

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 74 — How Long, My King?

1.0 Introducing Psalm 74

- For the first time in the Psalter we have encountered a psalm that refers directly to the Babylonian destruction of the Temple in 587/586 B.C. (see vv. 3-8; cp. 2 Kings 25:8-15 and 2 Chron 36:17-21).
- Psalms 50 and 73–83 attribute their composition to Asaph.
 - ✓ There could be more than one Asaph.
 - ✓ “Asaph” might sometimes refer to a descendant of Asaph (cp. 2 Chron 35:15).
- The psalm is labeled a “Maskil,” a skillful and artistic psalm teaching wisdom.
 - ✓ See Psalms 32; 43–45; and 52–55.
- The musical subscription gives the tune as “Al-tashheth” (“Do not destroy”).
 - ✓ See the same tune for Psalms 56–58 (musical subscriptions found in the headings of their following psalms, 57–59).
 - ✓ It is a fitting tune for Psalm 74.

2.0 Reading Psalm 74 (NAU)

74:1 A Maskil of Asaph.

O God, why have You rejected *us* forever?

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

74:2 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.

74:3 Turn Your footsteps toward the perpetual ruins;
The enemy has damaged everything within the sanctuary.

74:4 Your adversaries have roared in the midst of Your meeting place;
They have set up their own standards for signs.

74:5 It seems as if one had lifted up *His* axe in a forest of trees.

74:6 And now all its carved work
They smash with hatchet and hammers.

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

74:8 They said in their heart, "Let us completely subdue them."
They have burned all the meeting places of God in the land.

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

74:10 How long, O God, will the adversary revile,
And the enemy spurn Your name forever?

74:11 Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand?
From within Your bosom, destroy *them*!

74:12 Yet God is my king from of old,
Who works deeds of deliverance in the midst of the earth.

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

74:14 You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

74:15 You broke open springs and torrents;
You dried up ever-flowing streams.

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

74:17 You have established all the boundaries of the earth;
You have made summer and winter.

74:18 Remember this, O LORD, that the enemy has reviled,
And a foolish people has spurned Your name.

74:19 Do not deliver the soul of Your turtledove to the wild beast;
Do not forget the life of Your afflicted forever.

74:20 Consider the covenant;
For the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence.

74:21 Let not the oppressed return dishonored;
Let the afflicted and needy praise Your name.

74:22 Arise, O God, *and* plead Your own cause;
Remember how the foolish man reproaches You all day long.

74:23 Do not forget the voice of Your adversaries,
The uproar of those who rise against You which ascends continually.

For the choir director; *set to* Al-tashheth.



3.0 Understanding Psalm 74

3.1 Outline

- I. A Present, Horrible History (vv. 1-11)
- II. A Past, Holy History (vv. 12-23)



— Adapted from George Zemek, *Road Maps for the Psalms* (Valencia, Calif.: The Master's Academy International, 2006), Psalm 74.

3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “why have You rejected *us*”
 - See Psalm 13:1 and Lamentations 5:20.
 - Moses responded similarly after the Lord announced His displeasure with the Israelites’ worship of the golden calf at Mt. Sinai (Exod 32:11).
 - God sent the Babylonians to punish Israel because she had disobeyed Him and polluted the Temple (2 Chron 36:14).
- **v. 1** “the sheep of Your pasture”
 - Such terminology is reminiscent of the desert wandering of Israel after the exodus from Egypt (Ps 77:20).
 - This is one of Asaph’s favorite motifs (Pss 78:52; 79:13; 80:1).
- **v. 2** “purchased . . . redeemed”
 - Asaph alludes to the “Song of the Sea” in Exodus 15:13 and 16 by these two parallel terms.
 - This verse is an echo of Exodus 15:17.
- **v. 8** “all the meeting places of God”
 - “Meeting places” might be a reference to the Temple’s many chambers and courtyards.
 - However, the plural could be a plural of locality referring to the Temple alone.
 - In later rabbinic literature the same phraseology is used of synagogues and study halls.
- **v. 9** “There is no longer any prophet”
 - See Lamentations 2:5-9 and compare 2 Chronicles 36:11-16.
 - Compare Amos 8:11-14.
- **v. 11** “Why do You withdraw Your hand”
 - “This question is meant both as a complaint and as a prayer for mercy: Please do not withdraw Your right hand, and please do not refrain from coming to our salvation.” — Amos Hakham, *Psalms with the Jerusalem Commentary*, 3 vols., Koschitzky Edition (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2003), 2:149.

