

A contemplation by Asaph.

PSALM 74: 1 God, why have you rejected us forever? Why does your anger smoulder against the sheep of your pasture?

The psalmist complains of the desolations of the sanctuary, and pleads with God, Psa 74:1-3; shows the insolence and wickedness of their enemies Psa 74:4-8; prays to God to act for them as he had done for their fathers, whom, by his miraculous power, he had saved, Psa 74:9-17; begs God to arise, and vindicate his own honor against his enemies, and the enemies of his people, Psa 74:18-23.

The title is, Maschil of Asaph, or, "A Psalm of Asaph, to give instruction." That this Psalm was written at a time when the temple was ruined, Jerusalem burnt, and the prophets scattered or destroyed, is evident. But it is not so clear whether the desolations here refer to the days of Nebuchadnezzar, or to the desolation that took place under the Romans about the seventieth year of the Christian era. Calmet inclines to the former opinion; and supposes the Psalm to be a lamentation over the temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Verse 1

O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? - Hast thou determined that we shall never more be thy people? Are we never to see an end to our calamities?

PSALM 74: 2 Remember your congregation, which you purchased of old, which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your inheritance; Mount Zion, in which you have lived.

Verse 2

Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old - We are the descendants of that people whom thou didst take unto thyself; the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Wilt thou never more be reconciled to us?

PSALM 74: 3 Lift up your feet to the perpetual ruins, all the evil that the enemy has done in the sanctuary.

Verse 3

Lift up thy feet - Arise, and return to us, our desolations still continue. Thy sanctuary is profaned by thine and our enemies.

PSALM 74: 4 Your adversaries have roared in the midst of your assembly. They have set up their standards as signs.

Verse 4

Thine enemies roar - Thy people, who were formerly a distinct and separate people, and who would not even touch a Gentile, are now obliged to mingle with the most profane. Their boisterous mirth, their cruel mockings, their insulting commands, are heard every where in all our assemblies.

They set up their ensigns for signs - שמו אותתם אותות - samu othotham othoth, they set up their standards in the place of ours. All the ensigns and trophies were those of our enemies; our own were no longer to be seen.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh verses give a correct historical account of the ravages committed by the Babylonians, as we may see from 2Kgs 25:4, 2Kgs 25:7-9, and Jer 52:7, Jer 52:18, Jer 52:19 : "And the city was broken up, and all the men fled by night by the way of the gate. They took Zedekiah, and slew his sons before his eyes; and put out his eyes, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon. And on the second day of the fifth month of the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, came unto Jerusalem; and he burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and every great man's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem burnt he with fire. And they broke down the walls of Jerusalem round about. And the pillars of brass and the bases, and the brazen sea, they broke in pieces, and carried the brass to Babylon. And the pots, shovels, snuffers and spoons, and the fire pans and bowls, and such things as were of gold and silver, they took away." Thus they broke down, and carried away, and destroyed this beautiful house; and in the true barbarian spirit, neither sanctity, beauty, symmetry, nor elegance of workmanship, was any thing in their eyes. What hammers and axes could ruin, was ruined; Jerusalem was totally destroyed, and its walls laid level with the ground. Well might the psalmist sigh over such a desolation.

PSALM 74: 5 They behaved like men wielding axes, cutting through a thicket of trees.

PSALM 74: 6 Now they break all its carved work down with hatchet and hammers.

PSALM 74: 7 They have burned your sanctuary to the ground. They have profaned the dwelling place of your Name.

PSALM 74: 8 They said in their heart, "We will crush them completely." They have burned up all the places in the land where God was worshipped.

Verse 8

Let us destroy them - Their object was totally to annihilate the political existence of the Jewish people.

They have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land - It is supposed that there were no synagogues in the land till after the Babylonish captivity. How then could the Chaldeans burn up any in Judea? The word מועדי moadey, which we translate synagogues, may be taken in a more general sense, and mean any places where religious assemblies were held: and that such places and assemblies did exist long before the Babylonish captivity, is pretty evident from different parts of Scripture. It appears that Elisha kept such at his house on the sabbaths and new moons. See 2Kgs 4:23. And perhaps to such St. James may refer, Act 15:23, a species of synagogues, where the law was read of old, in every city of the land. And it appears that such religious meetings were held at

the house of the Prophet Ezekiel, Eze 33:31. And perhaps every prophet's house was such. This is the only place in the Old Testament where we have the word synagogue. Indeed, wherever there was a place in which God met with patriarch or prophet, and any memorial of it was preserved, there was a מועד moed, or place of religious meeting; and all such places the Chaldeans would destroy, pursuant to their design to extinguish the Jewish religion, and blot out all its memorials from the earth. And this was certainly the most likely means to effect their purpose. How soon would Christianity be destroyed in England if all the churches, chapels, and places of worship were destroyed, and only the poor of the people left in the land; who, from their circumstances, could not build a place for the worship of God! After such desolation, what a miracle was the restoration of the Jews!

PSALM 74: 9 We see no miraculous signs. There is no longer any prophet, neither is there among us anyone who knows how long.

Verse 9

We see not our signs - "They have taken away all our trophies, and have left us no memorial that God has been among us. Even thou thyself hast left us destitute of all those supernatural evidences that have so often convinced us that thou wert among us of a truth." But we may say that they were not totally destitute even of these. The preservation of Daniel in the lion's den, and of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace; the metamorphosis of Nebuchadnezzar; the handwriting that appeared to Belshazzar; were all so many prodigies and evidences that God had not left them without proofs of his being and his regard.

