

“WHY HAVE YOU REJECTED US FOREVER?”

PSALM 74:1-3—Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

The psalmist expresses his dismay with the apparent lack of protection and safety from God on behalf of His people and His city and temple. Several features are prominently displayed in this psalm:

- 1) Israel is the special covenant people of God living in the land given them by God.
- 2) Their temple is the special place of God’s worship where he has manifested His presence.
- 3) A vicious and uncaring enemy has attacked God’s inheritance and people—not sparing even the temple; God’s “name”, reputation, and glory have been assaulted by these enemies who have “reviled” God himself.
- 4) God has permitted this to occur and has apparently done nothing to remedy the situation.
- 5) Much time has passed and circumstances have not improved—the emphasis throughout is on “forever.”
- 6) All of these circumstances do not seem to square with the past historical circumstances of God’s mighty actions in creation, Exodus of His people from Egypt, providential provision for them in the wilderness, and settlement of them in the Promised Land.
- 7) Therefore, the psalm focuses on the need for God to establish the righteousness of His nature, character, and past works in connection with current circumstances.
- 8) This psalm appropriately follows Psalm 73, for the real question is still why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer?

I. THE QUESTIONS OF THE PSALMIST—WHY? (v. 1)

God’s people often ask “Why?” At least the psalmist is correct to take his questions directly to the divine source. Here the psalmist has **three** concerns about God’s behavior:

- A. God has rejected. It appears settled.
- B. God’ anger smokes.
- C. God’s rejection seems “forever” and the smoke continues rising. The psalmist repeats this word **three** more times in this psalm in vv. 3, 10, and 19. the words “How long” also stress the enduring nature of their rejection (v. 10), as does the word “continually” in v. 23. In stark contrast with the seeming ever enduring rejection is the **ancientness** of God’s selection of His people and establishment of His covenant with them as seem in the expression “of old” (vv. 2, 12).

But, the psalmist is also concerned about the people to whom such rejection and anger is directed:

- D. “The sheep of Thy pasture”. The noun pasture may also be rendered “pasturing.”
 1. Both words are used of literal sheep and pasture in Scripture, but are at times used for people.
 2. Here God Himself feeds, waters, protects, and guides his flock (see Psalm 23).
 3. How incongruous to the psalmist that the Shepherd should allow the flock under his care and protection to be treated the way they have by a vicious enemy; after all, a shepherd had the responsibility to guard against wolves, bears, dogs, and any other predator including people!

This incongruity becomes even more pronounced when we listen to the psalmist’s words in v. 2.

II. GOD’S PAST RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS PEOPLE (2)

Every expression of v. 2 adds to the sting felt by the psalmist:

- A. “Remember your congregation”. A “congregation” is a company assembled together by appointment. The Lord Himself had assembled this company when instituting the nation at Mount Sinai. Now, it seemed to the psalmist, God was not remembering his people; they had been scattered by the enemy.
- B. “Which You have purchased of old.”
 1. God had “gotten/purchased” his people by His mighty acts of power exerted in the Exodus.
 2. Moreover, this purchase had been “of old”—in fact nearly 900 years previous. How could He after all this time back out on His covenant and cease defending and protecting His people?

- C. “Which You have redeemed”. This purchasing was by way of “redemption.”
 1. The verb is used in the OT of the “kinsman redeemer” who was responsible to redeem a near relative from debt and slavery through buying back his land, possessions, or person, and even when necessary marrying one who needed spousal protection.
 2. In relation to Israel this verb speaks of God’s redemption of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The psalmist wonders how God can ignore the relationship He had established with His people.
- D. “The tribe of your inheritance.” Israel had 12 tribes of the sons of Jacob, but in one sense all of them combined were his “tribe”; but the tribe of Judah from whom David had descended is especially in view
 1. Israel had received “inheritance” from God—especially their land, possessions, privileges as his son.
 2. But at the same time, Israel was God’s inheritance—they were His special people whom he owned and cherished. How could He forsake them now?
- E. “This Mount Zion.” Think of the historical connections alluded to with these words.
 1. Originally Zion was the high point in the city of David in the southern part of the east hill of Jerusalem, but later it came to especially refer to the temple mount—even to the city of Jerusalem.
 2. The place of the temple had special holy associations from Abraham’s offer of his son Isaac on Mt Moriah, and from David’s purchase of the site and his offer sacrifice to Yahweh. Solomon built the temple there. With such special associations, how could God forsake it and allow its devastation?
- F. “Where you have dwelt.”
 1. Moreover, there God had chosen to dwell in His temple among his people—above the ark in the Holy of Holies. Would He no longer dwell with them?
 2. The verb is the root of the noun “tabernacle” where God had dwelt among the people in the wilderness and once in the Promised Land until the days of Solomon.

III. THE CURRENT SUFFERINGS OF HIS PEOPLE (3)

A. The Need to hear God’s Footsteps

The city was now in ruins and there was not much sound of “footsteps”—especially those of God in the midst of his people. Since Zion was high on a hill, and since there were many rocks and rubble over which to climb, the psalmist asks God to “raise, lift” His feet—indicating the reestablishment of His divine presence—toward the ruins that seem perpetual. . The city needs to hear these footfalls once more as an indication that the Lord has returned to His people.

B. The “sanctuary” itself was destroyed and bereft of its inhabitant, for the enemy had destroyed it in the ruination of the city. The whole city had been destroyed, but the sanctuary is singled out as the most devastating loss to the people, for God’s presence had been manifested there. The noun means “holy place,” the place set apart for His worship and made sacred by His presence.

C. The “enemy” is in control—the Babylonians as seen in II Kings—and has “destroyed everything. The verb “destroyed” literally means “to do evil, hurt.”

The next verses through verse 11 elaborate of the ruination of the nation—especially of the sanctuary. The destruction of the temple was a powerful shock to Judah.

CONCLUSION

Why, O God do we suffer so? We have had such a glorious past!

It is possible for believers to ruin the earthly spiritual heritage and to ruin their lives, living in misery.

When this happens, the problem is not with God but with us!

Why, because of sin and rebellion, disobedience and stubborn clinging to our own ways.

When will we wake up and turn back to God so that He may bless us again?

O, that we might be restored to our glorious relationship with God in Christ and live in victory!

Often our sufferings are brought on by ourselves and are not simply trials for obedient children.

YOU MUST SUBMIT TO THE CHASTENING HAND OF GOD AND TRUST HIM EVEN WHEN LIFE MAKES NO SENSE.