

# Psalms of Asaph



by

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## Psalms of Asaph 1.0



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# Preface

*“Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart” – Psalm 73:1*

We usually think of the Book of Psalms as written by David, but there were other contributors. Twelve psalms are said to be penned by Asaph who was a Levite. Possibly this was a family of musical Levites in charge of the hymns of Israel. Having their own conflicts with God, they left us their lessons of faith. The Spirit of God was pleased to use Asaph to instruct us on how to walk with God.

# Psalms of Asaph

Source: Commentary on the Book of Psalms. Form #17.074

NikeInsights: <https://nikeinsights.famguardian.org/publications>

Songs of Asaph: 50, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83



# Psalm 50 - Prayer as a Legal Pleading

*Psalm 50:15 "And call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me."*



A child of God will never know God's strength until he has met adversity.

Trouble may be the black horse upon which blessing rides.

You can find Christ in an empty wallet but He is seldom found in a cash box. There is something about difficulty that causes us to dig deeper, pray better, and work harder. Out of the darkness white lilies grow.

At one stage in my ministry, I was unfairly sued for five million dollars along with my Christian friend in retaliation for doing my duty as a minister of Christ. Though I did nothing wrong, I was concerned.

I found myself spending hours at the library reading frantically through law books to figure out how to defend myself. My whole life was turned upside down. I did not understand legalese (lawyer talk), comprehend procedure, or know diddly-squat about courts and judges.

With the help of my lawyer friend, I scratched out "an answer to the complaint," "a motion to dismiss," "a counter complaint," and "a motion for summary judgment." Over a few months my knowledge of shuffling legal cards increased and my confidence grew. On the day of my hearing, I presented my defense and the judge dismissed all charges against me because the plaintiff's accusations were divorced from the facts. But, the judge sustained my counter complaint! What an ordeal! What an education!

One thing I learned is that prayer is much like a legal pleading, and if you will learn to plead your case properly before the High Court of Heaven, your prayers can be more effective.

## **The Standing of the Righteous**

You can prevail in prayer in the day of trouble by properly pleading your case.

### **Plead your Obedience to the Summons**

*Psalm 50:1 <A Psalm of Asaph.>*

*1 The mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. 2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. 3 Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. 4 He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that*

*he may judge his people. 5 Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.*

“The Mighty God even the Lord” speaks and summons the earth . . . that He may judge his people.

His summons is an authoritative citation ordering a defendant into court to face a charge . . . or to receive justice due.

Right or wrong, true or false, convenient or inconvenient, if the defendant does not show up for court, presumption of guilt prevails and the plaintiff will be awarded a judgment.

It is the Judge, the Might One (El), God (Elohim), the Lord (YHWH) who issues the summons. It must be obeyed!

A summons from God is not optional. When we come before the Throne of Grace, we are not there because of human presumption, but by Divine command. Prayer is not man’s invention, man’s prerogative, or man’s contrivance. Prayer is simply obedience to an Order of the Court, and we would do well to honor it. Failure to appear shows contempt of court. It also creates a presumption of guilt. Furthermore, failure to appear can result in a heavenly bench warrant. When you pray, acknowledge that you are before the Bench in response to His summons.

### **Plead the Power of the Court**

The said purpose of the summons is stated: *“that He may judge His people.”*

A judge not only condemns, he justifies; he not only punishes offenders, he protects victims. In the Book of Judges, Israel’s judges rose up to defend the nation against foreign powers that had enslaved them. Moreover, there is forgiveness in this court. This judge is a savior, not an accuser; a victor rather than a villain; a warrior king rather than a wailing prosecutor. The purpose of this summons is for protection. The judge intends to bless, not condemn.

Yes, the Judge has a complaint against His people, but his purpose is to remove the offense in order to bless His people. Selah.

No claim is charged against His people. He is an advocate, not an adversarial witness.

### **Plead the Proper Party**

*5 Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. 6 And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.*

A hearing before a court cannot occur unless the proper parties are present and there is “a ratification of commencement. A proper party is one who has an inherent interest in the subject-matter of the litigation. In fact, ratification of commencement ought to be the first order of business in any court (Rule 17).

Here God calls upon His people to appear in His Court. He calls them, "His consecrated ones" (godly ones) and those "who made a covenant with Him." Who are you? Are you one of His people in His kingdom jurisdiction? Have you made a covenant with Him? Are you a Party Injured?

If your answer is "yes," you are the Proper Party and you have a right to appear and motion the Court to provide a remedy. God has set His love upon you, elected you before the foundation of the world, and washed you in the blood of the Lamb. Surely, of all people, you have a right to move the Court for injunctive relief.

If you are not "godly" and are not a partaker of the "new covenant," then you are not the Proper Party and you have no right to approach the Bench of Almighty God! You are in the wrong jurisdiction. Stop praying and go to your god-government for a remedy.

### **Plead In Personam Jurisdiction of the Court**

*Psalm 50:7 "Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God."*

Jurisdiction is a term of paramount importance. It determines the powers of the courts to inquire into facts, apply laws, make decisions, and declare a judgment. It is the first issue to be decided in any case. Does the court have the authority to hear the case? An American living in the U.S.A. has no duty to the laws of Russia. A New York Court cannot try a Delaware resident. A federal court has no jurisdiction over a private Citizen. A State court only has jurisdiction over state officers, state corporations, and other jural persons.

"Hear, O my people" - God commands because He has in personam jurisdiction over His people. Heaven's Court has jurisdiction over "the earth" (50:1), "the east and west" (50:2), "Zion" (50:2), the "heavens" (50:4), "his people" (50:4), and the "saints" (50:5), but the "wicked" have no right to petition the Honorable Court (50:16). If you are God's child, the Court has jurisdiction over you and all subject matter. You have a right to plead your case before the Judge.

The word "against" means "surrounding your concerns." God is **not** an opponent or adversary. He is an Advocate-Witness, **not** a prosecutor.

Furthermore, He has subject matter jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to His law and His people. And, He has territorial jurisdiction seeing that the "earth is the Lord's and the people thereof" (Psalm 24:1).

The Judge claims his power to "testify against thee," **but** there is no claim, no indictment, and no accusation mentioned in this case . . . or throughout this summons-psalm. Though deeply flawed, the sins of the people are not mentioned in this Court. How can they? The Son paid for all those sins at the cross and then made his people "perfect" forever through His one perfect sacrifice at the cross (Hebrews 10). All of God's people have a righteous standing (justified) in this Court (Romans 3:21-28; 4:5; 5:1).



## **Plead the Competence of the Court**

*8 I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me. 9 I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. 10 For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. 11 I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. 12 If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. 13 Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?*

The Judge is omniscient. He knows all things. He knows all the birds in the air and all the beasts in the fields. Justice is His profession. He wrongs no man, and He cannot be bribed.

The purpose of coming into court is not to be charged and rebuked. The text says, "I will **not** testify against thee."

## **Plead with Honor and "clean hands" to the Court**

*Psalm 50:14 Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:*

The imperative "offer" (shabah) means "to sacrifice," "slaughter," or "kill" — a reference to worship and devotion.

The word "thanksgiving" (todah) means "to throw up the hands" as in praise or as in taking an oath of devotion to the Lord.

The Hebrew word for "pay" is *shalam*. It means "to deliver one's self from faults", "to surrender," or "to submit" one's self to the authority of the LORD God. Since God summons his people to Court, the word "pay" implies "surrender" to His jurisdiction — to His authority as Judge.

The name of this Judge is the "Most High" in English and *elyown* in Hebrew. Since there are many gods and many jurisdictions with differing laws and rules, God is calling men to recognize Elohim as the Most High God, the "Possessor of Heaven and Earth," the God of Mechizedek and Abraham (Genesis 14:18; Deuteronomy 28:1) — the One Sitting in the 'Upper Chambers' of this Court.

## **Plead the Order**

*15 And call upon me . . .*

The Court has ordered you to "Call . . . in the day of trouble" (50:15).

By calling, you are not being a pest or a nuisance. You are not an inconvenience. A judge's order must be obeyed! Prayer is the proper way of motioning the Court to act. David motioned the Court, "Hear my prayer," a Qal command in Hebrew (Psalm 4:1). It is no mistake that the language of prayer is in the imperative. The petitioner respectfully moves the Court to honor this motion.

His Court is never closed. Never too busy; never over scheduled; never bogged down with cases. He has commanded you to come. An order of the Court is not to be ignored. Would He have delivered the summons if He did not intend to honor the purpose of it?

### **Plead the Character of the Judge**

*“ . . . call upon me . . . ”*

In our country the courts are considered incorruptible, and they are! The judges sitting on the bench, however, are very flawed, fractured, biased administrators.

But, not so with Heaven’s Judge. He is too good to be corrupted; too righteous to be partial; too holy to be tainted; too just to be unfair; too gracious to be critical of what may appear to be petty concerns of imperfect prayers and imperfect devotion. Come before His Majesty and say, “Lord, I appeal to You who are too great to change, too good to lie, too compassionate to overlook my plight . . . I pray you would . . .”

The Judge is not poor. “Every creature in the forest” and “every bird in the mountains” and “the cattle on a thousand hills” are His (Psalm 50:1-12).

The Judge is not stubborn and unwilling. He has commanded you to “Call.”

The Judge is not unable, “for nothing shall be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). If necessary, He will shake heaven and earth to come to your rescue. He will provide a path through your Red Sea.

### **Plead the Opportunity**

*. . . me in the day of trouble:*

Trouble is an opportunity. God cannot deliver a man who is not in trouble, or heal a man who is not sick, enrich a man who is not poor, or forgive a man who is not sinful. Trouble gives you the right to expedite your case; the right for special considerations; and, the right to waive honorable court rules.

Illustration: Do you remember the elections of 1990 when Bush defeated Gore in Florida by only a few hundred votes? Lawyers challenged the election process and motioned the Supreme Court to expedite their case because of the election crisis. The Court dispensed with special publication rules. Instead, the lawyers submitted their briefs on regular 8 ½ x 11 paper.

Likewise, if you are in a day of trouble, surely, the Court will waive certain expectations. You haven’t time to tweak your prayers and adjust your motions. Just get into the Courtroom and plead your cause. The day of trouble is a day of opportunity.

### **Plead the Time**

*“ . . . call upon me in the day of trouble.”*

Trouble happens to all men. When trouble knocks on the door, it is time to pray.

When you prey to the Court you are obeying His Order!!

Maybe you have a wayward son, or in a health crisis, or financial need. Yesterday, you were not in trouble. Today you need deliverance. Tomorrow will be too late. If it is a midnight hour and there are only a few grains left in the hourglass, then plead the time — the day of trouble.

### **Plead the Promise**

*“ . . . I will deliver thee.”*

The text says, “ Call . . . and I will deliver you.” The word, “deliver” (chalats) is a Piel verb meaning that extra intensity is intended in the deliverance.

The word “deliver” means “to draw out.” It is translated “tear out the stones” in Leviticus 14:40 supplying the imagery of removing difficult, heavy problems. It is translated “watered garden” in Isaiah 58:11 implying that God will refresh the weary soul. It is translated “to present the breast” in Lamentations 4:3. The imagery here is of nursing mother pulling out her breast to give her crying baby milk to drink and comfort to feel.

The phrase “I will” certifies, verifies, and validates the Judge will honor His promise. He Who is holy and just, can be nothing but faithful and true.

The fact that the Judge will deliver is forever settled – *Furthermore saith not!* The gavel comes down and the matter is settled.

But, what is not settled is the “when” of the deliverance.

For this, the supplicant trusted Wisdom of the Court, for the “spirit of wisdom and understanding” are upon Him (Isaiah 11:2). God is seldom early, never late, and always on time.

### **Plead the Proper Object**

*Psalm 50:15 “I will deliver You.”*

Will He deliver everyone else, but not me?

The “you” in this verse refers back to “his people,” “my consecrated ones,” “my people” and to “Israel” (Psalm 50:4, 5, 7).

You who have put your faith in Christ, are you not a son of Abraham (Galatians 3:7)? Are you not a member of the “called out ones,” the true Israel of God (Matthew 16:16; Romans 9:6)? Having received Christ are you not now His child (John 1:12-13)? Maybe, He will not answer the wicked, but surely He will answer you, a member of His family. Maybe, He will not answer the backsliding Christian, but surely He will answer You -- the one who is walking with integrity.

You may say, "But I am flawed. How can God answer me?" Even better! Plead your weakness. It was to an imperfect, flawed, fractured ritualistic people to whom the promise was given (50:8-14). Did not God say to the ailing apostle, "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9)?

He does not answer the prayers of perfect people . . . because there are none. Only Jesus is all-good. He answers the prayers of humble, repentant sinners; and, His responsible, obedient sons and daughters.

### **Plead the Purpose of the Court**

*50:15 " . . . I will deliver you, but you shall glorify Me."*

You can have the deliverance, but God must have the glory. You can have your health, but God must have the honor. You can have your win, but God must receive the worship. You can have your pardon, but God must have the praise. If you are a thief of God's glory, how can He honor His promise to deliver?

The only uncertain thing about this promise is the "When?" While we wait for God to work, we wait in darkness where the white lilies grow.

### **The Lack of Standing of the Unrighteous**

*16 But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? 17 Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. 18 When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. 19 Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. 20 Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. 21 These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. 22 Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.*

The Judge does not operate on presumption. God hears the prayers of sinners, but the self-righteous, proud, and lawless have no standing in His Court.

### **Plead with Thanksgiving for Giving Thanks Glorifies God**

*50:23 Whoso offereth (todah) praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth (suwm) his conversation (derek – way) aright will I shew the salvation (yesha) of God.*

Every pleading must honor the court. Praising God and speaking well of Him, glorifies Him. The Devil hates it; God loves it. Praise acts like incense carrying our weak, flawed prayers to Heaven.

Note the promise of the Court. The one who approaches the court with respect and honor can expect to see "the salvation of God" in relation to his trouble.

## Does God delay?

He did with Mary's prayer for her sick brother (John 11). But, maybe a resurrected Lazarus could bring Him more glory than a recovered Lazarus?

Did God wait 14 years to answer the prayer of aging Abraham? Maybe, a child from an old man and an old woman could bring Him more glory than the gift of a child to a young bride.

Did Jacob's plea for protection and prosperity happen in the first year of his departure from Canaan? Maybe, an impoverished patriarch with no commodities, two wives, and eleven children could bring Him more glory than a wealthy single bachelor.

After defeating Goliath, could not God have made David king of Israel? Maybe, an innocent but vilified fugitive seasoned by years of hardship would make a better king than a naïve boyhood-king.

"Out of the Darkness

Out of the dark forbidding soil

The pure white lilies grow.

Out of the black and murky clouds,

Descends the stainless snow.

Out of the crawling earth-bound worm

A butterfly is born.

Out of the somber shrouded night,

Behold! A golden morn!

Out of the pain and stress of life,

The peace of God pours down.

Out of the nails — the spear — the cross,

Redemption — and a crown! (Source Unknown).

It is not a mistake that a pleading is called "a prayer" in court. Prayer is much like a legal pleading, and if you will learn to plead your case properly before the High Court of Heaven, your prayers can prevail.

Personal note: On that five million dollar lawsuit. We entered into negotiations and I came away from the bargaining table with a handsome settlement. Six weeks later, my adversary declared bankruptcy but called me and promised to pay. A year later the man's wife died. But,

he sent me letters letting me know he would pay me. I wrote him a letter cancelling the entire debt encouraging Him to find consolation in Christ. Writing back, he expressed profound thankfulness and wonderment in what he called “an amazing Christian expression of love and forgiveness.”

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**Notes:**

There is more to this psalm which is worthy of study: For example:

## **The Lack of Standing of the Unrighteous**

### **Claim the Judges sanction of the wicked**

The Bible contains two grand themes: The Day of Salvation, and the Day of Judgment; the baptism of the Spirit, and the baptism of wrath (John in Matthew 3); the exoneration of believers, and the condemnation of unbelievers; access to God by men of faith, and rejection for those without faith (John 3:36). Likewise, Psalm 50 presents two themes: the advantages of the righteous, and the disadvantages of the wicked; or, the standing of the righteous (50:1-15), and lack of standing of the unrighteous (50:16-23);

### **The Wicked have no standing in this Court**

*Psalm 50:16 But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?*

### **The Wicked despise authority and violate the 1st Commandment**

*17 Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.*

The wicked have no standing in this Supreme Court, rights or privileges in this Court, but his “righteous” ones do.

The Wicked consent to crimes and are involved in a conspiracy to commit evil in violation of the 7th & 8th Commandment.

*18 When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers.*

### **The Wicked commit fraud in violation of the 9th Commandment**

*19 Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit.*

### **The wicked lie and commit murder in violation of the 6th and 9th Commandment**

*20 Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son.*

## **The wicked error in their theology**

*21 These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.*

## **The wicked are under command to acknowledge His authority and to submit to His law-order**

*22 Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.*

God promises salvation to those that acknowledge His sovereignty and surrender to His authority

*23 Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.*

Every pleading must honor the court. Praising God and speaking well of Him, glorifies Him. The Devil hates it; God loves it. Praise is like incense carrying our weak, flawed prayers to Heaven.

Note the promise of the Court. The one who approaches the court with respect and honor can expect to see “the salvation of God” in relation to his trouble.

Praise not only glorifies God, it opens the door for success (salvation).

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Out of the black and murky clouds,

Descends the stainless snow.  
Out of the crawling earth-bound worm  
A butterfly is born.  
Out of the somber shrouded night,  
Behold! A golden morn!  
Out of the pain and stress of life,  
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Redemption — and a crown! (Source Unknown).