- **v. 11** “destroy *them!*”
 - Compare Exodus 15:12.
- **vv. 12-15** The LORD as Savior and Victor
 - God’s deliverance of Israel out of Egypt provides the prime example of His saving power.
 - In verses 13-17 the personal pronoun (“**You**”) is often emphatic—implying that “*You and You alone*” have accomplished a certain deed.
- **v. 13** “You broke the heads of the sea monsters in the waters”
 - See Isaiah 51:9-10 and Ezekiel 29:3—a reference to God’s destruction of Pharaoh in the waters of the Red Sea (Exod 14:23-31).
 - Verses 13-15 allude to the crossing of the Red Sea (cp. Exod 15:2-13).
- **v. 14** “Leviathan”
 - This great creature (Job 41:1-34) is symbolic of overwhelming power before which no one can stand.
 - In this context, Leviathan represents the superior military power of Pharaoh when Israel fled from Egypt.
- **vv. 14-17** The LORD as Creator
 - Creation provides the prime example of God’s sovereign control over all things.
 - Compare Psalm 104.
 - ✓ 104:24 reveals the focus: “In wisdom You have made them all.”
 - ✓ 104:26 mentions that God created Leviathan (74:14).
 - ✓ 104:19-23 speak of the day and the night (74:16).
 - ✓ 104:35 closes with “Let sinners be consumed from the earth
And let the wicked be no more.”
- **v. 17** “summer and winter”
 - This could be an allusion to God’s promise to Noah. See Genesis 8:22.
- **v. 19** “Your turtledove”
 - Here is a classic depiction of God’s people as helpless and dependent upon the Lord.
 - See Song of Solomon 2:12. Compare Jeremiah 8:7.
- **v. 20** “Consider the covenant”
 - The most likely reference is to the Abrahamic Covenant. In Babylonian exile Israel would long for its promised blessings.
 - ✓ See Leviticus 26:27-45.
 - ✓ Compare 2 Chronicles 36:21.
 - Interestingly, a turtledove was one of the creatures God commanded Abraham to sacrifice at that covenant’s initiation (Gen 15:9).
 - ***What reasons can you list to support your prayer that God would act on your behalf?***



- v. 22 “Arise, O God”
 - Moses would call out these words (using “Yahweh” instead of “God”) every time the ark of the covenant set out on another day’s journey during the wilderness wanderings (Num 10:35-36).
 - ✓ See Psalms 3:7; 7:6; 9:19; 10:12; 17:13; 82:8; 132:8.
- v. 23 “Do not forget the voice of Your adversaries”
 - Surprisingly, the psalm does not end with “Do not forget the sheep of Your pasture” (cp. v. 1) or “Remember Your congregation” (v. 2).
 - The psalmist’s plea is for God to execute righteous judgment against those who have destroyed the sanctuary and deported His people.
 - We cannot but be reminded of the prophet Habakkuk (see Hab 1:2-4, 13; 2:20; 3:2, 13, 15).

4.0 Singing Psalm 74

Will God For Ever Cast Us Off?

(Tune: “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?” or “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”)



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|---|---|
| <p>1 Will God for ever cast us off?
His wrath for ever smoke
Against the people of his love,
His little chosen flock?</p> | <p>2 Think of the tribes so dearly bought
With their Redeemer’s blood;
Nor let thy Zion be forgot,
Where once thy glory stood.</p> |
| <p>3 Lift up thy feet and march in haste,
Aloud our ruin calls;
See what a wide and fearful waste
Is made within thy walls.</p> | <p>4 Where once thy churches prayed and
sang,
Thy foes profanely roar;
Over thy gates their ensigns hang,
Sad tokens of their power.</p> |
| <p>5 How are the seats of worship broke!
They tear the buildings down,
And he that deals the heaviest stroke
Procures the chief renown.</p> | <p>6 With flames they threaten to destroy
Thy children in their nest;
“Come, let us burn at once,” they cry,
“The temple and the priest.”</p> |
| <p>7 And still, to heighten our distress,
Thy presence is withdrawn;
Thy wonted signs of power and
grace,
Thy power and grace are gone.</p> | <p>8 No prophet speaks to calm our woes,
But all the seers mourn;
There’s not a soul amongst us knows
The time of thy return.</p> |
| <p>9 How long, eternal God, how long
Shall men of pride blaspheme?
Shall saints be made their endless
song,
And bear immortal shame?</p> | <p>10 Canst thou for ever sit and hear
Thine holy name profaned?
And still thy jealousy forbear,
And still withhold thine hand?</p> |

11 What strange deliv'rance hast thou
shown
In ages long before!
And now no other God we own,
No other God adore.

12 Thou didst divide the raging sea
By thy resistless might,
To make thy tribes a wondrous way,
And then secure their flight.

13 Is not the world of nature thine,
The darkness and the day?
Didst thou not bid the morning
shine,
And mark the sun his way?

14 Hath not thy power formed every coast,
And set the earth its bounds,
With summer's heat, and winter's frost,
In their perpetual rounds?

15 And shall the sons of earth and dust
That sacred power blaspheme?
Will not thy hand that formed them
first
Avenge thine injured name?

16 Think oh the cov'nant thou hast made,
And all thy words of love;
Nor let the birds of prey invade,
And vex thy mourning dove.

17 Our foes would triumph in our
blood,
And make our hope their jest;
Plead thy own cause, Almighty
God,
And give thy children rest.

— Isaac Watts

5.0 Praying Psalm 74

- Thank You, Lord, for redeeming me. [v. 2]
- Father, fill my mind and heart with Your Word. [v. 9]
- We praise You, O God, for day and night, summer and winter. [vv. 16-17]
- When I feel like a dove attacked by a wild beast, protect me, Father. [v. 19]
- Lord, fulfill Your covenant with Your people. [v. 20]



6.0 Applying Psalm 74

- Unfaithfulness to God has dire consequences.
- God remains in control, no matter what the circumstances.
- “No matter how devastating the defeat may be, failure is never final as long as the grace of God is available.” — Steven J. Lawson, *Psalms 1–75*, Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville, Tenn.: Holman Reference, 2003), 375.