redeemed”. This is a reference to Israel's redemption; the historical event of the Exodus, Israel exiting Egypt. Exodus 14:21-27 NKJV

21 “Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go *back* by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry *land*, and the waters were divided. 22 So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry *ground*, and the waters *were* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 23 And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. 24 Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the Lord looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians.

25 And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians. 26 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen.” 27 And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the



sea.”

Yahweh had redeemed them from Egypt and made them His inheritance, and He had come to dwell with them on Mount Zion. The word remember (v. 2) doesn't mean "call to mind," because **it's impossible for God to forget anything**. It means **"to go to work on behalf of someone."** Why did God permit a pagan nation to defeat the Jews and destroy their Holy City and sacred Temple, and why was He doing nothing about it?

Just as Asaph raised the question **"WHY?"**, Psalm 74 raises a question that is often asked today, **"Why is God letting His people suffer?"**. Let's consider some responses to this question:

### **1. Sometimes God Uses Suffering to DISCIPLINE Disobedience.**

"Why, God, have you cast us off forever?". It comes across as a cry out to God, when will salvation come and save them from the depths of their despair.

God spoke through His prophets and warned Israel, that judgment was coming because of the sins of the nation. They began worshipping their neighbor's gods, even sacrificing their children. (2 Chron. 36:15-21). Even so, the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple were catastrophic events that shook the people's faith.

### **2 Chronicles 36:15-21 NKJV. The Fall of Jerusalem**

***"15 And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. 16 But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy. 17 Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans (Nebuchadnezzar) who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand."***

***18 And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon. 19 Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. 20 And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years."***

Psalm 74:3–8. New Living Translation.

**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.**



Psalm 74 is clear that God was upset with Israel and that He was disciplining them. Jerusalem and the temple were in ruins (74:3). The temple was burned to the ground (74:7). The attacking army was totally destroyed Jerusalem (74:8).

## **2. Sometimes God Uses Suffering to Teach Us That CHOICES Have Consequences.**

Psalm 74:9-11 NLT

**“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.”**

God had warned Israel for years that judgment was coming if they did not turn from their immoral and pagan sinfulness. The last of the Prophets was Jeremiah who prophesied that the Babylonians would be allowed by God to conquer them and lead them into captivity for 70 years.

Jeremiah 25:7, **“7 But you would not listen to me,” says the Lord. “You made me furious by worshiping idols you made with your own hands, bringing on yourselves all the disasters you now suffer.”** NLT

Jeremiah 25:10 **“10 This is what the Lord says: ‘You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again.’”** NLT

Galatians 6:7-8 ***“7 Don’t be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. 8 Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit.” NLT***

### **3. Sometimes God Uses Suffering to Grow Our CHARACTER.**

James 1:3-4 ***“3 For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. 4 So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.” NLT***

Romans 5:3-4 ***“3 We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. 4 And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.” NLT***

The Life Application Study Bible explains, “For first-century Christians, suffering was the rule rather than the exception. Paul tells us that in the future we will **become**, but until then we must **overcome**. This means we will experience difficulties that help us grow. We rejoice in suffering, not because we like pain or deny its tragedy, but because we know God is using life's difficulties and satan's attacks to build our character...”

There are other reasons we can explore, however, time does not allow it.

“As he surveyed the situation, Asaph moved from despair to confidence and in the end affirmed that all was not lost. God has reasons for allowing suffering, but He has promised a day of Christ's return when it will all end.” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Worshipful*)

How does the psalmist's tone shift from despair to confidence in Psalm 74? What are modern parallels to the despair the psalmist felt after the destruction of the temple? What does this psalm teach us about God's willingness to embrace our pain? About the ultimate answer to that pain?

### **You Deliver and Create**

Psalm 74:12-17 NLT

***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.**  
**Central Theme Found in Verse 12**

Verse 12 is the central verse of Psalm 74 and the turning point in Asaph's experience. He lifted his eyes by faith from the burning ruins to the holy throne of God in the heavens and received a new perspective on the situation.

Now the psalm mirrors its themes. This section **responds** to the destruction of the sanctuary in Psalm 74:4-9. Asaph declares who GOD is.

The enemy is bent on destruction, but God is the Deliverer and Creator. The psalmist sings about God taming waters and slaying water monsters. In the ancient Hebrew mind, water and water monsters symbolized chaotic forces that ripped, torn, and hurt everything, from individuals, to communities, to the land itself.

- **He divided the sea.** God divided the Red Sea to rescue Israel and He divided the waters during creation. There are no troubled waters too deep for God!
- **He crushed the serpent.** God defeated Egypt, the greatest nation on earth, at that time, to rescue Israel. Maybe that is what Asaph is referring to. But Leviathan is also a mythological creature associated with chaos and sometimes creation. God is metaphorically shown, defeating chaos and evil. Satan, the dragon, has no power over God.
- **He opened the streams and dried up the rivers.** God can make water flow from a rock or dry up a great river so Israel can cross. Neither famine nor flood are a problem for our God.
- **Day and night, summer and winter, all creation is under God's hand.** Whether we are in the light and warmth of a summer's day or the cold dark of a winter's night, God is always in control!

**The enemy always seeks to destroy ([1 Peter 5:8](#)), but God is always there with us to deliver and create new life!**

Job and the 104th Psalm refer to leviathan as a real sea creature. However, verse 13, speaks of a multi-headed creature. This cannot be a real animal. This animal is symbolic just like God calls His people, sheep, Isaiah called leviathan the twisting serpent of the sea. [Is. 27:1] And later names it Rahab which in Hebrew means to be defiant, arrogant, boisterous or stormy.

***“In that Day, the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.”*** Isaiah 27:1 ***We get a real description of leviathan in Revelation 13, where it is called the beast from the sea. It is described as having ten horns and seven heads and is made up of all the beasts from the sea in Daniel 7. It represents all the imperial powers that have ruled the Western World from the time of Babylon. It gets its authority from satan.***

And I saw a ***beast rising out of the sea***, with ten horns and seven ***heads***, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads. 2 And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bears, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. Rev. 13:1

And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bears, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. Rev. 13:2

The Final Plea: God, for the sake of Your name, for the sake of Your praise, ***Remember*** Your people and Your promises (74:18-23)

Psalm 74:18-23 NLT

18

Remember how the enemy has mocked you, Lord,  
how foolish people have reviled your name.

19

Do not hand over the life of your dove to wild beasts;  
do not forget the lives of your afflicted people forever.

20

Have regard for your covenant,  
because haunts of violence fill the dark places of the land.

21

Do not let the oppressed retreat in disgrace;  
may the poor and needy praise your name.

22

Rise up, O God, and defend your cause;  
remember how fools mock you all day long.

23

Do not ignore the clamor of your adversaries,  
the uproar of your enemies, which rises continually.



The final section mirrors the beginning as it calls on God to remember:

- o The mocking of the enemy
- o The lives of His people
- o His covenant

In this final section the psalmist continues to plead with God for deliverance, and his requests are incredibly God-centered. He asks God to intervene on behalf of His people for His own name's sake.

- o The psalmist prays for the sake of God's name and reputation (vv. 18, 22-23)
- o The psalmist prays for the sake of God's praise (vs. 21)
- o The psalmist prays for the sake of God's covenant faithfulness (vs. 20)