It is not a mistake that a pleading is called, “a prayer” in court. Prayer is much like a legal pleading, and if you will learn to plead your case properly before the High Court of Heaven, your prayers can prevail. Furthermore, saith naught . . . well, almost.

Personal note: On that five million dollar lawsuit. We entered into negotiations and I came away from the bargaining table with a handsome settlement. Six weeks later, my adversary declared bankruptcy but called me and promised to pay. A year later the man’s wife died. But, he sent me letters letting me know he would pay me. I wrote him a letter cancelling the entire debt encouraging Him to find consolation in Christ. Writing back, he expressed profound thankfulness and wonderment in what he called “an amazing Christian expression of love and forgiveness.”



# Psalm 73 - Wrestling with Regret

*For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*



This psalm begins the third book of the psalms which is characterized by strong Levitical themes.

It is one of 12 psalms attributed to Asaph — most likely the Levitical composer of these psalms.

It is the story of a Levite who chose to walk a holy path in order to please his Lord. Saying “No” to temptation, this pilgrim was overcome with envy, doubt, and regret.

Filed with a constellation of troubles called “God problems,” darkness blocked out the light. When he saw the prosperity of law breakers, He questioned his choice of strict obedience to the law, and began to edit his own soul.

“We have in this psalm the record of the Psalmist’s struggle with the great standing difficulty of how to reconcile the unequal distribution of worldly prosperity with the wisdom and providence of God” (MacLaren).

The psalm is about a pious man’s spiritual struggle, his wrestling match with doubt, and his victory through faith by going deeper into truth — truth connected with the temple.

His struggle is our struggle. The man who picks up his cross to follow Christ walks in the shadow of death while other men seem to bask in the sunshine of the “high life.”

If you are disturbed by the expansion of anarchy and your growing difficulties, this psalm is for you.

So human is this struggle, and so glorious its conclusion, the Levite penned a poem to commemorate his journey so others could learn from his experience. In a conspiracy of silence surrounding the neglect of God, truth sounds like cannon fire.

## *The Psalmist’s Conclusion*

The author states the conclusion of his spiritual journey first.

*73:1 (A Psalm of Asaph.) Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.*

Asaph states his conclusion first: “God is good to Israel.”

“God is good to Israel” should be preceded by the adverb “surely,” “truly,” or “yet.” The idea here is that the psalmist was thinking about the holiness of God and the sins of the people . . .

that God is good to the righteous in heart and concluded, “Yet, God is good to Israel” — a blemished people. Even though Israel was not as pure as the driven snow, God was still good to the nation; that is, they were still beneficiaries of His grace, goodness, and mercy.

While practicing righteousness does not save the soul, the Lord is a friend to the righteous — in this case God was good to Israel, a flawed, fractured, fallible people who struggled with the call to righteousness.

“Good thoughts of God will fortify against Satan’s temptations” (Matthew Henry).

### *The Psalmist’s Confession*

#### *2 But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.*

Asaph was a Levite in the priestly class; a man with all the ambitions of manly males: the desire to conquer, provide, control, and succeed in life. But, he was also a sinful man who faced all the temptations that men face: avarice, envy, lust and the like.

Asaph humbles himself and talks personally about the state of his own soul. Though he trusted God, he almost stumbled . . . almost slipped; that is, he came close to allowing doubt and jealousy to conquer his soul and to join the dark side. Rubbed raw by the prosperity of the wicked (v. 3), he almost changed course. Instead of being a pillar of faithfulness, his soul became malleable like water.

Even the best of saints in their humble state have their confidence tested when they see the wicked eating filet mignon and themselves scrounging for crumbs; when they see the ambitious wearing the finest of clothes and they themselves repairing holes in their socks. The faith of good Christian men comes to a breaking point during times of hardship and trouble. It is hard to believe God is good when the cupboards are empty and children are crying for hunger . . . and, yet, many a servant of God has stared at poverty and “faked” assurance that God is good and will provide.

#### *3 For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

“envious” (qana) means “jealous” — a state of being extremely covetous of another’s prosperity.

Those bad men should prosper and good men should suffer grated against Asp’s soul.

Shakespeare: In Othello, Iago warns Othello: “Beware, my lord, of jealousy; it is the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on.” Thus, we get the phrase, “green with envy” — the art of counting the other fellow’s blessings instead of our own — one of the seven deadly sins. Jealousy and regret are not minor flaws like dandruff in the soul. Rather, it is more like having a knife in the lungs. If not removed, it will drive your soul to rest under the Poisonous Tree.

“foolish” is another word for sinners — a person who lacks good judgment — who fails to factor in eternal matters in choosing his course during this life. Fools rise to positions of power and the foolish world loves them. And, they seem to have a Midas touch where everything turns to gold.

The word “prosperity” (shalom) means “the peace of the wicked” more than it does the accumulation of assets; in part because of their security in shekels, and in part because of the lack of trouble they experience in climbing up “the ladder of success.”

To his credit, Asaph owns his sin of regret and takes responsibility for it. In taking the problem to the Lord, he found a remedy.

### **Ease in death**

*4 For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.*

The word “bands” means cords, ropes, chains, or pangs. From Asaph’s perspective these prosperous Cretans enjoyed a life of ease. Even their death was painless. They die as they lived free from misfortune and worry.

“but their strength is firm” — They were not weakened by disease or financial troubles. They had no downs — only “ups”; that is, they had the “tiger by the tail” and lived without fear.

### **Fewer troubles**

*5 They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.*

Most people struggle with finances . . . employment . . . housing . . . health . . . and providing for their families, but not these prats. They did not share the financial and relational struggles of the pious . . . of the working man . . . of the laborer. They seemed to rise above the grit and grim sliding into power without resistance. They had no callouses on their hands and yet they prospered. With bank accounts and cupboards full they enjoyed a life free of fear . . . of poverty . . . of obscurity . . . of serious health problems.

### **Pride**

*6 Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.*

“chain” and “garment” are metaphors depicting their bondage to pride. The use of the word “violence” indicates how they became prosperous — through fraud, corruption, and the strong arm tactics of extortionists.

While Asaph was struggling to put food on the table and doubting his calling, these wealthy villains were bursting with self-confidence, sporting a positive attitude, and oozing with self-esteem. Because they enjoyed the comforts of life, pride stood out like a pearl necklace on a black hog.

### **Plenty**

*7 Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.*

“fatness” — The idea here is that they had no wants, no worries, no troubles, and no concerns about where the next meal was coming from. Their fat faces revealed they had a full stomach, stood portly with no health problems, and that they were in total control of their destiny.

“They have more than heart could wish:” The verb “have more” is better translated “to pass over.” It most likely means that there were no obstructions, no hindrances, or obstacles standing in the way of their ambitions; their success came easily; their purposes were accomplished as easily as passing the salt across the table.

**Pomposity**

*8 They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.*

Asaph wants us to know the kind of people he envied and how close his soul was to ruin. He did not envy God’s humble servants, but corrupt, depraved men — scoffers, doubters, skeptics, mockers — violent men who thought nothing of crushing another man’s life as they climbed the “ladder of success.”

The word “corrupt” means “to mock or to jeer.”

“speak wickedly” means “badness” (ra): mocking, jest, threats, intimidation, extortion, hounding, hoarding, terrorizing, harassment, badgering, and derogatory speech.

“oppression” means “to extort money” or to “injure” someone in the process of achieving goals.

*9 They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.*

“set their mouth against heaven” refers to bragging, boasting, bitter invectives; blasphemy, sacrilege, impiety, irreverence, mocking, and profanity.

*10 Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.*

“Therefore his people return hither” -- refers to the popularity gained by self-applause. Ellicott comments, “a cup full of adulation and flattery are sucked out by them.” Benson takes another course, “the prosperity of the wicked, are sore grieved, and enforced to shed tears in abundance.”

The word “are wrung out” (mātsah) - means to “suck” or “to suck out” implying to drink vigorously . . . of an intoxicating cup (Benson). Perhaps, the idea here is one of unrestrained greed and addiction.

**Critical of the Christian faith**

*11 And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?*

Asaph, after waking up to the nature of these boasters observed they possessed a low view of God; that is, they questioned His omniscience . . . not to learn, but to cast doubt and to infect others with unbelief.

### **Prosperity**

*12 Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.*

Asaph appears to be ashamed of his spiritual weakness for envying the ungodly and their wealth. Here we see a good man perplexed and embarrassed by the fact that the wicked are prosperous and happy (Barnes).

### *The Psalmist's Confession of Regret*

*13 Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence.*

Consider the clean hands doctrine: The psalmist claims he injured no man; that he acted ethically, equitably, and in good faith. In contrast, the “wicked” acted injuriously, unethically, and in bad faith toward their fellow man.

In stating he washed his hands in innocence, the psalmist claims that he took steps to get right with God and to be reconciled to Him as required by Levitical law. The question that interrupted the silence was, “Why aren’t I prospering?” “Since I follow the Lord, while is my life filled with so many struggles?”

### **The Reason for his Regret**

*14 For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.*

Shouldn’t righteous men have fewer troubles than the proud? Even though the psalmist walked in obedience, he seemed to have more problems than ordinary men . . . and these set of problems were like a “burr under his saddle.”

We owe Asaph for accurately depicting the nature of a godly life: troubles . . . pains . . . difficulties . . . struggles . . . insecurity . . . poverty . . . a life of prayer . . . of insecurities . . . of rejection . . . of silence . . . of loneliness; and, all for taking up the cross to follow Christ.

“chastened every morning” has truth in it, but may be a bit exaggerated. His mercies are also new every morning. Nevertheless, this is the way he truly felt.

### **Why the Psalmist did not Speak about his Doubts**

*15 If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.*

Of a truth, a man struggling with doubt cannot share his fears with other believers because they do not have the capacity to understand nor can they be trusted to guard privileged information with care and integrity.

*16 When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me;*

He longed to tell others about his doubts and regrets and to receive their comfort, but he was restrained by a heavenly force — the fear of stumbling others. Therefore, he kept silent and projected an image of confidence — but, it was an act; that is, he faked contentment — the right course of action under these circumstances.

*The Psalmist's Solution to His Regret*

*17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.*

“Until” indicates a pivot in the mind of Asaph — a change in direction — a change of ideas — a correction in this Levite’s thinking.

Doubt and envy was the “elephant on his chest” . . . until he spent time in the holy place. Then he saw . . . and his soul revived because of truth.

He solved this problem not by introspection or by human reasoning, but by going to the sanctuary and fellowshiping with the LORD; that is, his correction came from communion with God.

**What did he come to understand?**

Asaph wanted to climb the ladder of financial success until he found out he was leaning against the wrong wall — the wall of lawlessness — the wall that rogues and wrongdoers climb.

Possibly, he remembered the LORD is Ruler of all . . . holy . . . a God of law and justice that required blood to redeem the souls of men. Animal’s throats were cut. Blood was sprinkled on the altar. Hands were washed in the brazen laver in a methodical, regular, accurate way as commanded by the Lord. Such considerations must have been high on the list of Theological meditations (Hebrews 9:22)).

“end” = the end of this life.

*The Psalmist's New Realizations*

**A New Knowledge about the State of Unbelieving Men**

*18 Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction.*

The “them” refers to the ungodly in verse 12: proud men, rich men, lawless men, practical atheists and agnostics.

The adjective “slippery” (chelqah) is translated “ground” and “smooth” or “slippery.” The footing of the wicked are like deer on ice . . . like men walking on smooth, slick rocks or snow covered ponds . . . like Pennzoil on a steel beam.

“Thou castedst them down into destruction” -- Having no heavenly passport, these people walk the road to destruction . . . to the edge of the cliff into eternal damnation. They are not there yet, but they are happily walking on the highway to hell. They do not choose hell! Life is not a matter of choices. God will “cast them down” to destruction, desolation, and devastation for the demolition of the man due to his revolt against the Lord.

Consider the slippery vulnerability of men’s bodies. With 30,000,000,000 cells in the body with zillions of chemical and electrical exchanges taking place every second, what could possibly go wrong?

Consider the slippery vulnerability of men occupationally, economically, environmentally, industrially, socially, religiously, and psychologically. Bodies break down, rent and utilities have to be paid, cars and equipment need repairs, relationships must be maintained and are easily subject to acts of Providence.

Consider the slippery vulnerability of nations and all the factors that are included in success: competent personnel, education, political structures, leadership vacuums, food production, energy resources, agricultural necessities, industry, industrial supplies, resources, expenditures, money supply, bank stability, trade, and sensitive economies — slippery places indeed!

*19 How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.*

The word “desolation” means “horror” or “terror.” And the word “moment” (rega) comes from the root word “wink of an eye.” But, only those with open eyes can perceive the fate of the wicked and behold their end which can take place in the blink of an eye.

*20 As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.*

The LORD is omnipresent . . . near . . . and very patient. He may appear to be asleep, but when He awakes, He is right beside the ungodly and able to squash them with one blow of His anvil-like fist. The real problem is not that God is not awake, but that believers are not aware of the on-going judicial work of the Lord in history. All sin. All die.

“It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment” — Hebrews 9:27.

### **A New Knowledge about Self**

*21 Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.*

“reigns” refers to one’s inner being.

The psalmist suffered from ignorance and a bad case of spiritual myopia — a lack of perspective; and, he suffered with the cancer of regret multiplying in his soul. Going to the sanctuary and contemplating the greatness of God expanded his understanding and provided a



remedy for his regret. Consequently, grief about his ignorance and his embrace of envy pierced his soul like the sting from the Queensland gympie-gympie plant that can leave victims suffering for weeks.

*22 So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.*

The psalmist did not come out of his spiritual funk thinking all men are born good. He did not grow in self-esteem, but Christ-esteem. Seeing the light exposed the darkness that clouded his own soul, and he repented of it.

He compares his ignorance to that of cow (beast). But, he does not plunge into self-pity or take out “the beat stick” to denigrate himself.

*23 Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.*

“Nevertheless,” may be the most precious word in this psalm — the hinge on the door of hope — “I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff comfort me.”

Despite the sickness working in his soul, the Lord did **not** cut him off. Better yet, the Lord lifted him up and nursed the man back to health. Not only did the psalmist see the sin in his own heart, he experienced the forgiveness of God . . . faithfulness of God . . . and the love of God.

What is amazing in this psalm is not Asaph’s slide into regret; all of us do this, but the Lord’s patience, graciousness, and gentle touch on this man’s tender soul.

When he went into the sanctuary, the Lord took him by the hand and personally instructed Him on the fate of the wicked and the benefits of faithfulness. He forgave this Levite and strengthened his heart to be faithful to His instructions.

**A New Knowledge about his Treasures in the LORD**

*24 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*

The Hebrew text reads, “By thy counsel, thou shall guide . . .”

He came out of this sanctuary-course with confidence that God would counsel and guide him with advice and instruction. . . and afterwards receive him to glory “with honor.” The thought is not of reward . . . or eternal life . . . but that of honor (Ellicott). Oh, to hear from the Lord, “Well done, my good and faithful servant!” The hope of all pious men!

“thou wilt open my eyes to understand; and principally by thy Holy Spirit, sanctifying and directing me in the whole course of my life” (Benson).

*25 Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.*

“And there” — better, “Besides thee I have no delight on earth.” Thus, this Levite invested his precious all in the promises of God.



*26 My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*

The psalmist began his journey envying the treasures of the wicked, but on the way he learned that knowing God and being right with Him was his treasure.

### **A New Knowledge about the Future of Unbelievers**

*27 For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.*

“For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish” — Those that forsake the Lord and who love this present evil world shall face the punishment of God. Those who ignore God will perish.

“all them that go a whoring from thee” — those apostates who profess religion but lay down like a whore before riches, fame, and pleasure shall be destroyed.

### **A New Conclusion about his own State in Life**

*28 But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.*

God will not suffer his people to be tempted to make them bitter, but to make them better.

If His grace were not sufficient to sustain the tempted, He would not permit men to be tested. But, because there is no other way to make men strong, He ordains trials to make men tough . . . and, to make them tender.

Asaph concludes that his stressful circumstances and his wrestling with the monster of envy make him stronger; that communion with God made him good; “that all things work together for good to those who trust God” — (Romans 8:28).

Thus, Asaph became a witness to the goodness of God and an evangelist calling men to repent and seek God.

How do you know when you are healed? When you become a witness for the truth upon which Christianity stands.

See the psalmist’s conclusion to his spiritual quest in verse one.

### **A New Perspective**

The Christian life is the most difficult life to live because it involves denying self, taking up the cross, and following Christ.

-It is no great decision to turn down the worst the world has to give. The test for a true Christian is to turn down the best the world has to offer, to pick up the cross, and follow Christ.

-Doubt is the mother of all evils.

-Beware of crucifying yourself between two thieves: (1) Regret for walking by faith in the past and (2) fear of following Christ in the future.

-Envy is the art of counting the other fellow's blessings instead of your own.  
(Harold Coffin)

-The envious die slowly, painfully, miserably.

-Difficult conflicts are the Spirit's call for us to go deeper into the knowledge of Christ.

-Be careful for what you hunger, for you will become the sum total of your desires.

-He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose (Jim Elliot).

-"No reserves. No retreats. No regrets." William Borden — a man about the Father's business.

A Poem by Edwin Arlington Robinson illustrates the vanity of envy:

Richard Cory

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,  
We people on the pavement looked at him:  
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,  
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,  
And he was always human when he talked;  
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,  
"Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—  
And admirably schooled in every grace:  
In fine, we thought that he was everything  
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,  
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;  
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,  
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

# Psalm 74 - A Cry from a Castaway

## *A Prayer for God to Intervene (1-3)*



This is one of the didactic psalms designed to give instruction to God's people. It has the feel of a captivity psalm following the destruction of the temple ("sanctuary") where every surviving Jew was asking "Why Lord, why?"

