

**SBC – July 27, 2025**  
**Psalm 74:1-23 (NKJV)**  
**“A Cry to God for Help”**

**A Contemplation of Asaph.**

The word “contemplation” is the Hebrew word Maskil meaning teaching or instruction. Evidently, the intention is that this be used for instructing God’s people.

Asaph is named as the author. Eleven of the Psalms in this section (Ps. 73-83) are attributed to him. Asaph was a Levite. He was a worship leader amongst the people of God in the days of David and Solomon (cf. 1 Chron. 15:17-19, 16:5-7, 25:6). It is also noted in the Scripture that he was a prophet in conjunction with his musical compositions (cf. 1 Chron. 25:1; 2 Chron. 29:30).

However, the occasion of the Psalm is the destruction of the sanctuary (the Temple) and therefore most believe that this refers to when the Temple was destroyed at the time of the Babylonian Captivity in 586 BC. This was hundreds of years later than the time of the Asaph who was a contemporary of David and Solomon in about 1000 BC.

It is true that the Asaph family continued to be prominent in Israel and so perhaps one of his descendants wrote this under the family name. Asaph was also a prophet and so he could have written this prophetically. So, commentators grapple with various scenarios as to how to explain this.

David Guzik summarizes these possibilities....

**Slide # 1**

- Asaph wrote of the catastrophe at Shiloh described in [1 Samuel 4](#), either being alive at that time or writing in the memory of it.
- Asaph wrote prophetically of a catastrophe that was still in the future.
- The Asaph who wrote this psalm was not the same Asaph associated with the reigns of David and Solomon, or this psalm came from his “school” and was written many years later.

Whatever the explanation, it is attached in some way to Asaph and is intended to be useful for our instruction.

**Slide # 2*****Psalm 74*****“A Cry to God for Help”**

vv. 1-8 Lament Over Sanctuary Desolation

vv. 9-11 A Sense of Hopelessness

vv. 12-17 Remembering God’s Intervening Power in History

vv. 18-23 A Plea for God’s Help

**1 O God, why have You cast us off forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?**

One of the most common laments of people going through hard times is WHY? Some has said this is “wail of a believer”. This is raw emotion from a troubled soul.

He feels like God has rejected them and wants to know if this will go on forever. It seems like there is no end in sight.

He asks God, “Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?” Not only did it feel like God has cast them off, but also that in anger God was punishing them.

Now indeed, if this is the context of the Babylonian Captivity, then if the writer would think about this, he would realize that God had been very patient with them as a people.

**Slide # 3****2 Chronicles 36:15–16 (NKJV)**

**15** And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place.

**16** But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

**2 Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old,  
The tribe of Your inheritance, which You have redeemed— This Mount  
Zion where You have dwelt.**

The word “Remember” is not the idea of mere recall, but to remember and act with favor. Asaph appeals to God to act on the fact that Israel was His special people, His people He had purchased and redeemed by bringing them out of the slave market of the nations (so to speak); they were His inheritance in the sense of being His valued treasure. And He asked God to remember how He had dwelt intimately with them in the context of Mount Zion.

Humanly speaking it is like appealing to an estranged loved one and seeking to stir up and kindle the special relationship they used to have.

**3 Lift up Your feet to the perpetual desolations. The enemy has  
damaged everything in the sanctuary.**

Here is the reason why the writer feels so broken. The enemy has wreaked havoc on the holy sanctuary of God’s people. He hopes that reminding God of this horrendous treachery would motivate God to move quickly for Israel’s good.

**4 Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place; They set up  
their banners for signs.**

His thinking was that this should offend God greatly! Blasphemous voices of the enemy were heard in His meeting place instead of the praise of God’s people. There, they had brazenly set up their banners. These evidently were idolatrous emblems, probably flaunting themselves and their supposed gods.

**5 They seem like men who lift up Axes among the thick trees.**

**6 And now they break down its carved work, all at once, With axes  
and hammers.**

**7 They have set fire to Your sanctuary; They have defiled the dwelling  
place of Your name to the ground.**

These enemies had no reverence for the God of Israel whatsoever. Like the barbarians they were, they hacked all the sacred things in the sanctuary to pieces. They burned the sanctuary to the ground, thus defiling the holy dwelling place of God’s name. This amounted to a frontal attack on the God of Israel.