There is no more any prophet - There was not one among them in that place that could tell them how long that captivity was yet to endure. But there were prophets in the captivity. Daniel was one; but his prophecies were confined to one place. Ezekiel was another, but he was among those captives who were by the river Chebar. They had not, as usual, prophets who went to and fro through the land, preaching repentance and remission of sins.

PSALM 74: 10 How long, God, shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme your name forever?

PSALM 74: 11 Why do you draw back your hand, even your right hand? Take it out of your pocket and consume them!

Verse 11

Why withdrawest thou thy hand - It has been remarked, that as the outward habit of the easterns had no sleeves, the hands and arms were frequently covered with the folds of the robe; and in order to do any thing, the hand must be disentangled and drawn out. The literal version of the Hebrew is: "To what time wilt thou draw back thy hand; yea, thy right hand, from within thy bosom?" Consomme; that is, manifest thy power, and destroy thy adversaries. I have, in the introduction to the book of Psalms, spoken of the old metrical version by Sternhold and Hopkins, and have stated that it was formed from the original text. A proof of this may be seen by the learned reader in this

and the preceding verse; where, though their version is harsh, and some of their expressions quaint almost to ridicule, yet they have hit the true meaning which our prose translators have missed: - Psa 74:10 When wilt thou once, Lord, end this shame, And cease thine enemies' strong? Shall they always blaspheme thy name, And rail on thee so long? Psa 74:11 Why dost thou draw thy hand aback, And hide it in thy lap? O pluck it out, and be not slack To give thy foes a rap!

PSALM 74: 12 Yet God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.

Verse 12

For God is my King of old - We have always acknowledged thee as our sovereign; and thou hast reigned as a king in the midst of our land, dispensing salvation and deliverance from the center to every part of the circumference.

PSALM 74: 13 You divided the sea by your strength. You broke the heads of the sea monsters in the waters.

Verse 13

Thou didst divide the sea - When our fathers came from Egypt.

Thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters - Pharaoh, his captains, and all his hosts were drowned in the Red Sea, when attempting to pursue them.

PSALM 74: 14 You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces. You gave him as food to people and desert creatures.

Verse 14

The heads of Leviathan - Leviathan might be intended here as a personification of the Egyptian government; and its heads, Pharaoh and his chief captains.

To the people inhabiting the wilderness - Probably meaning the birds and beasts of prey. These were the people of the wilderness, which fed on the dead bodies of the Egyptians, which the tides had cast ashore. The Vulgate, Septuagint, Ethiopic, and Arabic read, "Thou hast given him for meat to the Ethiopians," or Abyssinians.

PSALM 74: 15 You opened up spring and stream. You dried up mighty rivers.

Verse 15

Thou didst cleave the fountain - Thou didst cleave the rock in the wilderness, of which all the congregation drank.

Thou driedst up mighty rivers - Does not this refer to the cutting off the waters of the Jordan, so that the people passed over dryshod?

PSALM 74: 16 The day is yours, the night is also yours. You have prepared the light and the sun.

Verse 16

The day is thine, the night also is thine - Thou art the Author of light, and of the sun, which is the means of dispensing it.

PSALM 74: 17 You have set all the boundaries of the earth. You have made summer and winter.

Verse 17

Thou hast set all the borders of the earth - Thou alone art the Author of all its grand geographical divisions.

Thou hast made summer and winter - Thou hast appointed that peculiarity in the poise and rotation of the earth, by which the seasons are produced.

PSALM 74: 18 Remember this, that the enemy has mocked you, LORD. Foolish people have blasphemed your name.

Verse 18

Remember this - The heathen not only deny these things, but give the honor of them to their false gods, and thus blaspheme thy name.

PSALM 74: 19 Don't deliver the soul of your dove to wild beasts. Don't forget the life of your poor forever.

Verse 19

Deliver not the soul of thy turtle-dove - Thy people Israel are helpless, defenceless, miserable, and afflicted: O deliver them no longer into the power of their brutal adversaries.

PSALM 74: 20 Honour your covenant, for haunts of violence fill the dark places of the earth.

 Verse 20

Have respect unto the covenant - הבט לברית habbet labberith. Pay attention to the covenant sacrifice; to that offered by Abraham, Gen 15:9, etc., when the contracting parties, God and Abram, passed through between the separated parts of the covenant sacrifice. An indisputable type of Jesus Christ; and of God and man meeting in his sacrificed humanity.

The dark places of the earth - The caves, dens, woods, etc., of the land are full of robbers, cut-throats, and murderers, who are continually destroying thy people, so that the holy seed seems as if it would be entirely cut off and the covenant promise thus be rendered void.

The words may either apply to Chaldea or Judea. Judea was at this time little else than a den of robbers, its own natural inhabitants being removed. Chaldea was infested with hordes of banditti also.

PSALM 74: 21 Don't let the oppressed return ashamed. Let the poor and needy praise your name.

Verse 21

Let not the oppressed return ashamed - Do not permit thy people to be so diminished, that when, according to thy promise, they are restored to their own land, they may appear to be but a handful of men.

PSALM 74: 22 Arise, God! Plead your own cause. Remember how the foolish man mocks you all day.

Verse 22

Plead thine own cause - Thy honor is concerned, as well as our safety and salvation. The fool - the idolater, reproacheth thee daily - he boasts of the superiority of his idols, by whose power, he asserts, we are brought under their domination.

PSALM 74: 23 Don't forget the voice of your adversaries. The tumult of those who rise up against you ascends continually.

Verse 23

Forget not the voice - While we pray to thee for our own salvation, we call upon thee to vindicate thy injured honor: and let all the nations see that thou lovest thy followers, and hatest those who are thy enemies. Let not man prevail against thee or thine.