This is not a touchy, feel-good psalm. It is one of the toughest, most heart wrenching chorales in the Book of Psalm to read and admire — a prayer that can only be appreciated by those in hot pursuit of holiness.

"Arise, O God, plead thine own cause"

### **Question One and Two**

*Psalm 74:1 <Maschil of Asaph.> O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?*

"Maschil" means "didactic." "of" can mean "for"; i. e. the psalm was composed for or by Asaph, the chief musician to create a chorus appropriate for the psalm.

If one has never felt forsaken by God due to his trials, he has to question if he is walking by faith. The question is not asked because of ignorance, but so the reader can go deeper into the theology of Divinity. "Why" questions are the types of questions that force one to step back and think more analytically.

The verb "cast off" implies being rejected, set aside, or put on the shelf — the ultimate nightmare for a flawed God-seeker.

"anger smoke" is a metaphor referring to a smoldering log that keeps burning — a reference to the wrath of God.

"sheep" refers to Israel as a flock. Why would a shepherd with a flock purchased with his own currency be angry against his harmless, defenseless sheep? Such a condition seems preposterous and unimaginable; i.e. it is not in conformity with the natural order.

*2 Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt.*

"Remember" is the psalmist way of asking God to step in and provide relief for His people that he purchased by blood; that is, a people redeemed from Egyptian bondage.

“purchased of old” – A reference to being purchased by the blood of the Passover lamb. Blood, not shekels, is the currency of the Spirit world and the means of redemption.

The word “rod” literally means “stick or crook or staff.” Metaphorically, it implies “inheritance” or to one “endowed with authority” to live as a free, sovereign man.

“Mount Zion” is Jerusalem, the seat of authority – a reference to the temple from which God ruled over the affairs of the nation.

*3 Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary.*

The psalmist perceives the LORD to be at the rear of desolations crushing the nation. “Lift up thy feet” is plea to the Lord to pick up his pace and to advance to the front of the column to personally inspect the severity of the enemy’s breach into the holy city . . . even to the sanctuary. Possibly, this is a reference to the Babylonian invasion of Israel.

“wickedly” simply means “badly” which implies harm and ruin. Because God’s property was being damaged by assailants, the psalmist expected God to protect the temple . . . but He didn’t . . . and this perplexed not only the psalmist but the whole nation.

#### *Reasons for God to Intervene*

*4 Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs.*

“Thine enemies roar” refers to war whoops and battle cries. “Roar” also has a reference to wild animals like lions, wolves, and cougars. When war cries replace the praise of God, you know the infrastructure of the nation is seriously threatened. The meaning here is, that political factions cried for bloodshed in the very area which God had appointed as the place to meet with His people. Injured to the core, the very existence of the nation was in doubt.

“They set up their ensigns for signs” refers to signs, slogan, and symbols that enemies posted to rally their miscreant soldiers to raze the temple complex at the heart of the nation’s pride and joy.

*5 A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees. 6 But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers.*

The idea here is that men famous for speed and strength in axing down a proud tree are now applauded for their skills in destroying the Jews’ magnificent temple.

“One sees the axe glitter on high, as one cuts wood in the forest” (Luther).

Instead of having intelligent, careful sensitive men in power, the nation was under the control of invading brutes and thugs taking pleasure in using a wrecking ball to demolish the pillars of the temple.

*7 They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground.*

The meaning in this text is that intruders burned down the sanctuary as did the Chaldeans in 586 B.C. That which was holy was defiled, demolished, and destroyed by the sweat and strength of God-haters.

*8 They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land.*

The purpose of wrecking the temple was to destroy the people; ruin their religion, and to destroy the foundations of the nation.

“Synagogues” refers to assemblies or meeting places of people. Destroy a nation’ religion, land, language, or racial cohesion and you can decimate a country which is what happened during the Chaldean attack on Israel in 539 B.C.

*9 We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long.*

The idea here is that all symbols, icons, and familiar emblems that united the people around the worship of YHWH were ravished to the ground. With no emblems of worship, no prophet, and no word from God, the people were scattered and confused.

With no divine teacher, who could “save” the people, or who could “prevent” these desolations? Matters had deteriorated to the point that all divine interference and protection appeared to be withdrawn. The nation seemed to be abandoned to a ghastly fate by a negligent Deity.

### **Question Three and Four**

*10 O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?*

The exhausted psalmist is tired and terrified by this calamitous invasion and asks, “is there no end to this devastation?”

Likewise, afflicted Christians ask, “Will my trials never end?” “How long do we have to endure this pain and suffering? The answer, of course, is “just enough.”

### **Question Five**

*11 Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck it out of thy bosom.*

The psalmist prayed, and the heavens shook with silence. The question, “Why doesn’t God act to save us?” has flogged every saint throughout the ages.

“pluck it out of your bosom” is the psalmist way of saying, “Lord, get your hands out of your pocket and do something . . . now . . . immediately . . . or we die.

When madmen are in office and wickedness abounds, we demand that God do something . . . anything but remain silent.

The psalmist is not a rebel . . . or a complainer . . . or a quitter. He is a devoted sheep in God’s flock who is deeply troubled by the howling of wolves and the shocking absence of the Shepherd.

*12 For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.*

That all of God’s sheep confess God as their king and are loyal subjects of His Majesty is offered as the main reason why God should arise out of His slumber and act to save His people.

*13 Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. 14 Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness.*

The psalmist reminds the LORD that when Israel was trapped between Pharaoh’s chariots and the Red Sea that He acted dynamically to split the waters and to provide a means of escape on dry land through the walls of water.

“brakest the heads of dragons” and “leviathan” refers to crocodiles . . . a reference to the pursuing Egyptian army and to Pharaoh the head of the nation. God literally broke Egypt at the Red Sea. Metaphorically, the memory of drowning charioteers became a spiritual meal for His children to enjoy on their journey through the wilderness to the Promise Land.

*15 Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood: thou driedst up mighty rivers.*

“cleave the fountain” is a reference to when Moses smote the rock and out came a well spring of water to satisfy the thirst of man and beast.

“driedst up mighty rivers” refers to God splitting the Jordan so Israel could pass over into Canaan.

*16 The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun. 17 Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter.*

Deliverance at the Red Sea and mighty provision in the wilderness are not strange events because God controls the Sun during the day and the stars at night; the cold of winters and the heat of the summer. By His order the sun marches across the sky and sharing its light to the world. By His decree the earth enjoys the changing seasons and varied temperatures to the delight of all.

The idea here is that God has dominion over the sun by day and the moon by night. Therefore, He should not have difficulty rescuing His people from their present troubles.

*18 Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O LORD, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name.*

The psalmist reminds the LORD that the enemy has challenged his authority, criticized religion, and blasphemed His name; that the enemy boasted that God was not able help His people. He reminds the LORD that the enemies of Israel are the enemies of God; that this was not just their war, but His battle.

*19 O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever.*

The psalmist compares Israel to a defenseless, harmless turtledove — a helpless bird that needs his protection from the cruel bird trappers. This is the psalmist's way of reminding the LORD his timid, gentle people are under attack and in need of His protection.

*20 Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty.*

The psalmist initiates a legal argument reasoning that the LORD has a contract with Israel that requires His intervention to save and protect the covenant nation — a people He promised to shield and preserve.

*21 O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name.*

The psalmist reasons that if His people are defeated and shamed, how could they possibly boast about God? Let the poor and oppressed have reasons to praise the name of the LORD and to glorify Him.

*22 Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily.*

The psalmist lists his reasons why God should intervene and save His people, but here He urges God to make their affliction His cause. This Israelite reminds the LORD that man's destructive reproach against God's sheep was malicious contempt against God himself.

*23 Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually.*

The enemies of Israel clamored for its destruction. The psalmist prays that God would bring upon their enemies what they deserve and in so doing would rescue His people giving them another reason to praise Him.

There is no closure to the psalmist's dilemma . . . but, in reading the rest of the story in Ezra and Nehemiah we learn that God miraculously delivered His people from the clutches of Babylon by the Persian Messiah, Cyrus the Great in 539 B.C.

The psalmist asks “Why?” And, we know the answer. The Tanach teaches the captivity in Babylon was a punishment for idolatry and disobedience to Yahweh — a difficult but blessed discipline designed to purge idolatry from the nation and to purify His people.

Oh, the seriousness of sin! When feeling abandoned by the Lord, the God-seeker would do well to do a self-check and to repent deeply of any sin in his life. There is always hope for penitents:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).



# Psalm 75 - The Wine is Red

*For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red;*



God treads the grapes of wrath and the wicked must drink the terrifying brew of God's red wine.

The wine is ripe and ready to be poured.

Before us are lambs laughing at staggering drunks.

This is a song for saints who perceive the final judgment of the wicked and the glorious destiny of the righteous.

Here the virgin mocks her attacker, laughs at his impotence, and marvels at his intoxication. Like in a brawl, the psalmist taunts, jeers, jabs, and "trash talks" his inebriated opponents.

Holy faith dares to flaunt God's sovereignty and power in the face of his proud, flushed adversaries.

Happy are those that can sing of God's greatness.

Happy is the Christian who can laugh at the absurdity of evolutionists, the idiocy of liberal loons, the roar of feminists, and the shrill of steel tyrants tanked with lies and presumption.

## **The Preface**

*Psalm 75:1 To the chief Musician, Altaschith, A Psalm or Song of Asaph.*

Some see this psalm as pertaining to the days of David. Many see it as composed during the captivity, and others see it as a post-exilic psalm. It fits well with the post-exilic period, particularly the events of the Maccabean Period, but the poem appears to be written prior to the Babylonian Captivity (605-535 BC). It fits well with the fall of Sennacherib's Army in the Lion's killing fields (Isaiah 36-39). It may refer to David's coronation as it is a coronation psalm.

## **The Psalmist Speaks**

*Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks, unto thee do we give thanks: for that thy name is near thy wondrous works declare.*

The appellation "God" (Elohim) stands in the emphatic position. The key thought to grasp is that "God" is at the epicenter of history – a truth so simple many overlook it. The LORD is the Prime Mover of all the wondrous works of history.

The Hebrew word for, "give thanks" means to "throw up the hands."

Imprisoned, the psalmist speaking for the people gives thanks to God in advance of their emancipation. He recognizes that political deliverance comes from Elohim and not from man — not from the Babylonians or Egyptians or Greeks or the Medes — not from politicians or presidents or congressmen or the United Nations or from the People, but from God.

Secondly, the psalmist rejoices because God's name is NEAR — a present help in the time of trouble. The nearness of God is always a reason to give thanks.

## God Speaks

### *2 When I shall receive the congregation I will judge uprightly.*

The "I" refers to God or a king representing God. He is the speaker from verse two through verse six, and He is pleased to respond to the steel-faith of this saint. Using God as a speaker is a literary device, a kind of Theo-dictation or prosopopoeia. Such rhetoric is inspired by the Spirit to enhance the triumphant message of the psalm.

The King James Version falls short of the correct translation here. The thought in Hebrew is that God will take correct judicial action in His own timing as the following translations demonstrate:

New International Version

You say, "I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge with equity.

New Living Translation

God says, "At the time I have planned, I will bring justice against the wicked.

English Standard Version

"At the set time that I appoint I will judge with equity.

New American Standard Bible

"When I select an appointed time, It is I who judge with equity.

God injures no man!

### *3 The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved: I bear up the pillars of it. Selah.*

The word "dissolved" (*muwg*) could be translated "melt" or "teeters." *Muwg* is in the emphatic position. The ESV translates this nicely:

"When the earth totters, and all its inhabitants, it is I who keep steady its pillars.  
Selah"

A shaking earth is a metaphor for political upheaval and an unstable zeitgeist. Big problems call for acts of God, not acts of the state. This wording provides evidence the speaker is God.

When volcanoes roar, mountains tremble, sea levels rise, giant asteroids circle the heavens, tornadoes touch the earth, hurricanes drench the coast, tidal waves bash shorelines, celestial

bodies threaten devastation, and when political tyrants threaten death and destruction, there is nothing to fear. God fortifies the pillars of the earth. It belongs to Him. God reigns! The LORD secures the foundations of the earth, and limits the powers of madmen. Therefore, “fret not thyself because of evildoers.” (Psalm 37:1).

*4 I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly: and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn:*

“I” is in the emphatic position.

The term “fools” and the “wicked” refer to criminal politicians and plausible psychopaths.

The command “deal not” is the Hebrew word “halal” from which we get the word “hallelujah” (praise the Lord). It means “to shine forth” or “to praise.” The adverb “not” negates “halal;” that is, God calls these fools to stop all their boasting power and direct the people to trust the LORD.

The second word “lift not” refers to “to exalt,” “to rise up,” or “to promote” one’s agenda. Politicians and judges seek to be a god that can control the world and mold it into their own image. The lesson here is that political leaders, in competition with true religion, seek the praises belonging to God for themselves.

God addresses political rulers and parliamentarians as fools, morons, birdbrains, blockheads, nitwits, madmen, tyrants, and psychopaths possessing an inflated view of their self-importance while strutting their power to change the world. “Change” is always the promise made by candidates. “Yes, we can,” boasted one American president. But, politicians do have as much power as they think they have (John 19:11).

The Lord orders these depraved, crazy-in-chief regales to come to their senses and to suppress their pride. This is necessary because most leaders live near the island of Utopia out of touch with reality.

But, things are not out of control, even in the most irritating times. The sovereign LORD God restrains these extremists and prevents them from wrecking humanity with their self-promoting, half-baked, rash political policies; that is, God limits the ambitions of these power-hoarders.

This thought is fully expressed in the next psalm, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” (76:10).

*5 Lift not up your horn on high: speak not with a stiff neck.*

The word “horn” refers to the power of political will.

The term “stiff necked” refers to the unyielding pride and stubbornness of rulers — those responsible for the death, torture, and maltreatment of tens of thousands of individuals.

God commands these gasconades to control their tongues and to restrain their political swagger. Arrogant boasting within ear-shot of God is a form of insanity. Such hubris invites the lightening rod of God's justice . . . and like Haman the Agagite, they will find themselves hanging from the gallows they planned for their political opponents.

*6 For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south.*

The word "promotion" has a variety of implications: rising up, shining forth, lifting up, growth, spreading, increase in wealth, raise, lift, and set on high. Moreover, this term may refer to deliverance.

The Assyrians may be in mind here. In relation to Israel, deliverance will not come from the Medes (East), nor the Greeks (West), nor the Egyptians, Phoenicians, nor Arabians (South), nor from the north. Because of what they did to God's people, these statisticians would taste the bitter wine of God's judgment and then stagger like drunkards on a city wall.

The lesson here is that our hope is **not** in government, but in a right relationship with God.

A change in administrations seldom produces the prosperity promised by political candidates.

These rulers failed to learn the first rule of success: *be humble or stumble*. The hopers promise the rainbow but shortly into their administration the skies turn dark gray from the coal factories of burning greed.

### **The Psalmist Speaks**

*7 But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.*

"He putteth down one, and setteth up another" - "This one he humbles, and this he exalts" (Barnes).

"setteth" means "lift up" or "to promote" in the sense of success or status.

Whether we are talking about individual men or nations, God is sovereign. He is behind the processes that humble and honor men.

He chose Jacob and rejected Esau while still in the womb (Romans 9:13).

He demoted Moses in Egypt and then appointed him to be His prophet to humble Egypt (Exodus 2-5).

Consider God's appointment of Pharaoh: "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth" (Romans 9:17).

He chose Nadab and Abihu to be His priests, and then removed them from being priests (Leviticus 10).

He demoted Saul, and He promoted David.

He humbled the family of Eli the priest, and appointed Samuel to the position of priest.

He promoted, humbled and restored Nebuchadnezzar to his throne; and raised up Cyrus to be His Persian messiah over Babylon (Daniel 4: Isaiah 45).

He humbled Vashti, and raised up Esther to be Queen of Persia (Esther).

He was the force behind the hanging of Haman, and the power behind the promotion of Mordecai (Esther).

He installed Pilate as governor of Judea in the time of Christ (John 19:10), and He removed Herod by sudden death (Acts 12).

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Psalms 22:28 For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and he is the governor among the nations.

Jeremiah 50:2 Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard; publish, and conceal not: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces.

The psalmist wants his readers to know that God is the Judge; that His seat is not vacant; that He never sleeps or takes a vacation; that He reigns; that men should not interpret His delay as abdication of authority or dereliction of duty.

The Lord Jesus Christ is exalted to the right hand of God and reigns now. He is King yesterday, today, and forever. His sovereign acts of judgment can be seen in history and does not wait for the arrival of some alleged future millennium. Empires rise and fall by His decree. Kings reign by His good pleasure. They end when God says, "Enough!" Syria was squashed by Assyria; Assyria by the Babylonians; the Babylonians by the Medes; the Medes by the Greeks; and, the Greeks by the Romans.

*8 For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them.*

The psalmist instructs us through a metaphor – a Cup of Red Wine.

Red is the rich color of fire and blood. The very color of red implies vigor, danger, intensity, passion, anger, fury, and heat. Ripe red wine is a symbol of ambitious vengeance.

The word "mixture" refers to additives with a spicy pungent from nuanced herbs and delirium plants like peyote.

This red wine is not a Bordeaux blend Cabernet Sauvignon, but a ruby-red opiate that comes from a vineyard filled with gnarly old vines and hallucinogenic herbs. One sip leaves the inebriated naked of virtue and vulnerable to the steel sword of justice. This chalice is filled with a cocktail of judicial wrath eager to be poured out on seats of power for their shocking smugness and pompousness.