And yet it was as if God had abandoned the place and His people because He did nothing about it.

**8 They said in their hearts, “Let us destroy them altogether.” They have burned up all the meeting places of God in the land.**

Their goal in their hearts was to annihilate the people of God and any place the worship of God might take place.

The synagogue did not exist as an established institution until the Babylonian captivity. Yet it seems likely that there were **meeting places of God** throughout the land of Israel. When Israel was obedient, these were not places of sacrifice but places of prayer and hearing of the Scriptures. The Levites were commanded to teach Israelites the Scriptures ([Deuteronomy 17:9-12](#), [33:10](#); [Leviticus 10:8-11](#)). It makes sense that there might have been **meeting places of God** in many communities even before the synagogue became an established institution. – **David Guzik**

**9 We do not see our signs; There is no longer any prophet; Nor is there any among us who knows how long.**

Asaph lamented that they no longer saw miraculous signs being worked by God among them. There was no longer a prophet on the scene to bring the revelation from God.

If indeed, we are talking about the destruction of the Temple at the time of the Babylonian Captivity, Ezekiel was taken to Babylon and Jeremiah to Egypt leaving the people with no prophet.

#### **Slide # 4**

“Our problem is not an absence of God’s Word or God’s teachers. Our problem is that we do not value this Word. We do not cherish it and study it. We do not memorize its important passages. Instead we allow countless lesser things (like television) to take the Bible’s place.” - **James Montgomery Boice**

And then the writer says, “Nor is there any among us knows how long.” Here is the burning question. If you know how long you have to suffer you can muster through it, but if seems like there is no end in sight it is easy to loose heart.

His “Why” question is closely related to “how long?”

**10 O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?**

Will this go on forever? Is God never going to act?

At this point, he even more clearly brings God into the equation. This was really an affront to God Himself. Would God allow the enemy to continue to blaspheme Him forever?

As seen in Psalm 73 there are times when God’s people can’t seem to make sense out of what God is doing or in this case not doing.

And so he once again reverts to the “WHY” question.

**11 Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? Take it out of Your bosom and destroy them.**

He can’t understand why God won’t act in the face of such egregious actions on the part of the enemy.

Don’t we often wonder the same thing. How can God continue to allow the wicked to carry on with such outrageous irreverence and not seemingly do a thing.

Robert Ingersoll, (a famous atheist) after delivering one of his addresses, pulled his watch from his pocket and said, “According to the Bible, God has struck men to death for blasphemy. I will blaspheme Him and give Him five minutes to strike me dead and damn my soul.”

There was a period of perfect silence while one minute went by; two minutes passed, and people began to get nervous; three minutes, and a woman fainted; four minutes, and Ingersoll curled his lip.

At five minutes, he snapped shut his watch, put it in his pocket, and said: “You see, there is no God, or He would have taken me at my word.”

The story was told later to the preacher Joseph Parker, who said, “And did the American gentleman think he could exhaust the patience of God in five minutes?”

I read somewhere that Luther once said, “If I was God I would have long ago smashed the world to smithereens.” God is a very patient God.

And we are even told why...

### **Slide # 5**

#### **2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV)**

**9** The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is **longsuffering toward us**, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

It is very human to want God to take His right hand and destroy wicked enemies. And this is what Asaph wanted God to do.

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

Even though he was having a hard time waiting he still knew the reality of Who God was declaring Him to be His King from way back, a God Who works salvation on the earth. So he does realize God is a God of deliverance – he is just struggling with WHY He hasn't done so in a more prompt manner. Again, that is a very human thing to do.

We want relief and we want it now. And now he recounts how God has worked in times past.

#### **13 You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters.**

#### **14 You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces, And gave him as food to the people inhabiting the wilderness.**

The God who divided the sea has the power to deliver His people. The idea of sea serpents and Leviathan seem to go together.

The term Leviathan literally means “twisting one” appears 5 times in the OT Scriptures (cf. Job 3:8; Ps 41:1; 74:14; 104:26; Isa. 27:1). In each case, it refers to a mighty creature who can overwhelm man, but is controlled by God. It seems this creature (now extinct) in early times was some type of sea monster – kind of like a sea-going dinosaur.

### **Slide # 6**

#### **Psalm 104:26 (NKJV)**

**26** There the ships sail about; There is that Leviathan Which You have made to play there.

Some believe that in the Bible the word is used in a poetical way to portray some overwhelming wicked power that only God can conquer.

