

Psalm 74

Title: Devastation and Deliverance

Author and Date: Asaph

Key Verses: Psalm 74:2, 18, and 22

Type: National (Communal) Lament

Outline

- A. Devastation by enemies (verses 1-11).
- B. Deliverance by God (verses 12-23).

Notes

Title: “Maschil of Asaph.” For the meaning of “Maschil” see the notes for Psalm 32. For the identity of “Asaph”, see the notes on the title of Psalm 73 (see also the note on verse 7 below).

Summary: Psalm 74 is a national (communal) lament wherein the psalmist cries to God for help on behalf of himself and his people, Israel. The psalmist believes that God’s people are rejected and punished by God (verse 1). He calls upon God to remember them (verse 2). Enemies attack Israel’s people and make a devastation of the sanctuary (temple) in Jerusalem (verses 3-7). There are no assemblies of God’s people left or prophets when the devastation is over (verses 8-9). The psalmist asks “How long?” and “Why?” concerning the great devastation (verses 10-11).

The psalmist believes that God alone can deliver them from this devastation because he is “King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth” (verse 12). God does many mighty works in the earth from Israel’s exodus (verses 13-15) to creating the natural laws of the physical world (verses 16-17). The psalmist returns to his cry for deliverance. He wants God to do several things: remember the enemy (verse 18), forget not the poor (verse 19), have respect unto the covenant (verse 20), let not the oppressed return ashamed (verse 21), plead his own cause (verse 22), and forget not the adversaries (verse 23).

Verse 1: When God’s people are attacked, they cry “Why?” (verses 1 and 11) and “How long?” (verse 10). The “sheep of thy pasture” (KJV) is a reference to the people of Israel (see also verse 2). Israel is also called “thy turtle-dove” (KJV) in verse 19.

Verse 2: “Remember” is a theme in this psalm (see also verses 18 and 22). The psalmist wants God to remember his people and remember what the enemy has done to them.

Verse 3: “Lift up thy feet” refers to God coming to visit and deliver Israel.

Verse 4: Note that Israel’s enemies are God’s enemies: “thine enemies” (KJV).

Verse 7: This is most likely a description of the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:8-21). If the setting of the psalm is in the time of the Babylonian captivity, then the author would be one of the “sons of Asaph” who lived at this time (2 Chron. 35:15; Ezra 2:41; 3:10). See also Psalm 79 and Psalm 137.

Verse 10: The enemies’ attack on Jerusalem (verse 7) is an attack on God himself (verse 10).

Verse 11: This verse is the imprecatory portion of the psalm.

Verses 12-17: Note how many times “Thou” (you) is used in the verses 13-17. The psalmist believes that God alone can take care of the enemies because he is “King of old” and he can do many mighty works. He is Lord of people (verses 13-15) and of his creation (verses 16-17). Leviathan (verse 14) is a large sea creature (Job 41:1).

Verse 18: The enemies and adversaries mentioned in verses 3-11 are here described as “foolish people” (see also verse 22).

Verse 19: “Thy turtle-dove” and “thy poor” (KJV) are references to God’s people who have been devastated by the enemy. Israel is like a defenseless dove attacked by a wild beast.

Verse 20: “The covenant” (KJV) would be the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:2ff), Israel (Ex. 24:8), and David (2 Sam. 7:5-17).

Questions

1. What question does the psalmist ask God concerning Israel (verse 1)?
2. What people and what place does the psalmist want God to remember (verse 2)?
3. What does the psalmist want God to do to the enemy and why (verse 3)?
4. What have the adversaries done to the sanctuary (verses 4-7)?
5. What do the enemies say in their heart (verse 8)?

6. What is the result of the enemy's devastation (verses 8-9)?
7. What questions does the psalmist ask God concerning the enemy (verses 10-11)?
8. What is God to the psalmist (verse 12)?
9. What great works of God does the psalmist recount (verses 13-17)?
10. What does the psalmist want God to remember (verse 18)?
11. What requests does the psalmist have for God concerning the poor, the covenant, the oppressed, the foolish man, and the adversaries (verses 19-23)?

Applications for Today

1. God remembers. He does not forget. He does not have a poor memory. He always remembers and never forgets his people and what enemies do to them (verses 1-2 and 18-23). What does Hebrews 6:10 say about God? What does God remember (Rev. 18:5)?
2. God's people will have enemies and adversaries that seek to cause devastation and destruction of all that is good (verses 3-11). They are foolish people (verses 18 and 22). What did Paul face at Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:9)? How are Christians to face adversaries (Phil. 1:28)? What does God have planned for adversaries (Heb. 10:27)?
3. A common question asked by God's people when they are suffering is "Why?" and "How long?" (verses 1, 10, and 11). What questions does Habakkuk ask and why (Hab. 1:2-4)? What do dead saints ask and what is the answer (Rev. 6:9-11)?