Moreover, the Cup of Red Wine is **not** for God's people, but for the wicked (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

Who are these "wicked?" They are kings of the earth, presidents, congressmen, and judges who neglect God and arrogate to themselves wealth and power.

Because these political rulers rejected His feast at the table of grace, they will be dragged with chains to the Bench of Law and forced to drink the red wine of perfected justice – the wine of divine recompense foaming with vengeance mixed with fiery wrath and heated displeasure for the idolatry of kings, their blasphemies toward Heaven, and their cruelty towards men.

Take a look at the red wine God gave Nebuchadnezzar to drink.

Daniel 4:28-33 All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "**This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar:** Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes." Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

### *9 But I will declare for ever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.*

The "I" is that of the psalmist which could be King David as a newly installed king.

What a contrast! The faithful who adore the God of all grace, and who sing and proclaim the praises of God, stand in juxtaposition to the pompous potentates drunk with self-importance and self-determination – rulers who are destined to drink the red wine of God's staggering justice.

The title "God of Jacob" reminds the soul that God helped Jacob . . . that He is a God of grace . . . the God Who helps the weak . . . Who helps those abused by power-mongers.

"As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Romans 9:13).

The believers sing like songbirds while the wicked moan in sorrow like Burmese cats. The righteous sing because grace has conquered their hearts; and, the wicked groan because they are conquered by the intoxicants of the red wine in the chalice handed to them by the Judge of All Men.

*10 All the horns of the wicked also will I cut off; but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.*

This text would be better understood if it was prefaced with “who says” as the NIV translates the thought:

“who says, ‘I will cut off the horns of all the wicked, but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up.’”

The verse ends with a summary: The wicked proud will be banned from the kingdom of God and will drink the Ripe Red Wine of God’s Wrath in the fires of judgment; but, God’s lambs will be exalted for they are destined to feast at the table of salvation in the kingdom of God.

If you have been seared by the hot steel of anti-Christian critics, Sing! Rejoice! Boast of your salvation! Your adversaries will have to drink the ruby hues of the red wine of Divine justice.

Rest, Soul, rest!

# Psalm 76 - Hope in Political Turmoil

*“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.”*



Reviewing the headlines today is like reading the obituary of Christian causes.

Voters who appear to be suffering from traumatic brain disorders are electing criminal gangs into office. Immigrants swarm across the border like trails of ants searching for goodies left over after at an American picnic.

Images of violence, murder, and riots fill the evening news. Communists, feminists, and Sodomites demand center stage in the American theater. Drag queens are invited to read books to children in school libraries. Woke America doesn't know the difference between males and females, between XY and XX chromosomes. Steak lovers are expected to give up eating meat in order not to offend soy-vegetarians. Crazy politicians are wearing double masks and threatening truthers with forced drug therapy. Warmongers in CONgress talk about surviving a nuclear war as if it like recovering from the common cold. Is there any hope?

Tares are among us — an enemy has done this . . . and, the problem is bigger than any one of us (Matthew 13:28).

Here is a psalm bursting with assurance that God has command of politicians in rebellion against His law-order. The psalmist gives us assurance that the lunatics in power are limited by the steel arm of God's sovereign power.

The background of this psalm is the Assyrian invasion of Jerusalem under Sennacherib circa 701 B.C. Before us are the lessons the songwriter wants us to learn.

*Psalm 76:1-2 To the chief Musician on Neginoth, A Psalm or Song of Asaph.*

The composer delivered this psalm to the Chief Musician after the Assyrian invasion into Judah during the reign of Hezekiah. It is called a "Song of Asaph," the father of Hezekiah's secretary (2 Kings 18:18).

A poem set to music, this liturgical sonnet knuckles down on the dominion of God over tyrants and their imperialistic agendas.

Like a war-time correspondent, the psalmist publishes his triumphant report:

*1 In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel. 2 In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion.*



Do you want to know God? Where should you begin your search? Where can you find Him? China? Tibet? India? Mecca? Not hardly.

The grand truth of this psalm is that God can only be known by revelation . . . that He has revealed Himself to men . . . that ancient Hebrews were the steward of this light.

The search for God begins and ends with the record of the LORD's dealings with Abraham and his descendants? God is known in Israel, and nowhere else . . . until this era . . . . . the birth of the true Israel of God (Christ) . . . and His representatives, the church.

[Note: Do not confuse modern Ashkenazi so-called "Israel" (fake Jews) with ancient Israel, a polity of Hebrews.)

The adjective "great" emphasizes the wonder of the manifestation of God among the Hebrews and the reverence they had for His Name.

(Ancient) Israel became His station to telegraph the knowledge of God to the nations. While all people on earth have access to the knowledge of creation, only this nation became the trustees of His special revelation to mankind.

The composer gives four metonyms to identify the locus of the knowledge of God: Judah, Israel, Salem, and Zion.

No man will find God in a Tibetan cave or some Buddhist Pagoda in Asia. But, He can be found in the history and theology of the Hebrews . . . and their NT counterparts.

The name "Israel" was the name given to Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes. Judah was the ruling tribe with its capital in Jerusalem a.k.a. "Salem" which means "peace" — the ancient name for Jerusalem. Zion is the high hill in Jerusalem—the place where Solomon built the temple. Zion is simply a metonym for the temple or the presence of God in the capital city.

The Glory was pleased to dwell among his people in that nation from 1440 BC to 586 BC, and in and through the personal visitation of the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament era whose body was the temple of God (John 2:19-20).

*3 There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Selah.*

"There" refers to the landscape of Jerusalem.

With blazing fury, the Assyrians smashed the nations crushing opposing armies in the Levant. When they advanced to the gates of Jerusalem, knees knocked and teeth rattled. The veteran Assyrian infantry seemed undefeatable. Controlling all the roads, they shut Jerusalem in like "a caged bird." Their breath smelled foul and death wafted through the air.

The psalmist wasted no time in rifling his message to the people:

“There” at Jerusalem, God broke the arrows . . . bow . . . shield . . . sword . . . and the battle! The word “brake” is a Piel verb intensifying the meaning that God “crushed” and “smashed” the proud Assyrian Army.

The story of the Assyrian invasion and the events surrounding their defeat is described in 2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chronicles 28-32; and Isaiah 37-39.

In this account, God’s destroying angel massacred 185,000 Assyrian soldiers during the night. When sunlight kissed the eastern walls of Jerusalem, the watchmen saw nothing but corpses in the Assyrian camp (Isaiah 37-38). Instead of being ransacked, Hezekiah’s people plundered the Assyrians.

*4 Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey.*



Stunned by God’s work, the psalmist burst into praise.

A few days before the smashing victory, the refugees in Jerusalem shook like leaves in the wind while considering the power of the invaders. No doubt the headlines in the “Jerusalem Post” read “City of David Faces Genocide By Assyrians.” A dark cloud of negativity settled on Jerusalem as the people faced the pragmatic reality that the greatest army on earth had surrounded Jerusalem eager to kill, capture, and plunder.

The “mountain of prey” refers to the territory belonging to the “Lion of Judah.” It was in the Lion’s killing fields wherein the hunter became the hunted; the victim became the victor; and the predator became the prey.

After the crushing defeat of Sennacherib’s army, the nation stood in awe of the glory and excellence of their God.

The psalmist teaches us a lesson that we should walk by faith and not by sight; that is, to stand confident in His power and grace even when we hear the thunder of war-rumors, soldiers marching, and drums pounding. Wait on the Lord, and barricade rashness and impetuosity.

*5 The stouthearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands.*

The “stouthearted” refers to the impressive Assyrian army.

“They have slept their sleep” publishes their devastating defeat.

“None of the men of might have found their hands” describes the helplessness of the Assyrian troops to fight against an angel of God.

When the fury of God's death angel struck the republican guard of Sennacherib's army, a strange stupor seized them so they couldn't even grasp their swords to defend themselves against the destroyer. Like bar-room drunks, they staggered through their tents unable to find their weapons . . . and, even if they possessed a sword, what good would it do against an angelic Spirit?

*6 At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep.*

Chariots and horses on those ancient battlefields were like an infantry facing a German Leopard Tank with sticks and stones.

God did not stop the Assyrian meat grinder from leaving Nineveh, or stop them on the killing fields of Phoenicia, Syria, Egypt, or Moab.

But, when they came to the gates of Jerusalem, the sovereign LORD God of Israel issued His command. Enough! Like the Egyptian charioteers were buried at the Red Sea, Assyrian corpses littered the treed landscape around Jerusalem like masses of poisoned ants.

When secular man seems to have gained the upper hand in the battle between good and evil, the Christian must remember that God is sovereign and that the wicked are crunched like crackers under His feet.

*7 Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?*

There is a classic riddle that asks, "What is black and blue and red all over?" In our mind appears the loser of an Irish bare knuckle street fight.

What is the answer to the question, "Who may stand when once Thou art angry?" The only fitting answer is . . . "No one!"

The pronoun "Thou" is used twice in the Hebrew making it emphatic: "You, and only You, O Lord, are to be feared!" We don't fear man, we fear Christ. We don't fear the condemnation of government; we fear the condemnation of God.

Barnes: The repetition of the word "thou" is emphatic, as if the mind paused at the mention of God, and remained in a state of reverence, repeating the thought.

It is an error to publish how great evil has become in society instead of how great "God is in the generation of the righteous" (Psalm 14:5).

Instead of slogging through the swamp of despair in the dark everglades of politics, we tread the highway of righteousness illuminated by the promises of God.

Instead of focusing on the muscle mass of swamp critters, let us gaze at the authority and power of the Lion of Judah Who commands victories for Jacob in His killing fields (Psalm 44:4).

Considering the might of the enemy instead of contemplating the historical conquests of Christ does nothing to increase confidence associated with faith. Faith does **not** lead to victory, it IS the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

“Now faith IS the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”  
(Hebrews 11:1).

God is more interested in our study of Him than in our assessment of the strength of our opponents. Declaring the might of the enemy is to have more faith in the enemy than in the power of Christ!

To fear the wicked is to have more faith in man than in Christ. The only fear permitted in the Christian life is fear of Him who has the power to cast into hell (Luke 12:5).

God limits the power of the wicked (v. 10); unbelief limits the power of God.

The reason for this fear is the anger of God, an ominous virtue that demands expression against the unrighteousness of man.

Study God. Know God. Believe God. Those who challenge His authority will end up being black and blue and red all over.

*8 Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared, and was still, 9 When God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth. Selah.*

Judgment (diy) refers to God’s intervention into history to punish the Assyrian troops with plunder on their minds and murder in their hearts. The roaring discharge of Divine justice pierced every ear. The earth shuddered. All stood at attention stunned by the devastation of unleashed anger on the Assyrians.

Attributing human characteristics (fear) to the earth is a figure of speech called personification.

The “meek of the earth” are the quiet souls in the land that do no harm. When dark clouds gather and naked fear invades souls because of the waves of injustice crashing on the shoreline, Christians know that when their Captain gives the order and says “enough is enough,” the heavens are silent and the earth is mute.

The verb “arose” is an anthropomorphism alluding to the fact men wake up from a sleep. Figuratively speaking, when our Captain awakes and shouts His command, the roaring sea of maritime powers gives way to peace and calm.

*10 Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.*

Which of us hasn’t felt utterly exasperated after listening to the evening news? The world is dangerously over populated with reporters that slant the news toward their defeated humanistic perspective. The depravity of politicians seems to have no boundaries. Psychopaths

seem to be in charge of powerful Western countries. We know there is a limit to intelligence, but there doesn't seem to be a limit to the madness of God's enemies.

"Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe." (Albert Einstein)

"Power is okay, and stupidity is usually harmless. Power and stupidity together are dangerous". (Patrick Rothfuss, *The Name of the Wind*)

"Never argue with stupid people, they will drag you down to their level and then beat you with experience." (Mark Twain)

Is there an anchor for the soul that can keep us together while lunatics captain the ship?

The conjunction "surely" (*kee*) announces the main lesson of the psalm—a detail about the sovereignty of God, that if grasped, can cause us to experience calm in the midst of political storms.

The phrase "wrath of man" refers to all the insane, imperial ambitions of politicians and social engineers.

Not all psychopaths are behind bars. Maniacs are in power and hold key positions in the apparatus of government institutions. Madmen run for office. Voting fails. Money talks. Justice broken. The status quo in the hands of unaccountable bureaucrats makes ordinary citizens feel as helpless as ants to stop the elephant stampede of lunacy thundering across the land.

"shall praise thee" (*todah*) means "to throw up the hands." Ellicott says, "Possibly we should render, '*and those who remain from their wrath shall celebrate a festival,*' since the suggested emendation is the word used in that sense."

The Cambridge Bible adds, "All rebellion against God's will must in the end redound to God's glory: it serves to set His sovereignty in a clearer light" ([Exodus 9:16](#)).

The Pulpit Commentary considers man's wrath "shall give occasion for great deeds on God's part – deeds which will bring him praise and honour."

The word "restrain" in Hebrew means "to fasten one's belt" or "to gird" with a sash (Exodus 12:11; 29:9). God restrains these nutcases. Like guard dogs, they are on a leash.

Benson: "thou shalt put it on as an ornament, which the girdle was; thou shalt adorn thyself with it as a conqueror adorns himself with the spoils of his enemies."

Barnes: "It is not that there was anything in the wrath itself, or in their plans or intentions, that was in itself "adapted" to honor God; but that it was overruled by him, so that he took "occasion" from it to display his own character."

Timothy, in his battle against heresiarchs in Ephesus, faced “madmen” (anoia) like the sorcerers, Jannes and Jambres, Pharaoh’s magicians. See 2 Timothy 3:9-10. In this passage Paul assures his son in the faith “they will make no further progress;” that is, there is a limit to what these lunatics can accomplish because God restrains them.

The great question for the godly is, “How much evil must these tyrants do before God shackles them?”

The answer is, “just enough;” that is, these belligerents are not capable of carrying out all their wicked schemes against innocent people. God limits the plans of those intent on world dominion.

The term “remainder of wrath” refers to the frustrated devices of ambitious politicians — evil plans they cannot legislate — cannot mandate — schemes and dreams they are precluded from executing while in office.

The trusting Christian is not in a panic because he knows that God has these devils on a chain. These criminals that appear to be unrestrained in their folly will be used for the glory and praise of God.

The problem with man is not something from without, but from within.

Jeremiah 17:9 “the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, who can know it?”

No man knows the depth of his own wickedness. No man is as evil as he can be because God restrains evil.

And in our story, the might of Sennacherib and his army fell as corpses in that ancient theater in order to demonstrate the crushing, bone-breaking power of the Lion of Judah.

The invasion of the Assyrians to Jerusalem and their stunning slaughter resulted in praise to the LORD; their retreat from Jerusalem demonstrated how God restrains the wrath of man.

Now we come to the main application of the psalm.

*11 Vow, and pay unto the LORD your God: let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared.*

Since these heads of state are bridled, and God is the only One to be feared, believing men should fear God and obey Him Only! Godly men feed faith and starve doubt; proclaim the power of God and scoff at the illusory strength of rebels.

The psalmist calls upon God’s people to stay the course; to keep their vows to Him; to not be unraveled by the lunacy of these political clowns . . . to not retreat out of fear . . . and, to stand up for righteousness.

*12 He shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth.*

The psalm ends with a great promise. The word “princes” refers to politicians and civil rulers.

The Hebrew word for “cut off” means “to lop off” like a vinedresser prunes a vine (Leviticus 25:5; 11). It is the first word in the sentence, the emphatic position, assuring us tyrants will be pruned.

The Hebrew word “terrible” (yaw rey) is translated “phobeo” in the LXX meaning the LORD is the fear of kings. An evil prince with standing armies is no match for an offended God.

The psalmist leaves us with a promise. Political leaders like Lenin and Stalin who seem so unrestrained by empathy or guilt, and those modern political leaders that are driven by unrestrained pity to spend a nation’s resources trying to solve all the world’s problems, shall be “cut off;” that is, God will terminate their ambitions and bring them to an end!!

Just as the LORD God was terrible to the Assyrian army, He will be terrible to modern rulers. He is to be feared because He has them ALL on a leash. He can defeat their imperial ambitions. And, he will subject their evil plans to His will. He will cut down the antagonists and destroy them forever. It is not God’s will that humanistic regimes succeed. Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Mao Tse Tung, Pol Pot, Stalin, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein and their dictatorial ambitions are dead.

These mighty monarchs that thunder on earth for a time have a *terminus ad quem*, but the kingdom of God shall endure forever. The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9).

Onward Christian soldiers, onward!

Forget being “safe.” We live in a maximum liability universe where living life involves risks!

Don’t leave the battlefield. Be true. Be strong. Be free. Take risks. Believe God.

# Psalm 77 - Lessons from a Sleepless Soul

## The Man with God Problems

*"In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore (yad) ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted."*



Before us is a hymn written by a psalmist so troubled he could not sleep or speak.

It is a lesson for generations to come on how troubled souls can find rest and peace from barking dogs of doubt and storms of unbelief that threaten the faith-confidence of afflicted saints.

*Psalm 77: 1 (To the chief Musician, to Jeduthun, A Psalm of Asaph.)*

Twelve psalms are credited to Asaph. Acquainted with suffering, this composer's musical style often touched the minor key.

"Jeduthan" is the name of a Levite, the chief musician.

This psalm shows the author as a true saint feeling the heat as sparks fly from God sharpening the man's steel faith on the grind stone of His promises.

*I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me.*

Like many psalms, the psalmist introduces the conclusion of his quest first. God heard my prayer! What success!