Most commentators think what is in view here is a poetic depiction of God's deliverance of His people from Egypt. There He divided the sea. Thus, the references to **sea serpents** and **Leviathan** may be poetic references to Egypt.

**15 You broke open the fountain and the flood; You dried up mighty rivers.**

God dried up the Jordan River so that His people might cross into the Promised Land (cf. Josh. 4:23; 5:1).

**16 The day is Yours, the night also is Yours; You have prepared the light and the sun.**

**17 You have set all the borders of the earth; You have made summer and winter.**

This emphasizes the sovereignty of God over the whole of all creation. God is in charge. The day and night are His. He sets the unmovable boundaries of the earth – such as that of the sea.

### **Slide # 7**

**Job 38:11 (NKJV)**

**11** When I said, 'This far you may come, but no farther, And here your proud waves must stop!'

God determines the seasons.

"The sevenfold repetition of the word ["You" in verses 13-17] brings forcibly into view the Divine personality and former deeds which pledge God to act now." - **Alexander Maclaren**

The point is, it is not that God can't act. Asaph recognizes God's power over all and that He could intervene at any time if He so desired. And he recognizes that God, as a God of salvation, has so acted at various times in the past. But for NOW God is holding back, and through prayer, Asaph seeks to move the hand of God into action.

**18 Remember this, that the enemy has reproached, O LORD, And that a foolish people has blasphemed Your name.**

Once again he reminds God of the atrocities that have been committed by the enemy against God Himself! He really thinks it is time for God to move and is doing all he can to make his case with God.

**19 Oh, do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beast! Do not forget the life of Your poor forever.**

Here is a desperate pleading request. A turtledove is a defenseless vulnerable bird.

**Slide # 8**



In contrast to being a helpless bird the enemy is portrayed as a wild beast! And so he pleads, “Do not forget the life of Your poor forever.”

**20 Have respect to the covenant; For the dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty.**

He pleads with God on the basis His covenant relationship with His people and bemoans the awful truth that the “dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty.” How true! Earth is full of depraved people and they can be so very cruel! In the face of this Asaph recognizes they need God’s intervention.

This is powerful praying – praying that aligns with God’s Word – with God’s covenant promises. As God’s people rely on His covenant promises they pray accordingly. That is powerful praying. A lesson can certainly be learned from this.

**21 Oh, do not let the oppressed return ashamed! Let the poor and needy praise Your name.**

His specific request is that God vindicate His oppressed people so that they can praise God for how He has worked on their behalf.



**22 Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; Remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily.**

**23 Do not forget the voice of Your enemies; The tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually.**

He here asks God to act for the sake of His own reputation and again asks God to remember how the foolish reproach Him daily.

He then makes a final plea that God not forget (overlook) the voice of His enemies who rise up against Him continually.

Clearly, Asaph saw his enemies as also being the enemies of God. This was not just about him and his people, but also about God Himself and His reputation.

Praying for God's glory/reputation is especially powerful!

This is a Psalm about prayer – about intensive crisis praying. We are all human and in crisis we have all kinds of emotions. We are all prone to ask the WHY and HOW LONG questions.

Asaph prayed from the position of knowing God as His King and Savior (v. 12).

- He prayed, reminding God of His historical relationship with His people (v. 2)
- He prayed, reviewing how vicious and brutal the enemy had been (vv. 3-8).
- He boldly and directly asked God to deal with the enemy (v. 11).
- He prayed, recalling God's sovereign power over nature (vv. 13-17).
- He prayed, emphasizing to God that the enemy had brutally blasphemed and reproached Him (v. 18).
- He pleaded with God on the basis of total dependence (v. 19).
- He pleaded with God on the basis of covenant promises (v. 20).
- He pleaded with God to act for the sake of His own self (v. 22).

It is often said that Jesus never taught His disciples how to preach, but He did teach them how to pray.

“Prayer pulls the rope below and the great bell rings above in the ears of God. Some scarcely stir the bell for they pray so languidly. Others give but an occasional pluck at the rope. but he who wins with heaven is the {person} who grasps the rope boldly and pulls continuously with all {their} might.” – **Charles Spurgeon**

**God help us to be people of prayer!**