

Psalm 74

Introduction: With this psalm we move into book 3 of the Psalms (73-89). Derek Kidner has given this psalm a single-word title: Havoc.

The psalmist, who has just experienced the devastation of the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem in 586 BC, asks God to consider Israel's sufferings and intervene on behalf of his people. Remember the book of Lamentations and Psalm 137. He describes the ruined temple, recalls God's mighty deeds in the past, begs for mercy, and calls for judgment upon God's enemies. (NET)

There are two primary causes for this lament: the Temple (and the external worship of God) has been destroyed and there are no prophets present to communicate God's Word. Could the situation be any worse?

Superscription: *a maskil of Asaph*

- 1) Is God really concerned?—74:1-3
 - a) He asks emotional, agonizing questions—74:1
 - i) ¹ *Why, O God, have You rejected us off ① perpetually?*
 - ii) *Why does Your anger smoke (smolder) against the sheep of Your pasture?*
 - (1) They remain His sheep even when the pasture lies devastated.
 - iii) The psalmist does not really believe God has *permanently rejected* his people or he would not pray as he does in this psalm. But this initial question reflects his emotional response to what he sees and is overstated for the sake of emphasis. The severity of divine judgment gives the appearance that God has permanently abandoned his people. (NET)
 - iv) God has, through the prophets, repeatedly warned them what would happen if they continued to disobey Him.
 - b) He confidently presents faith-grounded requests—74:2-3
 - i) Do something—74:2 ² *Remember Your congregation, which You acquired/created long ago,*
 - (1) God's redemption of Israel at the Exodus—*which You redeemed as the tribe of Your inheritance;*
 - (2) God's presence with Israel—*this Mount Zion where You dwell.*
 - (a) Even if everything is in ruins!
 - ii) Do it carefully—74:3 ³ *Lift up Your feet to the ② perpetual ruins; the enemy has damaged everything in the sanctuary.*
 - (1) Read 2nd Kings 25 and Jer. 52.
 - (2) Similar to walking carefully through the debris of the destruction
 - (3) Where there was good (a prosperous life), there is now evil (devastation); where there was joy, there is now pain in God's people and place. So the need for God to do something is urgent. (Ross)
 - c) The psalmist depends on God's unique relationship with the nation of Israel.
- 2) He describes the appearance of his **PRESENT** crisis—74:4-11

- The praise of God's people is replaced with an ugly roar from the enemy. (Grogan)
 - a) He describes Babylon's heavy-handed pillaging—74:4-8
 - i) Babylon's **external** actions—74:4-7
 - (1) Intimidation—74:4 ⁴ *Your adversaries have roared (like lions) in the midst of Your meeting place; they have set up their emblems as signs.*
 - (2) Destruction—74:5-7a ⁵ *It was like men who bring axes to a thicket of trees. ⁶ And now they are smashing all the engravings with hatchets and pickaxes. ⁷ They set Your sanctuary on fire;*
 - (3) Desecration—74:7b *they have utterly desecrated/profaned the dwelling place of Your name.*
 - ii) Babylon's **internal** attitude—74:8
 - (1) Against Israel—⁸ *They said in their hearts, "Let us oppress/subdue them completely."*
 - (2) Against God—*They have burned all the meeting places of God in the land.*
 - b) He is unsettled by God's apparent silence—74:9 ⁹ *We have not seen our signs; there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long?*
 - i) Where are the prophets? Jeremiah has been taken to Egypt (Jer. 43), with Daniel and Ezekiel being taken to Babylon
 - c) He makes statements of faith in the form of questions—74:10-11
 - i) He asks questions concerning the attitude of the Babylonians—74:10
 - (1) ¹⁰ *How long, O God, will the adversary scoff?*
 - (2) *Will the enemy despise Your name ☹ perpetually?*
 - ii) He asks questions concerning God's apparent delay—74:11 ¹¹ *Why do You hold back Your hand, even Your right hand? From Your bosom destroy!*
 - (1) We might say, "Take Your hands out of Your pockets and do something!"
- 3) He recalls the reality of God's PAST works during the Exodus—74:12-17
- The repeated, emphatic use of the second person pronoun is a challenge to God's apparent inactivity. (Grogan)
 - This description of God's great works around the entire globe will make the Babylonians look small.
- a) He trusts God despite all evidence to the contrary—74:12 ¹² *Yet God is my King from ancient times, working deliverance in the midst of the earth.*
 - This is the turning point of the entire psalm.
 - i) If faithful people acknowledge God is their king, then in their life they owe him their allegiance. (Ross)
 - b) God's work concerning the Red Sea—74:13-14
 - i) ¹³ **You** *divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea monsters in the waters.*

- ii) ¹⁴ **You** crushed the heads of Leviathan (supposedly with 7 heads; a reference to Egypt?); *You gave him as food for the people/creatures of the wilderness.* (the bodies of the soldiers on the shore for the wild animals)
- c) God's work concerning sources of water—74:15
 - i) Provision in the wilderness—¹⁵ **You** broke open the spring and stream;
 - ii) Providing access to the Land—**You** dried up the perpetually flowing rivers (Jordan at flood stage).
- d) God's work concerning time—74:16 ¹⁶ *To You the day, also to You the night; **You** have established the light and the sun.*
- e) God's work concerning boundaries—74:17
 - i) Geographically and politically—¹⁷ **You** have established all the boundaries of the earth;
 - ii) Seasons—**You** have made summer and winter.
- 4) His hope for the reality of God's **FUTURE** work—74:18-23
 - The suffering remains, but it is now in proper perspective
 - a) He describes Babylon's "not-my-God" attitude—74:18 ¹⁸ *Remember this: an enemy has taunted Yahweh, and a foolish [nabal] people has disrespected Your name.*
 - b) He asks God to tenderly protect them—74:19-20
 - i) Stated negatively—74:19
 - (1) ¹⁹ *Do not deliver the soul of Your dove;*
 - (2) Restated—*do not forget the life of Your afflicted* ④ *perpetually.*
 - ii) Stated positively—74:20
 - (1) He reminds God of His covenant with Israel—74:20 ²⁰ *Consider the covenant,*
 - (2) Why? *for the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence.*
 - c) He longs for God to be praised—74:21
 - i) Stated negatively—²¹ *Do not let the oppressed return in shame;*
 - ii) Restated positively—*let the afflicted and needy praise Your name.*
 - d) He asks God to judge Babylon for their attitude—74:22-23
 - It is God Himself who is under attack and whose enemies mock Him with ever-increasing noise. (Grogan)
 - Their mockery is of God's power and plan; and so in their premature thinking their victory over Israel was a victory over Israel's weak God. Little did they know that God allowed them to do this as part of his plan. (Ross)
 - i) ²² *Arise, O God, defend Your cause;*
 - (1) Restated—*remember Your taunting from the foolish [nabal] man all the day.*
 - ii) ²³ *Do not forget the voice of Your adversaries;*
 - (1) Restated—*the uproar of those who rise up against You, which ascends* ⑤ *perpetually.*

- e) The answer to these prayers is explained in the next psalm (75).
- 5) Points for us to remember
- a) When God's people and God institutions are devastated by ruthless enemies, the faithful can only plead with God to fulfill all his promises and vindicate his name by his mighty power over this pagan world, just as he has done time and time again since the creation. (Ross)