But, this is not where the composer began his pilgrimage.

*2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore (yad) ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted.*

"The day of trouble" comes to all men.

The Hebrew word for trouble (tsarah) means "narrow," "stress," or "distress."

We are not told what kind of trouble knocked on his door. Maybe it was the wolf of want, or the lions of lust, or the silver gulls of sickness, or the foxes of famine, or the cranes of a corrupt government howling for a piece of the man. Whatever it was, the fierce-burden weighed heavy on his feeble soul. His legs buckled and he collapsed to the ground.



The word “sore” (yad) should be translated “hand.” The author is not addressing his painful burden as much as he is addressing his prayerful stance before the throne.

Luther translated it, “My hand is stretched out at night.”

The psalmist folded his hands in prayer, and he did not relax his vice grip on God the entire night — and “ceased not.”

“And refused to be comforted” means he resisted all trite, utopian clichés that men offer to comfort the distressed; that is, he waited on God for a remedy that would deliver his soul from the fear stalking his faith.

*3 I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah.*

Some translators have tried to soften the bluntness of this text by translating it as, “When I am troubled, I will remember God.” But, the KJV gives the true idea: thinking about God enlarged his troubles. Selah!

In addressing his problems, God was at the eye of his hurricane. He tried to run the race set before him, but Providence handed him a sack of bricks to carry, and the man didn’t have the strength to put one foot in front of the other.

Sweet thoughts about Jesus usually quench a pilgrim’s thirst, but this psalmist experienced chronic fatigue and nail biting anxiety thinking about theology.

His problem was not with men, but with a sovereign God who ordained his troubles.

Possibly, he wondered why a God of love would give him bitter herbs to poison his soul; or why a God of wisdom handed him tangled trials to unravel; or why this all-powerful God did not prevent the predators from stalking his soul in the first place; or why this God of Light abandoned him in subterranean darkness; or why the God of riches seemed like a stingy, grasping, penny-pinching, cheapskate.

Spiritual Novocain like “God is in control” or “everything will turn out alright” only wearied the mind of this mature pilgrim.

The best of men who study the Bible find themselves naked of hope while locked in a dark cellar questioning the love, wisdom, and power of God. Forced on his buckled knees with hands cuffed to God’s promises, many a Christian has had to wait for the Sun to shine and for God to unlock the doors of his stinkin’ prison.

*4 Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak.*

The stabbing pain in his soul found no comfort in the sugar-pill placebos offered by spiritual fraudsters.

This was not a paltry inconvenience, but a bone-crushing trial that robbed him of rest. His body begged for sleep, but God’s sentinels kept him awake.

Sleepless and speechless, this believer stuttered trying to put two sensible words together to make a complete sentence.

His prayers resemble more of a sob than a speech; more of a cry than a coherent conversation; more of a disjointed groan from a pauper than a discourse from a prince.

Words fail the man who feels disappointed with God. Mystical matters make men mute. While strenuous circumstances stretch men's faith; and, it is the silence of the sovereign God that scourges the soul.

*5 I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.*

Sleepless and speechless, all this sullen saint could do was to lift up his heavy eyelids and reflect on the history of redemption.

Troubles are good if they drive us to truth (amet) — the Aleph and Tav of knowledge. Tired travelers can often find relief from present troubles by reviewing the trails other saints have trodden. Yesteryear's light can become today's lamp.

*6 I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.*

Sleepless and speechless, the psalmist's weary mind drifted toward the songs that lifted his soul out of sorrows that battered his ship in past storms. In his darkness, he couldn't utter a word in prayer, but he could set his compass by the starlight of Scripture.

*7 Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? 8 Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? 9 Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.*

Now we get to the substance of the hymn writer's sorrows. Like an old rag doll in the attic, the man felt "cast off forever."

Hearing the barking dogs of doubt yapping doom in the darkness, the psalmist felt disowned by the LORD — "favorable no more?" The Hebrew word for "favor" is the Hiphil imperfect verb of *ratsah*. The Hebrew verb has to do with cause and effect of birth, productivity, prosperity, and fruitfulness. The use of the imperfect tells us the psalmist faced an uncertain future.

The first word in Hebrew is a long word that contains the root "forever" (olam). As his difficulties lingered like a long winter, he wondered why a loving, God would hand him a sack of bricks to carry on his journey to the celestial city.

Collecting his thoughts, he marshaled a series of questions to his Commander. Though covered in a shroud of doubt, his questions reveal a mustard seed of faith.

God seemed to have rejected him for a season, but was His cold-shoulder permanent?

The Lord pardoned the psalmist in the past, but had the well of mercy run dry, “has God forgotten to be gracious?”

What man has not felt that his sins are so great that he has exhausted the love and mercy of God . . . that there is nothing left in God’s storehouse of virtues but anger and justice?

*10 And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.*

By “infirmity” the psalmist is not referring to a physical weakness, but to the mental treadmill of trying to understand the theology of Providence. This matter clogged the gears in his mind; that is, this theme was bigger than his capacity to resolve the contradictions that agitated his soul.

Remembering “his right hand” refers to reflections on the power of God. In Isaiah 53, we learn the right arm of His power is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

*11 I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. 12 I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.*

Having muddled through his query, the psalmist set his mind on the task of remembering redemptive history — specifically the works of God in delivering His people from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1-15).

Exodus 3:7 And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction (only: poverty) of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters (nagas; tax collectors); for I know their sorrows (ma’kob: pain);

The phrase “wonders of old” comes from the Hebrew word *palah* which is first translated “hard things” in Genesis 18:14, “Is anything too hard (palah) for the Lord;” that is, the psalmist sets his mind to remember how the LORD tackles “hard things” — that He is the God of the impossible — the God that could lift his load.

Perhaps he remembered how God took childless Abraham and gave him priceless Isaac; or took Jacob from being a penniless to being prosperous ; or took Joseph as a prisoner and made him a governor.

The Hebrew word for “meditate” is *hagah* which means “to moan, groan, growl, muse, or meditate.” It is the same word used for a lion growling over his prey in Isaiah 31:4 and Psalm 1:2.

Here is a saint chewing on truth and growling over God’s Word. When is the last time your spouse has heard a lion roaring over the Bible in your home?

*13 Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?*

The word “sanctuary” (kodosh) in this text should be translated “holy;” that is, “your way is holy.” (the word for “sanctuary” is *miqdash* (Psalm 73:17) and not *kadosh*. The word *kodosh* means “holy,” “separate,” and “apart.”

In going down memory lane, the psalmist remembers Exodus 3 and the intriguing story of Moses at the burning bush. There, God spoke to Moses,

“Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”

The story of redemption from slavery in Egypt began when Bedouin Moses encountered the holiness of God. There he learned about “holy ground.”

In typical Eastern custom, guests showed their respect for the host by taking off their shoes before entering the home, the Bedouin camel-hide tent, the “house of hair.”

Likewise, the LORD required Moses to honor his holiness by removing the sandals from his feet.

Before Isaiah entered his ministry, he heard the seraphim cry, “holy, holy, holy is the LORD God Almighty” (6:1-3). Holiness is so important, it is the only attribute of God that is mentioned three times in a row.

Deliverance begins when desperate men understand (stand under) the holiness of God.

After Moses saw the holiness of God, the nation saw the greatness of God!

Pharaoh asked the most important question ever asked by a prince, “Who is the LORD that I should obey him? Pharaoh learned the LORD was great in judgment. Israel learned that He was great in love, in wisdom, and in power.

*14 Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people. 15 Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.*

The psalmist acknowledges that God did the “hard things” by judging Egypt, breaking the will of Pharaoh, and protecting the Israelites from the Nile plagues. Redemption from Egypt was by the blood of the Passover Lamb (the price of redemption) and by power wherein the muscular arm of God split the Red Sea delivering Israel and drowning the armies of Pharaoh.

“Declaring thy strength to the people” includes not only the Israelites, but the people in the surrounding nations. The fear of God went before them; that is, the stunning news knocked the wind out of the Canaanites before Israel ever crossed the Jordan River.

He defines “Thy People” as “the sons of Jacob and Joseph.” A reminder of the breach between these tribes with a slight hint that God redeems “the good, the bad, and the ugly” among us.

*16 The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled.*

The psalmist now contemplates one of the hard things God did in the exodus. Trapped between Pharaoh's chariots and the Red Sea, the LORD split the sea into two terrifying towers of death, dried up the ocean floor, and led ALL his people out of Egypt on dry land. And, to everyone's astonishment, the Judge of All Men collapsed the twin towers crushing Pharaoh's army. The floating corpses touching the shore carved a message in the sand the nation would never forget: "the LORD is a man of war" (Exodus 15:3).

*17 The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. 18 The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook.*

This text may refer to the staggering events at the Red Sea or more likely the shock-and-awe of the electrical storm at Mt. Sinai that preceded the thundering downpour of holiness in the LORD's presentment of the Ten Commandments.

*19 Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.*

"Thy way" refers to the power of God in parting tons of water at the Red Sea and leading his people between the towers of death on dry ground. Afterward, He covered His tracks under the roaring waves so they could not be traced. God's ways are vast like the ocean, and like the ocean His ways cannot be fully discovered.

*20 Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

Leaving the lightening judgments in Egypt, the violent surf at the Red Sea, and the crackling thunder at Mt. Sinai, the psalmist thoughts shifted to the pastoral scenes of quiet country life. His thoughts drifted from an ocean-splitting, War-Lord Redeemer to that of a wise, tender Shepherd leading and feeding his flock (Psalm 23).

This mighty sea-splitting Savior was also a gentle Shepherd Who employed the Prophet Moses and Aaron the High Priest to lead His children through the hostile Arabian Desert.

This psalm begins with the psalmist fretting in a storm of conflict, but ends with the psalmist finding rest and hope in God's pasture — not because his circumstances changed, but because his soul reclined on three pillows: the love of God (in Egypt), the power of God (at the Red Sea), and the wisdom of God (at Mt. Sinai).

Likewise, our souls can find rest at Calvary, the climax of his love, power, and wisdom. Have God problems? Consider His love for you at the cross.

# Psalm 78 - The Apostasy of Ephraim

*“They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law.”*



This is a psalm of Asaph, a Levite — possibly a musical family within the tribe of Levi. It was composed after he carefully considered why the Northern Ten Tribes were defeated and carried away captive to Assyria.

The psalm was composed after the time of David . . . after the civil war and political division in 1 Kings 12. The nation split over the issue of taxation, but this political issue was only the fruit of a deeper sin — the lust of the king for shekels, and the idolatry of the north.

The background of this psalm is Ephraim’s revolt against Rehoboam and the formation of a new government with its golden calf worship erected at Dan and Bethel; that is, the apostasy of the ten northern tribes called “Israel,” “Samaria,” or “Ephraim.”

*The purpose of the psalm is to warn the nation of apostasy.* Apostasy is the deliberate, willful denunciation of the faith. Thus, this psalm exposes backsliders contemplating desertion from Christ and the gospel. It establishes the fundamental argument for being faithful to the Lord and for avoiding unbelief, complaining, and backsliding.

*Secondarily, it shows us why a nation (or church) must defend its fundamental principles.* If leaders do not protect the country’s cardinal values, it will drift into the sea of idealism, humanism, utopianism, communism, feminism, and equalitarianism. All offense and no defense is a loser’s strategy. Ephraim had bows and arrow for its military might, but they dropped their shields when it came to defending the nation’s religious base.

*The value of the psalm is that it explains why God rejected Ephraim* (the Ten Tribes). It does not tell us why He was pleased to choose Judah to lead the nation in its theocracy. The reason God chose Jerusalem is wrapped up in the eternal promises of God and not the virtue of Judah.

Thus, this psalm contains the most important, fundamental lesson Christians can ever learn.

## **Asaph’s Call to Remain Steadfast to the Faith**

*Psalm 78:1 <Maschil of Asaph.> Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth.*

See notes below on the word “maschil” which refers to wise instruction.

“Give ear” is a command by a king or ruler or priest, or even Asaph to stand at attention and pay attention. What he says has the force of law because his instructions are grounded on the Word of God.

*2 I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:*

Asaph’s wisdom reaches back into antiquity; and, his method of conveying wisdom was by storytelling.

*3 Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.*

This tried and trusted wisdom was handed down from generation to generation by wise fathers.

*4 We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.*

Asaph speaks for the people and renews the commitment of his generation to be faithful in passing on the praise (gospel) of the LORD to future generations. Indeed, God will strengthen and purify His people for this very purpose.

### **The Lord’s Command to Be a Theocentric Nation**

*5 For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children:*

"testimony" refers to the two tablets, the Ten Commandments, in the Ark of the Covenant, a "law in Israel."

"Jacob" is another name for Israel. The "law" was given not as a mediator between God and man, but as a rule to produce a happy, safe, productive society governed by the rule of law.

The bedrock of a nation’s strength is Christ-centered families.

God’s purpose is to redeem men in every nation of the world because He is not willing that any people group in the world be without hope of salvation. Consequently, Israel was His beach head or base of gospel operation to reach the world with the good news of Who He is and what He had done from men through His Son at Calvary.

“And appointed a law in Israel” – The LORD gave the law to Israel, an act of Sovereignty and love, to the Hebrews on Mt. Sinai. Their laws were not man-made statutes, but authoritative rules for all people. There are few things more derelict than the notion that Christian men are at liberty to choose the law which they will serve. The Word of God, not the Constitution, is the highest law in the land. The Ten Commandments and relevant case law is a direct reflection of the character of God.



The word “testimony” is a reference to the “Tabernacle of Testimony” which contained the “Ark of Testimony” which contained the two tablets which were called “the Testimony” — the law which was the objective testimony of God’s character.

Exodus 25:21 And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony (the Ten Commandments on tablets) that I shall give thee.

Exodus 25:22 And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony,

Exodus 38:21 This is the sum of the tabernacle, even of the tabernacle of testimony . . .

“that they should make them known to their children” — The purpose of God is to create a godly generation and this is primarily accomplished through the family. It is the duty of every parent, every Christian, and every church to teach and train their children in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His law-order.

*6 That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children:*

It is the duty of every generation to pass down the history, wisdom, and maxims of law to secure the spiritual prosperity of their children and grandchildren.

Note that when liberals talk about the need for change they are advancing rebellion against God’s law and the principles that make nations great; that is “change” is the term used to advance a secular revolution . . . and, fools fall for it. “Change” introduces a movement towards the gods of chaos so legal anarchist and political subversives can make man into their own image. The first building block of revolution is “separation of church and state” so they can build society on their religion of feminism, humanism, secularism, and the other religious isms without calling it a religion.

The hope of the world is not in children, but in parents with an ambition to train their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

*7 That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments:*

A generation that builds society on “hope in God” exhibits health: “We are endowed by our Creator with unalienable rights”, but a society that builds its society on man commits suicide.

*8 And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.*



Israel's history contains a rebellious segment, and Asaph exhorts his generation to reject the gods of chaos for self-evident reasons.

## **Consider the Apostasy of Ephraim**

### **Refusal to Defend Their Brethren**

*9 The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.*

"Ephraim" is a hypernym for the northern tribes a.k.a. Samaria.

"Turned back in the day of battle" – that is, these rebel tribes refused to do their duty to help the nation to defend itself against political enemies . . . and . . . to defend its lawful, theocratic government in Jerusalem.

"being armed, and carrying bows" informs us that Ephraim failed to join the national battle to defend the solidarity of the nation not for lack of military might, but because of willful rebellion. Secondly, "bows" may imply the nation trusted in its own military resources to defend itself, and that they felt no need to rely upon the unseen powers of the living God to protect them.

Moreover, they refused to defend the nation's religious foundation or the nation's constitution formed at Mt. Sinai. Not only did Ephraim not defend Israel's theocracy, it did not rally to defend the nation's theology. Ephraim revolted, and then liberalized the northern tribes by tolerating and practicing Baalism in Dan, Samaria, and Bethel. Baalism, the belief that the State was the source of law and that the highest good was to die for the State was the State religion of neighboring countries. Baalism is a hypernym for State worship, emperor worship, patriotism to the State regardless of its character.

That is, Ephraim did not stand by their brethren, or assist them in defending their country. They refused to defend their brethren, and gave themselves to their commercial interest; that is, they willfully and intentionally declined to join with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in defense of the nation's lawful government.

### **Unfaithfulness and Breach of Trust**

*10 They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law;*

Ephraim's political revolt was more serious because it involved rebellion against God . . . a breach of the covenant . . . a breaking away from their contract and agreement to obey — an act of infidelity, disloyalty, betrayal, perfidy, and treachery.

### **Willful Forgetfulness**

*11 And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them.*

“forgot” does not mean Ephraim casually failed to remember the LORD and what He did for them, but that they deliberately, intentionally, and maliciously refused to read, cite, quote or practice the law; that is, they willfully enacted a policy of separation of church and state. They revolted from the faith and set a bold new course of self-reliance for the nation which ended up in its demolition by Assyria.

When people are driven by lusts, they develop amnesia.

Americans would do well to remember the apostasy of the Supreme Court in 1947: The Separation of Church and State: *Everson v. Board of Education* — the opening of Pandora’s Box: teen pregnancy, abortion, pornography, feminism, Sodomy, and transvestism.

Consider the unreasonableness of Ephraim’s rebellion in light of god’s goodness.

Asaph rehearses the marvelous history of the nation, its deliverance from Egypt, and their treacherous journey through the wilderness in order to expose the unreasonableness, thanklessness, and ungratefulness of the ten tribes.

In this section, Asaph uncloaks the senseless treachery of Ephraim — an unforgiveable sin. Furthermore, the psalmist sheds light on Ephraim’s apostasy and how they deserted the faith like the murmuring unbelievers did in the wilderness after the exodus.

