



Psalm 74

# WHY DOES GOD ALLOW HIS PEOPLE TO SUFFER?

Book III, composed of seventeen psalms [73-89], introduces a quite different perspective on the life of God's redeemed people. No longer is the focus on the person of David and his constant struggle as he seeks to establish his throne despite the incessant attacks of his foes. This book deals much more extensively with the corporate community of the people of God and its **devastation** by international forces. ...The predominant message is the stunning defeat of God's people as they face these powerful forces of foreign nations. The book concludes dramatically with the throne and crown of the Davidic king cast into the dust (89:38-39, 44).

—O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms*

An overview of the themes of the five books of the Psalms:

- Psalms 1-41: Opposition to God's Anointed King
- Psalms 42-72: Communication to the Nations
- Psalms 73-89: Devastation and Despair of God's People
- Psalms 90-106: Faith in God's Sovereign Kingship
- Psalms 107-150: Consummation and Celebration!

Psalm 73 describes the struggle of a believer looking at the power and prosperity of the ungodly. Psalm 74 describes the struggle of the redeemed community still reeling from the utter devastation of their nation. Written by the sons of Asaph (cf. Ezra 2:41; 3:10), this psalm describes the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

## THE PROBLEM — The Destruction of Jerusalem (74:1-11)

- The Distressed Question

*Why have You allowed such destruction to fall on Your people, the sheep of Your pasture (cf. Psalm 95:7; 100:3)?*

- The Desperate Plea

\_\_\_\_\_ that we are Your people!

\_\_\_\_\_ to see what the enemy has done to us!

- The Devastating Destruction

*What happened?* (2 Kings 25:1-15)

*Why did it happen?* (2 Chronicles 36:11-21)

*What was the result?* (Lamentations)

*The temple has been violated. The key symbol of life has been lost. Things in all parts of life fall apart—precisely because the center has not held. This psalm of protest and grief does not concern simply a historical invasion and the loss of a building. It speaks about the violation of the sacral key to all reality, the glue that holds the world together.*

—Walter Brueggemann

*If you want one simple word to symbolize all of Jewish history, that word would be "Jerusalem."*

—Theodor Kollek

*This psalm was probably written fifteen or twenty years after the destruction of Jerusalem.*

—A.F. Kirkpatrick

*The enemy would not stop with the single sanctuary which was at Jerusalem; it would include every place that had become sacred by past associations.*

—H.C. Leupold

*Jewish tradition states that the Messiah will appear on Tisha B'Av, and the day of mourning will become a national day of rejoicing with the rebuilt Temple.*

—Thomas Ice

- The Deafening Silence

If written several years after 586 BC, then the people in the land would have been without a prophet as Ezekiel was in Babylon and Jeremiah had been taken to Egypt (cf. Jer. 43:1-7). The prophecy of a 70-year captivity was unknown to them (Jer. 25:1-11).

## THE PRAISE — The Sovereign Kingship of God (74:12-17)

*God is working salvation in the midst of the earth...*

- God divided the sea by His strength (Exodus 14:21-22).
- God crushed the heads of \_\_\_\_\_ (cf. Gen. 3:15; Job 41; Is. 27:1, 51:9-11; Ps. 110:5-6; Rev. 12:1-17).
- God opened up fountains and floods (Ex. 17:5; Ps. 105:41).
- God dried up mighty rivers (Joshua 3:13-17).
- God rules the day and the night (Genesis 1:14-18).
- God sets all the boundaries of the earth (Deuteronomy 32:8; Acts 17:26).
- God determines the seasons (Gen. 8:22; Eccl. 3:1; 7:14).

*And He is \_\_\_\_\_!*

## THE PRAYER — Defend Your glory and Your people! (74:18-23)

- Display Your justice toward the \_\_\_\_\_.
- Display Your grace toward the \_\_\_\_\_.

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- What do you remember about 9/11? How did this day affect you? (If you were too young to remember, ask someone older.)
- What does it mean to declare God as your sovereign King? What would it mean in your life personally?
- Make a commitment to pray on your knees each day for our church, our nation, and for the persecuted church worldwide.

*Israel uses creation and the Red Sea event as prisms through each of which it looks at the other. YHWH acted with might and delivered and established kingly authority in both events.*

—John Goldingay

In Hebrew, the pronoun “You” is used seven times in 74:12-17.

**Sea serpents.** Hebrew, *tannin*, “dragon, serpent, sea monster.”

**Leviathan** (Hebrew). Probably from a root meaning “twisted, coiled.” It seems to refer to a serpent, sea creature, or dragon.

*The authors of the Bible regard the enemies of the people of God as those whose heads, like the head of the Serpent (the father of lies), will be crushed. Those who are understood as opposing the purposes of God and his people appear to be regarded as the seed of the serpent.*

—James Hamilton

*The majority opinion understands Leviathan to be a natural creature, probably a crocodile. On the other hand, a few commentators take Leviathan to be a primeval, supernatural evil...a terrible evil loose in the world that YHWH promises to defeat—but that he has not defeated yet.*

—Eric Ortlund

*When he says that leviathan was given for food to the Israelites in the wilderness, there is a beautiful allusion to the destruction of Pharaoh and his host. ...For when their enemies were destroyed, the quiet and security which the people in consequence enjoyed served, so to speak, as food to prolong their life.* —John Calvin