This section contains a list of marvelous things God did for the Hebrews and a list of the senseless, illogical rebellion of the ten tribes.

### **Consider the Unreasonableness of Apostasy**

*12 Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.*

Ephraim apostatized from the faith despite God’s judgment on Egypt and His preservation of Israel.

*13 He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap.*

Ephraim apostatized from the faith despite God’s miracles at the Red Sea.

*14 In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire.*

Ephraim apostatized from the faith despite His gracious guidance by the pillar of fire at night and the cloud by day.

*15 He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths.*

Ephraim apostatized from the faith despite His miracle of providing water out of the rock.

*16 He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers.*

Ephraim apostatized from the faith despite God's abundant provision to supply of water out of the rock at Horeb for two million people and their livestock.

## **Consider the Nature of the Apostasy**

### **Sin and Rebellion**

*17 And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness.*

The word "sin" (chata) means "to miss the mark."

The word "provoking" (marah) means "to be contentious," "to resist in a way that disturbs His peace. It is the same word used referring to the "Water of Marah" (Exodus 15).

### **Tempting God**

*18 And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust.*

"tempted God" is much like what like the whining of a toddler that cries until it gets what it wants.

*19 Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?*

The key here is the word "against." They unreasonably challenge the powers of the Creator. The One Who created the heavens and the earth surely has the power to provide "a table" in the wilderness.

### **Doubt, Unbelief, Complaint, and Blasphemy**

*20 Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?*

Again, they challenged the powers of the Creator. The One Who can do the impossible caused water to pour out of a rock. Likewise, He buried the people in three feet of quail.

"A wind set in motion by GOD swept quails in from the sea. They piled up to a depth of about three feet in the camp and as far out as a day's walk in every direction. All that day and night and into the next day the people were out gathering the quail—huge amounts of quail; even the slowest person among them gathered at least sixty bushels." (Numbers 11:41-35)

*21 Therefore the LORD heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel;*

God cannot only provide water out of rock, His wrath can cause rocks to burn (Numbers 11:1-4).

## **Unbelief and Distrust**

*22 Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation:*

Israel saw mighty miracles, not because of their faith, but because of their unbelief and stubbornness of heart. A man can believe and see miracles – for his joy and edification, or he can whine and see God’s provision – a result which shrivels the soul (Psalm 106:15).

## **Consider the Unreasonableness of Unbelief and Apostasy**

### **Stubbornness Despite God’s Goodness**

*23 Though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven,*

He provided rain in the desert; that is, God has solutions to impossible problems.

*24 And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. 25 Man did eat angels’ food: he sent them meat to the full.*

He rained manna from heaven.

*26 He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven: and by his power he brought in the south wind. 27 He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea: 28 And he let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations. 29 So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire;*

He provided the people quail to eat – so much so the quail covered the camp three feet high.

### **Lust and Greed**

*30 They were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths, 31 The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel.*

“not estranged from their lust” means they were not separated from their sins. The sad result of experiencing the miracles without faith is that these wonders did not motivate the people to forsake their sinful lusts. God’s testings are designed to improve the man, to separate Him from his sins, and to increase his confidence in the Lord.

The GREATEST TRAGEDY in life is to go through troubles and not be separated from your lusts; that is, not to reap a spiritual benefit from your trials.

“The great tragedy of the Christian life is not that we suffer, but that we fail to profit from our pressures” – Augustine.

For example: It would be stupid for a man to carry a hundred pounds of rocks up a hill and then demand that God level the mount. An intelligent man would take the rocks out of his

backpack, and then continue his climb. Likewise, a pious Christian going through affliction will separate from his sins and continue his course.

### **More Sin and Unbelief**

*32 For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works.*

Unable to place their faith and their precious all into the hands of Almighty, they continued to sin . . . even after seeing these mighty wonders.

## **Consider Their Response to God's Judgment**

### **Forty Years of Death and Trouble**

*33 Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble.*

God tested Israel ten times; and, each time they failed the test. Consequently, "their days did he consume in vanity."

Benson says it this way, "In tedious and fruitless marches hither and thither, sometimes forward and sometimes backward . . ." that is, they failed to reap an eternal benefit from their pain and suffering.

*34 When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and enquired early after God.  
35 And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer.*

The "they" refers to the survivors of God's judgments. Only when they saw the cold face of death, did they turn and seek His face.

What is about men that only a near death experience can cause them to cast off their sins and seek Him?

Men forget God until they need Him. In this case, He was pleased to be their Redeemer and their rock of Salvation.

### **Duplicity and Hypocrisy**

*36 Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues.*

"Nevertheless" is a translation of the Hebrew Vav . . . and indicator that over time the people hid behind a hypocritical mask.

"flatter him" is a Piel verb implying intense deception and duplicity; that is, they "talked the walk, but failed to walk the talk. In modern vernacular, they became liars instead of truth tellers; deceivers instead of doers; retractable instead of reverential.

### **Disloyal, Treacherous, Faithless, Perfidious**

*37 For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.*

The word “right” means “firm, steadfast, or fixed.” – the opposite of being “steadfast” or dutiful to the obligations of the covenant.

### **Betrayal in light of His Goodness**

*38 But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. 39 For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.*

While these tribulations revealed the hard heart of man, they also revealed the tenderness of God.

“full of compassion” is a Piel verb; that is, this is an excellent translation revealing that the Creator-Judge is more prone to care than to scorn, forgive than to condemn, to bless than to blame.

### **Contention and Intentional Rebellion**

*40 How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert!*

The words “prove” and “grieve” inform us that the people’s behavior touched the heart of God in a negative way. God is a sentient Being. His heart is not a Sherman tank nor is it made of steel. He has feeling and emotions. He was hurt and injured by what Israel said and did.

*41 Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.*

The word “limited” (tavah) means “to pain, or to grieve.” It is translated “scrabble” in 1 Samuel 21:14 – a reference to David departing from his sentient reasoning and acting like a madman.

The English word “limited” means “a restriction on the size or amount of something permissible or possible.”

How can you limit the Almighty? These people grieved God and limited His power by turning away from His will and doing the opposite of what pleases Him.

### **Willful forgetfulness of His Judgments on Egypt and His Salvation of Israel**

*42 They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy.*

“his hand” refers to His redemptive power and works – a reference to the miracles in Egypt and at the Red Sea.

“not” negates the verb “remember” (zakar) and it is the first word in the sentence meaning that it is emphatic.

How could these people not remember His power in Egypt and at the Red sea? The answer is that they were so fixed on feeding their lusts; they could not or would not reflect on God's love for them or on His power. When people are addicted to their sins, amnesia sets in like a London fog.

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**From verse 44-56**, the psalmist recalls the mighty miracles of his hand that these people forgot.

**Most of us would remember** rivers turning to blood, millions of frogs jumping down the street, clouds of locusts, hails that prunes all the fruit off trees and levels fields, hail the size of baseballs the killed cattle and sheep, the sudden, inexplicable death of all the firstborn in the nation, the splitting of the Red Sea, water out of the rock, bread (manna) delivered to your doorstep, and the day you woke up covered in 3 feet of dead quail, the thunder and lightning around Mt. Sinai, the fall of Jericho and the staggering defeat of the Canaanites, and joyful be handed free houses, lands, and cities . . . **but, not these people.**

*44 And had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink. 45 He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them. 46 He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust. 47 He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycomore trees with frost. 48 He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts. 49 He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them. 50 He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence; 51 And smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham:*

*52 But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. 53 And he led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. 54 And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, even to this mountain, which his right hand had purchased.*

*55 He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents. 56 Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies:*

The psalmist uses the word "tempted" three times in this psalms, and "provoked" twice to emphasize nature of the rebels and the effect of their sin. The opposite of tempted and provoked are praise, submission, and obedience.

### **Consider the Unfaithfulness of Ephraim**

The question on the mind of every faithful Hebrew was "Why did God permit the Assyrians to kill, conquer, and destroy the largest tribe in Israel?" The psalmist doesn't explain why He saved Judah, but he does clarify why God ordained the destruction of Ephraim (a.k.a. "Israel," "Samaria," or "the Northern Kingdom")

“Behold the goodness and severity of God” (Romans 11:22).

### **Rebellion**

*57 But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow.*

“turned back” refers to apostasy. “unfaithful” refers to their treachery.

### **Reckless Idolatry**

*58 For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images.*

“high places” refers to the small hills in northern Israel where Ephraim set up altars worship to false gods . . . where every man did what was right in his own eyes.

“jealousy” is a praise worthy zeal to preserve something precious; that is, Israel’s idolatry aggravated the anger and jealousy of the LORD.

## **Consider God’s Response to Apostasy and Rebellion**

### **Anger**

*59 When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel:*

It takes a lot to stir God’s righteous anger, but Ephraim managed to do with their idolatry. Asaph refers to His anger twice to emphasize the response of God to idolatry. Furthermore, the psalmist adds the adjective “greatly” to add to the intensity.

### **Abandonment**

*60 So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men;*

“Shiloh” is where the tabernacle was set up during the Period of the Judges. Today, this site is known as Khirbet Seilun or Tel Shiloh.

### **Captivity**

*61 And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy’s hand.*

The Ark is a symbol of power. During the time of Eli the High Priest God permitted the Ark to be stolen by the Philistines – a shame for Israel.

Likewise, Ephraim was considered the military strength of Israel (his glory). After the ten tribes plunged into idolatry, God assigned Ephraim to be destroyed by the Assyrians.

### **War and Death**



*62 He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance.*

Asaph informs the reader that Ephraim's captivity and death by the sword was the result of Ephraim stirring up God's wrath due to their apostasy.

*63 The fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage.*

"their maidens were not given to marriage" should be translated, "Their virgins were not praised in nuptial songs."

To further emphasize the extent of God's fiery anger against Ephraim, Asaph highlighted two of life's great tragedies: the death of Israel's young men and the absence of nuptial songs or choruses sung at weddings – a highpoint in every woman's life. With young men dead and society destroyed, young virgins were destined to be old maids.

### **Intense Penetrating Judgments**

*64 Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation.*

The priests here have to be the priests of Baal in Samaria, Dan, and Bethel. Not only did the false priests die, so did their widows; that is, the ravages of war prevented surviving widows from performing the customary practices of lamenting their husbands death.

This rhetoric may be a reference to the death of the wife of Phinehas who died in child birth after learning of the ark being stolen by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4).

## **Consider the Goodness and Severity of Providence**

### **Awake in Anger**

*65 Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine.*

Asaph compares God's wrath to the emotions of one suddenly awakened from his sleep and to a mighty soldier exhilarated by wine.

### **Pursuit of Apostates**

*66 And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach.*

Asaph compares the wrath of God to an angry, energetic soldier pursuing fleeing adversaries and stabbing them with a sword in the back. Moreover, the death of Ephraim is compared to the shame of being killed while running away from advancing soldiers. It is the duty of soldiers to stand their ground and to defend their country. But, Ephraim ran away like scared rabbits. The word "coward" comes to mind.

### **Dismissal of Ephraim**

*67 Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim:*

Thus, the main warning of this psalm: God rejected Ephraim because they chose to sin against God like the apostates in the Wilderness.

### **Election of Judah**

*68 But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved.*

No reason is given. The reason God chose Jerusalem to be the Capital of the nation rests in the heart of God – not in the character of the people or the virtues of David.

### **The Blessing of a Skilled, Caring King-Shepherd**

*69 And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established for ever. 70 He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: 71 From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance.*

Asaph shines the spotlight on God’s favor toward Judah. Unlike Ephraim that perished, God elected, ordained, and established Judah as the object of His love and the heirs of His grace.

### **Pastoral Care of God over the People**

*72 So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.*

O, the foolishness of Ephraim to reject the grace, mercy, love, strength, kindness, guidance, compassion, and provision of the Lord God.

No wonder Asaph penned this lesson for all to learn the benefits of being faithful to the Lord.

### **Application**

Americans would do well to learn Asaph’s lessons and apply it to their churches . . . and to their nation.

“Behold the goodness and severity of God” (Romans 11:22).

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Notes:

1) on the term “maschil” from Barnes:

The word “Maschil” in the title – משכיל *maškîyl*, is derived from the verb – שכל *śakal* – meaning properly “to look at, to behold, to view;” and then, to be prudent, circumspect; to act prudently or circumspectly, as one does who looks attentively and carefully at objects; then it means to be intelligent, prudent, wise. The participle, which is the form used here (causitive of the Hiphil), means “making wise or prudent,” or “conveying instruction;” and this title is given to this

psalm, as well as to many others, as conveying the idea that the psalm was adapted “to make wise,” or to impart instruction; and the sense would be well expressed by our phrase, “didactic song.” The title is prefixed also to the following psalms: Psalm 42:1-11; Psalm 44; Psalm 45; Psalm 52:1-9; Psalm 53:1-6; Psalm 54:1-7; Psalm 55; Psalm 74; Psalm 88; Psalm 89; Psalm 142:1-7.

**On the Difference in these terms:**

What is the difference between an Insurrection, a Rebellion, and a Revolution?

Insurrection – a violent uprising against a legitimate authority or government.

Rebellion – an act of violent or open resistance to God’s established government or ruler.

Note: Rebellion in the Bible is strictly against a God-ordained authority. It is not possible to “rebel” against a tyrant because the tyrant is the one rebelling against Heaven’s Will. Resistance to tyranny is service to God – not rebellion.

Revolution – a forcible overthrow of a government or social order.

# Psalm 79 - A Lament Over the Destruction of Jerusalem



This psalm was written by Asaph or one of his Levitical family members.

The time of the composition is uncertain. Some scholars think it was written during the time of Antiochus Epiphanies, but it was most likely written after the Babylonian Invasion and ruin of Jerusalem under

Nebuchadnezzar (586 B.C.).

This is not a comfortable psalm. It behaves more like a funeral march than a victory parade. It is a groaning-prayer that comes out of the darkness of the death and destruction of Jerusalem. Asaph's prayer is a cry from a broken heart . . . a conquered Jew bearing a flicker of hope that God would intervene in the hour of the death to save the nation.

Little did Asaph know that God was using the Chaldeans to judge the nation for their profound sins; that the Jews would be in well-treated slaves in Babylon; that Babylon would fall to the Persians; that God would use the exile to purge the nation of idolatry forever; and, that the Jews would experience the greatest comeback in history.

How do you correct a nation infected with idolatry . . . a nation that worships idols on every hill and under every green tree (Jeremiah 2:20)? A nation where every man has his own god and his own law-order (Jeremiah 10:14)? A nation where every man lusts after his neighbor's wife (Jeremiah 5:8)? A nation governed by odious women (Isaiah 3:10-12)?

God has a way to resolve the fruits of idolatry. It is called Babylonians, death of the idolaters, deportation, and enslavement by foreign powers. Before the exile, the Jews were the most idolatrous people on earth; after the exile they became the most monotheistic people on the planet.

Therefore, we give thanks for the chilling disciplines of the Lord as well as for the charming delights of God.

## A Review of the Terrible Destruction of Jerusalem

### The Heathen Have Come

*Psalm 79:1 <A Psalm of Asp.> O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps.*

Asaph describes the invasion of the Chaldeans and their demolition of the temple (589-586) – a profound mystery and stunning experience for every surviving Hebrew.

## **Dead Bodies Everywhere**

*2 The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth.*

Asaph describes the carnage of unburied bodies all around Jerusalem. What a terrible sight – rotting corpses, broken limes, severed heads, and vultures pecking at body parts! Who could forget?

## **A Bloody Slaughter**

*3 Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them.*

Though death is not uncommon in war, the ease at which the Babylonians slaughtered the people and the lack of help by the Lord bewildered the Jewish mind. Where was God?

## **Ridicule and Derision**

*4 We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us.*

Not only were the Jews stunned by the ruination of the nation, the surrounding nations were solemnly amused by the leveling of the nation's capital.

## **A Prayer for A Reversal of Circumstances**

*5 How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire? 6 Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name.*

That God was angry with the Jews, all knew! The question was, “for how long?”

Asaph reflects the mindset of all surviving Jews. It's one thing to experience a defeat, but total annihilation? In the mind of the Jew, God was supposed to protect His people and to crush their enemies. But, it appeared God protected the Babylonians only to ravage Judah. Why? How long would God's anger boil against the people?

## **Reasons for the Prayer**

### **Jacob Devoured**

*7 For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place.*

The Babylonians not only attacked Jerusalem, they devoured God's lambs like ravenous wolves. No Jew could understand this or believe that good would come out of this slaughter and the dismantling of the nation.

## **Jacob Humbled**

*8 O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low.*

The exiles were quick to conclude God ravished the nation because of their sins. What they could not understand why their appeared to be no mercy in the conquest. No people left in the land, no temple, no priesthood, no capital city baffled all the Jews. Where was the tender mercy of God?

## **Divine Glory at Stake**

*9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake.*

People can boast of God's power and goodness in times of plenty, but how could the survivors boast about God having the foundations of the nations demolished? Somehow, someday, Asaph prayed for deliverance from exile and that God scrub the nation clean of its sins.

*10 Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed.*

Restoration was not only important so Israel could continue in the faith, but God's glory and reputation among the nations was at stake. How could the ravishing of the nation cause the heathen to be impressed with Israel's God?

## **Prisoners in Danger of Dying**

*11 Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die;*

This is a prayer that God would see the tears and hear the cries, groaning, and sorrows of the exiles . . . that they might still find hope in God – that God would be moved by the suffering of His people to act on their behalf.

## **Justice Demands Retribution**

*12 And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord.*

Disturbed by the victory dances of the pagan nations over Jerusalem's downfall, Asaph prays that those rejoicing in their defeat as proof that God was unable to protect them and that their faith was false felt like plagues in their bosom – kind of like having to wear a dead chicken around their neck.

## **A Flicker of Light**

*13 So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations.*

This psalm has melancholy written all over it; but, there is a flicker of light.

The “we” is the remnant or “thy people.”

How do you respond to the death of your loved ones and the destruction of your beloved city? Asaph lights a candle and shows us the way: praise God and give thanks.

How could anyone give thanks seeing dead corpses in the city, blood in the streets, and Babylonian soldiers stabbing men, women, and children with grins on their faces? But, God’s white sheep did.

The righteous give thanks in all things: in the good times and the bad times for the Scripture says, “In everything give thanks.” God’s sheep do not flee to the comforts of the world but into the comforting arms of the Shepherd. Asaph is not seeking the Creator as much as he is encouraging his people to seek their Chastiser.

Surrounded by war whoops, blood, and groans from the dying, His sheep found safety in patterns of thankfulness. And, not one of those bearing the mark of the Tav (t) on their forehead died in this slaughter (Ezekiel 9:4ff). All were preserved. Idolaters died. Praise and thanks being expressions of trust and faith, those that gave thanks and praised God survived.

There are two ways to improve a nation: (1) Conversion by the cross; and, (2) the death of the wicked. In this case, God destroyed the tares and preserved the wheat. There is no other way.

Give thanks and live, or complain and die with the idolaters.

“But since correction lieth in those hands, Which made the fault that we cannot correct, Put we our quarrel to the will of Heaven, Who, when he sees the hours ripe on earth, Will rain hot vengeance on offenders’ heads.” (Shakespeare, Richard II, Act 1, Scene 2).

# Psalm 80 - Turn Us Again, O God of Hosts

*"Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine"*



This precious psalm by Asaph bears a strong resemblance to Psalm 74 and Psalm 79:1-13; and, it is touched by angels for it has the fingerprints of cherubim all over it.

It appears to be birthed in Israel's Babylonian captivity where Jews were asking "Why?" The "why question" is in place to cause people to think and to carefully analyze the theological dynamics that took place under this traumatic chastisement.

To perceive the dynamics behind history and to lift the veil to understand the Lord's perspective on political concerns one must work with angels and priests. Asaph pulls back the veil to show us the real remedy to the world's problems.

Reading the psalms is like taking a trip to heaven. It is the need of the hour . . . the need of every Christian . . . of every church! If you want man's perspective on life, listen to the news; if you want God's perspective on life, study the psalms.

If you are searching for a remedy to all the madness in the world and carnality in the church, spend time with Asaph the priest.

This is a priestly invocation-prayer entreating God to rise up and save His people. Those who think man's future is determined by man's choices, votes, and the decisions of government are dreadfully mistaken! God must turn the people. Do not trust princes (Psalm 118:8-9).

The key to understanding this psalm is to rid yourself of all hypocrisy and duplicity, and to become a simple, humble apprentice priest at the feet of Asaph.

A key word in this psalm is the word "turn" (shuwb). Used four times, it is an appeal to this sovereign God to use His muscle and might to "turn the people" back to Him — a Calvinist perspective on life that Armenians have difficulty appreciating. The emphasis in this psalm is upon God turning us and not upon our effort to turn ourselves to God.

The key title for Elohim in this psalm is "the LORD God of Hosts" — the Source of Salvation. It takes the armies of God to turn sinners away from the Poisonous Tree to the Tree of Life.

Christians are very concerned about changing the world — something no one can do; but, God is interested in perfecting His church, not changing the government — Judgment must begin at the house of God. He seeks to make better men, not bigger corporations; to make better Christians, not fatter wallets. Correction lies in His hands, not in our choices.



Blessing comes from God through priests to the nation. *The faults that we can barely detect, only He can clearly correct. "Turn us, O God!"*

### **The First Prayer for God to Turn and Save the People**

*Psalm 80:1 <To the chief Musician upon Shoshannimeduth, A Psalm of Asaph.> Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.*

"Shoshannimeduth" is used in Psalm 60, 69, and 80. It is translated "lilies" in 1 Kings 7:22 and 1 Kings 7:26 -- most likely a musical instrument.

"Give ear" is an invocation for God to hear this prayer-song.

Asaph addresses the Lord as "O Shepherd of Israel" — an appeal to God's tender, gracious, caring, compassionate character as the Pastor of "his flock." Let us remember to direct our prayer to the Lord who is "the Good Shepherd," (John 10:11), the "Great Shepherd," (Hebrews 13:20-21) and the "Chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4).

He could have called God a Vineyard Keeper as this theme also arises in this psalm.

"led Jacob like a flock": Jacob called God his Shepherd — the one who guided Him all the days of his life (Genesis 48:15; 49:24). Therefore, rescue your flock from the wolves trampling through your vineyard.'

"the flock" is Israel, the remnant, the exiles, true Israelites indeed. The NT equivalent would be "the disciples," "the people of God," "His sheep," "the remnant," "the New Israel," "the True Israel," "Christians," or the "church of the Firstborn."

"thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth" is not a poetic gesture, but a perceptive appeal to the Throne, to the Seat of Power, to the Lord's authority as the King of Israel — a lying hold of the throne of grace of a people seeking shelter under the "Wings of the Cherubim" as little chicks seeking refuge from the storm under the wings of their mother (Hebrews 4:16; Matthew 23:37).

Blood is on the mercy seat. "shine forth" in power . . . in mercy . . . for the good of Thy people who live in darkness. Let your mercy which is "higher than the heavens" reach us (Israel) — a not so subtle rebuke regarding the golden calves erected at Dan and Bethel in 931 B.C. by Jeroboam.

"Shine forth — Out of the clouds, wherein thou seemest to hide thyself. Show forth thy power and goodness to, and for, thy poor oppressed people, in the face of their enemies" (Benson).

*2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us.*

The reference, “Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh” is an appeal to unity and better times when these three diverse tribes marched together as if descendants of the same mother: See [Genesis 46:19-20](#); [Numbers 2:18-24](#); [Numbers 10:22-24](#).

### *3 Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*

This Calvinistic prayer for God to “turn” (shuwb) the nation around is pleaded three times in this psalm, and once for God to turn Himself to the nation (3, 7, 14, 19). The prayer does not say, “Let us turn” to the Lord. Revival is of God, not man.

“Turn us again” implies the tribes were headed in the wrong direction — that they were divided from the Lord and each other. Restore us to an unblemished position of love and favor.

“again” implies God must do this work again and again in our lives. Sometimes, the entire army of God must be employed for deliverance. It was at the cross. Sometimes we need deliverance from the giants of avarice, pride, lust, jealousy, sloth, megalomania, anger, and gluttony.

“Turn us again” implies the nation had a chronic stiff neck disorder due to the depravity of man (Exodus 32:9; Deuteronomy 9:6, 13) — a spiritual posture that mimics stubbornness, abstinence, hardheadedness, unsearchableness, and willfulness. These steely, ossified conditions can only be broken by the power of God.

Asaph praise God would reach down, re-align Israel’s backbone, and bend the tribes away from their deep-seated sins, their spirit of independence, and their self-reliance.

“cause thy face to shine” is a portion of the priestly benediction in Numbers — an invocation for their Captain to rise from His throne and shine His light and grace upon the people: “the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night” (Numbers 9:15;) — an appeal for God to change His disposition and to deal with them favorably.

Consider the Aaronic Blessing — the Lord’s Prayer of the Old Testament. Note the Source of Blessing and the ternary use of “LORD” and the sestet blessings: provision, preservation, illumination, graciousness, favor, and shalom.

“The LORD bless you, and keep you;  
The Lord make His face shine on you,  
And be gracious to you;  
The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,  
And give you peace.” (Numbers 6:22-27)

“and we shall be saved” — saved from political turmoil, impending dangers, division, discord, and from the evil effects of their sins on the nation’s welfare. Blessing comes to the people through the priests . . . the pastors . . . and the churches, and do not come through congressmen, presidents, judges, armies, bureaucrats, voters, or protestors.

[Note: the primary problem with every nation in decline is not the economy, shortages of energy, or corruption in government, but sin and rebellion against the LORD God and His law-order. And, the nation refuse to believe this. The answer to the secular mind is always more money, bigger government, increase in military spending, and additional legislation. Christians must stop believing that the economy is the problem! The problem is spiritual, not financial; likewise, the solution is spiritual and not commercial.]

### **A Second Prayer for God to Turn the People and to Save Them**

What are the evidences of God being angry with His people? Consider the following:

*4 O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?*

Asaph changes His focus from the Lord as a Shepherd, the Lord as the Captain of battalions of soldiers.

In this prayer, Asaph addresses His Sovereign as “LORD God of hosts”; i.e. “the God of Armies”— an appeal to His sovereignty as Ruler of the hosts in heaven and the armies of Israel on earth — an appeal to the Covenant Keeping God — to the absolute authority of Israel’s Captain and Commander to rise up, go before the people, and to defeat their enemies.

Numbers 10:35 And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee.

His strength as “LORD God of hosts” invigorates believers: “Little ones to him belong; they are weak, but he is strong;” “His strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:8); “If God is on our side, which can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

Barak said of Israel: “Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain” (Numbers 23:24). May this be true of the church.

The word “angry” (ashan) means “to smoke” or “to burn with anger.” Because the LORD did not answer their prayer, they assumed that God was angry with them. With the LORD, anger is one of His virtues. The question becomes, “How long will this continue?”

*5 Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure.*

“Thou feedest them” is good . . . but with tears?

So grievous was this chastisement, Asaph pictures God’s people eating meals and drinking cups of water salted by tears. Great grief and disappointment are signs that God is angry at his people.

The word “great measure” (shālī’ysh) refers to a measure of grain as in a third of an ephah (a bushel or 56 pounds).

Notice God's grace and the limited nature of His anger.

Yes, He may be angry at his people, but they will never face a full bushel of His angst — a third maybe, but never a full bushel. God is good and His anger is good! How else do we learn what pleases Him? How else do we realize the seriousness of sin? Yes, Christians may experience painful discipline for their sins . . . but they will never experience the wrath of God because His entire wrath against sin was poured out on Christ. If He paid for all of our sins, how many sins are left for us to pay for?

*6 Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves.*

"laugh" refers to mocking, jeering, jesting, and scoffing at God's people.

"neighbours" here refers to surrounding nations. Strife with men is another indicator of God's displeasure against His people. Mocking the faith is another.

Proverbs 16:7-31 When a man's ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Sometimes, but not always, contention with other sheep indicates we have "rough edges" that need to be smoothed out.

However, strife is not always an indicator we have done something wrong; sometimes strife indicates we have done something right.

John 7:7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil

Psalms 44:22 Yea, for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are considered like sheep for the slaughter.

*7 Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*

This second prayer ends with "Turn us again." This is a second request for God" to "turn them around" . . . to him . . . to each other. Asaph inserts the title, "O God of hosts" — a reference to the sovereignty, authority, and power of God as Captain over all creatures — an indicator of greater sincerity by Asaph.

This appeal is to the "God of hosts." Asaph uses this title here a second time — a request for God to rise and shine and to save the people — a priestly benediction of the priests in Numbers 6:34-27.

"shine" is used three times in this psalm — the remnant of priestly blessing referring to the warmth of affection, benevolence, and goodwill.

It is impossible to feel the glow of God's countenance when our backs are to Him — Lord, turn us around so we can see and feel the warmth of your smile.

### A Third Prayer for God to Return and Save the People

This prayer is based on God's gracious historical dealings with His people.

*8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.*

Asaph calls Israel "a vine out of Egypt" – a dormant grape vine capable of being replanted in another field – a propagation procedure.

"Thou hast cast out the heathen" – a reference to the Canaanites during the time of Joshua.

*9 Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.*

"Thou" refers to the work, care, and superintendence of the Lord over His vineyard Israel.

Grapevines that are cut 8 to 16 inches long with three or four buds can be replanted with three buds in moist soil to grow a vineyard. God planted the 12 sons of Jacob in the land to uproot the Canaanite kings and to take possession of the land.

*10 The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars.*

Asaph employs agricultural metaphors to express the growth of Israel.

So effective was the planting of Israel in the land that its boughs were everywhere – the cities of 12 tribes stood out like large cedars; that is, God's plan not only made progress but prospered to the point of maturity agriculturally, spiritually, and civilly. It became a true nation with a constitution, law, government, and industries that were self-sustaining.

*11 She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river.*

The metaphor of a growing vineyard continues with an emphasis on expansion.

*12 Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?*

The theme suddenly switches from one of prosperity to one of plunder. God removed His hedge of protection and foreigners came across its borders as an army of pirates to steal the nation's wealth.

The "thou" refers to God's intentional demolition of His vineyard – a tearing down of the economy that was so complete that foreigners plucked what was left of the country's riches.

*13 The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it.*

"doth waste it" means to cut down or cut off; to devour; and to trample down. The invaders are compared to wild pigs that ravage the vineyard devouring and stealing everything of value due to the intentional neglect of the Foreman.

*14 Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine;*

“Return . . . O God of hosts” is used a third time, and it implies that God intentionally, deliberately left His vineyard to be trampled on by illegal aliens. Asaph issues the plea to “return” (shuwb) four times in this psalm. This time it is a plea that the “God of hosts” — the God of armies . . . the Vinedresser might return — an appeal to the people’s Sovereign to come back and to reverse the nation’s fortunes — to restore His favors — to employ all His powers to reconnect with His people.

“turn” and “look down” are the verb; the implied “You” or “god of Hosts” is the subject; and the implied “Yourself” is the direct object; and to “us” is the indirect object.

Where is the Owner? Return, O God of hosts. Restore, repair, and renew your vineyard. Protect us. Revive us. Save us.

“visit this vine”: The strength of any nation is in its “priests” who enter behind the veil to pray prayers that touch the heart of God and unlock His power for the good of the people (vine). Good does not come because of voters or government leaders. Good comes from God.

#### **A Fourth Prayer for God to Turn and Save His People**

*15 And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. 16 It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance.*

John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Asaph continues to describe the devastation and destruction of God’s choice vineyard comparing it to a vineyard set on fire to burn deadwood, weeds, and other pests.

“right hand” refers to God’s special power and love in planting Israel in the land.

“fire,” “cut down,” “perish,” and “rebuke of thy countenance” refer to the severity of God’s chastisements upon the nation.

*17 Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.*

“Let thy hand” refers to an act of sovereignty.

This is the fourth prayer that God would turn the nation around; that God’s hand might be “upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.” It is a plea the Lord would sustain the nation’s leadership; that God would strengthen the government and its chief officials to act wisely for the good of the people.

*18 So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.*

“we not go back from Thee” — Asaph, speaking for the people, expresses the “should be” unbending, unyielding, uncompromising commitment of the people to the Lord. This commitment appears to be dependent on God delivering the people.

But, human desire and human choice is not enough. God has to provide the quickening (chayah) — the condition requisite for calling upon His name is that God infuses life into the people.

“quicken us” is a prayer for God to revive the people — to renew the people’s devotion to the Lord. Reformation, revival, and spiritual renewal always precede an economic recovery. You can’t plan it; God must provide it.

*19 Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*

This is the fourth time Asaph prays that the “God of hosts” would intervene and use His authority to turn the nation from their sins and empower them to surrender to His command. To turn the people toward holiness and devotion to His will so He could shine on them and treat them with favor.

Sin severs fellowship, and only by forsaking sin, can His people enjoy the sunshine of His favors. “Turn,” therefore, is the mission of this psalm.

The subject of the sentence is “You” (the LORD of Hosts); the verb is “turn”; and the object of the action is “us.”

That is, all this pruning and devastation of God’s vineyard is because the nation turned its back on the Lord. The remedy to backsliding is in God and not human choices. He has to turn men to Himself — to face Him and to accept His law-order.

Asaph prays that God would do the turning . . . that He would be pleased to change His countenance and to shine on the people with favor. If God acts, “we shall be saved”; that is, the remedy for hardship and trouble is in the Lord and not in man.

Oh, to be fully turned from sin and restored to God! It is so much easier to play Christian than to perform as a Christian; to talk holy than to be holy; to waiver rather than to labor; to dither and dally than to be devoted to Him; be playful rather than faithful; to chase after the urgent instead of the important; to feed our sins instead of forsake our sins.

The impatient, pragmatic, Armenian Christian will say, “ I prayed this prayer and it didn’t work!” Well, it worked for this priest who prayed this prayer circa (586 B.C.) and saw the dynamic answer 50 years later in the return of the Jews to Israel in 536 B.C.

O, how much better the world would be if we waited upon Him to revive us. Then He would turn our foolishness into holiness. Oh, for the strength to forsake the darkness and to find His light. Only the love + of Christ can deliver us from the sins we love. Turn us, O God of Hosts. Return and make Thy face to shine upon us . . . your people . . . the sheep of your pasture . . . your church! Amen!



# Psalm 81 - Behold the Goodness and Severity of God

*"He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee."*



This psalm was composed for Asaph to create a chorus for the nation to sing at festival seasons — a “warning” psalm reminding the nation of their blessings, duties, and missed blessings due to their disobedience.

The Apostle Paul commanded the Romans to “Behold the goodness and severity of God” (Romans 11:33) and we would do well to consider this theme.

## The Duty of Praise



*Psalm 81:1 <To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm of Asaph.> Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.*

*2 Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery.*

*3 Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day.*

The lesson here is let all the musical instruments and the talents of men be employed in praise to the LORD God. Praise is good, complaining is bad; praise comes from faith, complaining comes from fear; God loves praise, and the Devil hates it. The Devil loves complaining and criticism, and God hates it. Praise God every day to keep the Devil away.

*4 For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob.*

Praise and rejoicing in the Lord are not great options; this is law! — a great duty incumbent on all men. God has one basic household rule, *you must be happy and sing and rejoice being in His kingdom-home!* Complaining and criticizing other family members is strictly forbidden. Be happy or get spanked! When we rejoice in God’s salvation, we fulfill His will for our lives.

During our Bible Camp days we avoided a long list of Do’s and Don’ts. We established one rule: *You must be happy and to make sure other people are happy by the way you behave.* Make the cooks happy, the counselors happy, and fellow-campers happy, and we will have a good week at camp. It was easy to enforce and easy to correct aberrant behavior among campers.



## **Behold the Goodness of God**

*5 This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not.*

Promises fulfilled: Leaving Egypt was prophesied by Joseph and realized in the Exodus event where the people traveled out of Egypt unmolested.

Preservation of their language: “I heard a strange language,” refers to the Egyptian language in contrast to the original Hebrew of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — a language perfectly preserved during Israel’s captivity in Egypt.

The use of “I” is a literary device to communicate truth. The author transports Himself to the time of the exodus as if he was one of the slaves in Egypt struggling to understand the Egyptian dialect surrounded by complex polytheism and multiculturalism.

*6 I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots.*

Freedom from slavery: “removed” implies deliverance and freedom from bondage.

“shoulder from the burden” and “pots” refer to the work of slaves carrying water and slats of bricks to build Pharaoh’s cities.

*7 Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.*

Answered prayer: “trouble” refers to Israel’s bondage in Egypt.

“callest” refers to the nation’s prayers that produced a Moses to lead them out of Egypt.

“The secret place of thunder” is an allusion to Mt. Sinai, an isolated, desolate mountain.

“the waters of Meribah” was at Mt. Horeb where the LORD tested their faith and proved to them that He was the all-sufficient God by bringing water out of the rock.

### **The Duty of God’s People to Hear**

*8 Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me;*

The imperative “hear” (shema) appears in the emphatic position. It is the most fundamental duty placed on men . . . something Israel found difficult to do.

God gave us two eyes, two hands, two feet, two ears, and one mouth. Unfortunately, the mouth is open more than the ears; and, the mouth does more work than the hands or feet.

Knowing the tendency of men to be yakky doodles, the great Catholic Monk, St. Benedict required monks to follow the rule of silence.

Epictetus, the great stoic philosopher noted, “We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.”

Blindness separates people from material objects; deafness separates people from God and man.

### **The Duty of Fidelity**

*9 There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god.*

The word rendered “strange” (zār) refers to an alien or to a person foreign to a nation. God placed a duty on men not to worship gods or adopt the laws of foreign nations. Since gods are the source of law, the permissive and cruel gods of the nations competed for the attention of the Israelite. “No other god before me” was the first and foremost law of the Hebrew commonwealth.

“no” – This negative command requires man to restrain his impulses and to refuse to comply to the lawlessness of liberalism. Israel crumbled, **not** because they refused to obey their government, but because they complied with government’s addiction to liberalism (2 Kings 17: 8-21:).

2 Kings 17:8 And walked in the statutes of the heathen . . .

### **The Duty to Receive His Love**

*10 I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.*

A positive command: This one absolute God with one absolute law redeemed Israel from Egypt and had made one, absolute demand on His people — to be exclusively devoted to Him. Blessing was associated with loyalty and obedience.

“Open wide your mouth” is an analogy referring to young chicks that open their mouth so their mothers can feed them. This is God’s way of instructing Israel to open their ears and to hear him only; to open their mouth to let God meet their needs. The meaning is clear: “I am the all-sufficient One. Do not go to other gods, other religions, or other counselors.

Don’t go to psychologists and the great university professors for guidance. I am able to meet all your needs and satisfy all your wants” Selah!

“Open wide”: This positive command requires positive energy; that is, for men to stoke the fires in the furnace of their hearts to seek God.

## **Behold the Severity of God Due to Dereliction of Duty by Israel**

*11 But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.*

Israel refused to hear the LORD; i.e. they spurned the LORD and refused to find all their happiness in Him.

### **Missed Guidance**

*12 So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.*

“heart’s lust”: God withdrew and turned them over to the hardness of their hearts; that is, to let them go their own way to suffer its bitter consequences.

### **Missed Blessings**

*13 Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!*

This passage shows us the blessings that Israel missed because of their hard heart and complaining.

*14 I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.*

### **Missed Victories and Conquests over their Enemies.**

*15 The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever.*

Israel missed the happiness, joy, and blessings which God intended to be perpetual. But, sin and rebellion against God, without exception, is the ruin of all people. See the three most common sins of people in 1 Corinthians 10:6-10 and flee from them as fast as your sandals can slap.

### **Missed Harvests and Honey**

*16 He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.*

In traveling through the wilderness, Israel complained and grumbled — this childish petulance is one of the three sins of the nation that resulted in 40 years of discipline.

God tested the nation ten times. Once they responded by committing idolatry; once they plunged into immorality; and, eight (8) times they “grumbled”; i.e. were peevish and choleric (1 Corinthians 10:6-10)

In grace, God provided them with manna and water. The great question, therefore, is what would have happened if they did not grumble? The answer is that God would have provided them with gourmet wheat in the desert and Manuka Honey out of the rock; that is, they got what they needed when they complained, but missed God’s best for them by not being thankful and waiting on Him.

Blessed be the Name of the LORD.



# Psalm 82 - A Charge to Magistrates

*“How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked?”*



We do not know the time or the occasion for this psalm, but we are very familiar with corruption in the courts and the reason for God addressing magistrates on earth.

Judicial administrators have the same problems as all men. Some are lazy, many are swayed by public opinion, and others are open to bribes.

## A Statement about the Supreme Judge

*Psalm 82:1 <A Psalm of Asaph.> God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods.*

“God standeth in the congregation of the mighty” means that the Supreme Ruler of the Universe has standing to issue directives to judges in the courts of men. They are responsible to His law. Further, the Supreme Chief Justice holds these magistrates accountable to Himself and His law. These arrogant jurists will give account of their manipulation of law to enrich the State.

## A Probing Question

*2 How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah.*

Can you say “bias, prejudice, corruption, and conflicts of interest”? Just as fraud and bribery dominated the agenda of the courts today, so did they in the psalmist’s time.

“A comprehensive analysis of nearly 57,000 corruption cases in federal courts spanning 30 years revealed that fraud and bribery dominated the types of conduct underlying criminal cases, accounting for 76% of the lead charges in cases resulting in convictions” (National Institute of Justice)

## A Charge to Magistrates

*3 Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.*

**Duty One:** It is a duty of magistrates to defend those who cannot defend themselves. It does not mean ruling in favor of the poor against the rich, but to see that right is done to them regardless of the favors being offered to a judge by the wealthy.

Two vulnerable defendants are mention, the poor that do not have the resources to defend themselves and the fatherless that are ignorant of the judicial process and do not have a father-attorney to intercede on their behalf.

*4 Deliver the poor and needy; rid them out of the hand of the wicked.*

**Duty two:** Deliver the poor and needy from the oppressive power of the sophisticated dexterity of those who would crush the weak.

The “wicked” would be rich, powerful plaintiffs.

### **A Word about Weakness Among Magistrates**

*5 They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course.*

The psalmist addresses corruption in Israel’s courts.

Many judges suffer from tunnel vision; i. e. they can’t see the forest for the trees. But, in this case, these magistrates were willingly ignorant about religion, God’s law, and the rules of the court. These judges not only manufactured void judgments due to malicious prosecution, they had no desire to judge fairly. These vultures sitting on thrones of power took no pains to learn the facts or the law before they rendered a judgment.

### **A Warning to Judges**

*6 I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.*

The appellation “gods” refers to the status of judges. Because the fate and destiny of men are in their hands, they have the power of gods.

The Lord gently reminds these surrogates that their status among men is temporary; that in time they will suffer the fate and destiny of common, unbelieving men.

*7 But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.*

He reminds these stuffy, nose-in-the-air magistrates who considered themselves superior to the common man that they are mortal like all men – *that they put their pants on one leg at a time.*

### **A Prayer Directive to the Supreme Court of Heaven**

*8 Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.*

“inherit” is the Biblical word for jurisdiction. The Creator has jurisdiction over what He creates.

Rather than take these matters to the courts of men, the psalmist appeals to the Supreme Court of Heaven to review these matters. “Come forth and see that justice is done on earth as it is in heaven.” The Judge of all men has a duty to do so seeing that He claims title over all nations.

# Psalm 83 – Be Not Still, O God



This is the last of the thirteen psalms of Asaph.

It is a priestly prayer by Asaph who intervenes on Israel's behalf.

The beauty of this psalm is Asaph's respectful approach to the Lord, his accurate intercession for the nation, and his evangelical spirit towards the nation's enemies.

## A Prayer for God to Wake Up and to Provide Emergency Relief

*Psalm 83:1 <A Song or Psalm of Asaph.> Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God.*

This prayer is directed to Elohim. His designated covenant name "LORD" (YHWH) is not used until verse 16 and 19. This is a basic prayer. However, Asaph is not praying to an unknown "god." He is praying to a particular God Whose name is the LORD.

There are three verbs in this sentence: "Keep," "hold," and "be still." Each is negated by the adverb "not."

The verb "keep" (demiy) means "to pause, be quiet, or to rest."

The verb "hold peace" (charash) means "to cut, engrave, or to plow." It is negated by adverb "not."

The verb "be still" means "to be undisturbed, quiet, or at rest." It too is negated by adverb "not." All these verbs are gentle jussives and not loud commands.

The nation is an emergency and God seemed to be indifferent to their crisis. Asaph gently knocks on God's chamber doors and calls Him to wake up out of His slumber and to intervene in this emergency.

"Plead for us, not by words, but by thy actions; hold not thy peace" (Benson).

### The National Emergency

*2 For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head.*

"For lo" (hegey) means "to wake up and take notice." It explains the reason for the prayer. Thy enemies of the Lord roar like the sea.

“thine enemies” — “Wicked men wish that there might be no religion among mankind” (Matthew Henry).

“tumult” (hamah) means “roar, growl, rage, disquieted, murmur, noise, and clamorous” — a serious political conflict motivated by “hate” and its brothers, “anger,” “rage,” and “reckless.”

The main idea in this text is that the heathen have been aroused like a lion pacing back and forth in a wild and restless manner eager for the kill. “tumult” is also analogous to the restless roaring of the raging, untamable sea.

“lifted up the head” is a metaphor for the body language of pride, insolence, boldness, confidence, and defiance. The heathen sharpened their tongues as well as their swords. Bells sounded. Cries for war ran through the streets.

“hate thee” — Nothing unites people more than the possibility of a holy war against an opposing religion — especially against a religious people that believe there is only one God and one way of salvation; against a people who will not socialize or eat with you; against a people who are intolerant of religious pluralism, feminism, relativism, humanism, polytheism, and omnism.

“Wicked men are commonly noisy, roaring out their blasphemies against God, belching out oaths and curses, and breathing threatenings and slaughter against the saints” (Gill).

### *3 They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones.*

“crafty counsel” refers to a conspiracy to trap and devour the innocent in Israel. Caravans reported to the Jews the blasphemies, curses, and threats of their neighboring nations.

“Whereby they have showed both their implacable rage and malice, and their great assurance of success . . . They have laid aside all their private quarrels and animosities, and agreed together against thee” (Benson).

“hidden ones” refer to a well-protected people that are not easily routed (Psalm 17:18; 27:5; 31:20).

### *4 They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.*

“Come” refers to a call to the nations to join the coalition to smash and desolate Israel’s foundations.

“cut off” refers to slaughter, extermination, and genocide of an entire nation.

“That the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance” — refers to extinction . . . the death of a race . . . of a religion . . . of the Messianic nation . . . of the light of the world -- a plan not to plunder their wealth and to make them slaves, but to make them dead.



Pious Christians would do well to remember the world will tolerate impotent religion but they will not tolerate a faith that claims to be the only way to God (John 14:6).

*5 For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee:*

The terms “consulted,” “one consent,” and “confederate” refers to international solidarity of these diverse states.

“confederate” literally means “to cut a covenant.” A reference to an international agreement or contract with nothing but death and killing on their minds — an anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Christian, antinomian, anti-humanity agenda.

So much of what the world does is to humiliate, abase, humble, and even stifle, choke, and smother the gospel. Think legislation like separation of church and state, censorship of hate speech; of morals even confusion regarding genders, marriage, and sexuality.

### **A Description of the Invaders**

Asaph mentions enemies from the south, east, west, and north: Edomites, Ishmaelites in the south; Moabites, Hagarenes (Arabs), Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek in the east; Philistines in the West; Tyre and Assyria in the north. The children of Lot, Ammon and Moab, appear to be the driving force of this conspiracy.

*6 The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes; 7 Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre; 8 Assur also is joined with them: they have holpen the children of Lot. Selah.*

### **A Prayer for God to Intervene**

*9 Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison: 10 Which perished at Endor: they became as dung for the earth.*

This prayer builds on the victories of Barak and Gideon.

Let them be overthrown like the Midianites (Numbers 31); and like Sisera the general of Hatzor, and Jabin the king of Hatzor (Judges 4-5) — Canaanites that perished near Mt. Tabor.

“dung for the earth” is a metaphor describing a massacre — a field of dead, rotting, mangled corpses that ended up being fertilizer to enrich the soil.

“All who oppose the kingdom of Christ may here read their doom. God is the same still that ever he was; the same to his people, and the same against his and their enemies” (Matthew Henry).

*11 Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna:*

Oreb and Zeeb were princes of Midian slain by Gideon.

Judges 7:25 And they took two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb; and they slew Oreb upon the rock Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian, and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side Jordan.

*12 Who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession.*

"houses" is better translated "pastures" or "meadows" or "sheep fields."

Asaph prays that God would overthrow their present enemies as He did past enemies -- powerful ancient enemies that marshaled all their military powers to conquer the "holy land." The land was "holy" because God's house was literally and physically in Jerusalem; but, the land is no longer holy because Christ is not there. He is in heaven at the right hand of the Father. The aim of the wicked is to neuter the church militant on earth.

## **A Prayer that the Enemy Might Be Overthrown**

### **As a Wheel, as Stubble**

*13 O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind.*

"like a wheel" refers to a "rolling thing" (galgal) like a chariot wheel.

"as the stubble" may refer to a tumble weed that is easily blown away by the wind.

The word "wheel" is used in Scripture to "refer to a chariot wheel that is easily moved. Ezekiel 10:2, Ezekiel 10:6; or a wheel for drawing water from a well, Ecclesiastes 12:6; then, a whirlwind, Psalm 77:19; and then, anything driven before a whirlwind, as chaff, or stubble, Isaiah 17:13." (Barnes).

The idea is that God would easily and quickly remove these thistles as a mechanic changes chariot wheels.

### **As Fire**

*14 As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire;*

Asaph beseeches the Lord to release His flaming arrows and to rain down fire on Israel's enemies. Few things arouse more fear in men than mountains on fire.

### **As a Storm**

*15 So persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm.*

"persecute" means "to pursue" in the sense of unyielding self-defense . . . to scare them away — a wish that God would send a powerful message to these enemies with an inescapable, raging storm that pelts the land with hailstones decimating fields and striking fear into man and beast.

### **Disappointment**

*16 Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD.*

“shame” (galown) refers “to regret, embarrassment, and disgrace” and not the pale face of death — that they would be filled with awe at the power of God and His love for His people.

“they may seek thy name, O Lord” shows the intent of this prayer. Asaph prays, not that the enemy would be annihilated and obliterated, but that the nations would be eternally impressed with the power of God.

This is not a malicious, hostile prayer for God to marshal his forces and to crush these nations. But, that God would deal with them in such a way as to impress them with the power, truth, and mercy of the LORD — to strike fear in their hearts that they might seek the Lord and discover His graces.

Here we see the beginning of prophecy . . . the dawn of the Messianic hope . . . the unfolding of the evangelical spirit to win men to Christ . . . the ambition to convert the nations . . . the merciful unfolding of the kingdom of God into history.

### **Confused and Alarmed**

*17 Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish:*

“confounded,” “troubled,” “shame,” and “perish” are terms of disappointment and humiliating defeat.

“confounded” (buwsh) refers “to shame, confusion, and disappointment.” Resist them . . . may they be baffled by the obstacles you place in front of them. May they be confused like chirping birds . . . like a flight of dark shadows . . . like rabbits in a thunderstorm.

“troubled” (bahal) refers to being disturbed with “alarm and terror.”

“yes, let them be put to shame” by utter failure in their schemes . . . by their inability to activate their plots . . . by the roadblocks you put in their in their path to victory.

### **The Intent of the Prayer**

*18 That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth.*

The spirit of Asaph shines with evangelical goodness. In this prayer, mercy and truth meet together (Psalm 85:10). May they know that you are truly God . . . the true God . . . the “Most High God over all the earth.” See Genesis 14:19 where Abraham lifted up his hand to “the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth.”

Asaph prays for the defeat of Israel’s enemies, but in a manner that would cause Israel’s enemies to come to know, admire, and respect the God of Israel. He wants the neighboring nations to know there is a difference between the LORD that exists and their gods that don’t

exist; between truth and fiction; that there would be such a manifestation of power that the nation's victory could only be traced to the intervention of the LORD God. He wants the nations to know there is only one, true God . . . and, that He dwells in Israel.

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