

PSALMS

Chapter 74

O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture? ²Remember your congregation, which you have purchased of old, which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage! Remember Mount Zion, where you have dwelt. ³Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins; the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary! ⁴Your foes have roared in the midst of your meeting place; they set up their own signs for signs. ⁵They were like those who swing axes in a forest of trees. ⁶And all its carved wood they broke down with hatchets and hammers. ⁷They set your sanctuary on fire; they profaned the dwelling place of your name, bringing it down to the ground. ⁸They said to themselves, “We will utterly subdue them”; they burned all the meeting places of God in the land. ⁹We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long. ¹⁰How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever? ¹¹Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the fold of your garment and destroy them! ¹²Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. ¹³You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. ¹⁴You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. ¹⁵You split open springs and brooks; you dried up ever-flowing streams. ¹⁶Yours is the day, yours also the night; you have established the heavenly lights and the sun. ¹⁷You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth; you have made summer and winter. ¹⁸Remember this, O LORD, how the enemy scoffs, and a foolish people reviles your name. ¹⁹Do not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild beasts; do not forget the life of your poor forever. ²⁰Have regard for the covenant, for the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence. ²¹Let not the down trodden turn back in shame; let the poor and needy praise your name. ²²Arise, O God, defend your cause; remember how the foolish scoff at you all the day! ²³Do not forget the clamor of your foes, the uproar of those who rise against you, which goes up continually!

Ps 74 A prayer for God to come to the aid of his people and defend his cause in the face of the mocking of the enemies—the Lord’s relation to his people is like that of a king to his nation. The psalm dates from the time of the exile when Israel had been destroyed as a nation, the promised land devastated and the temple reduced to ruins (see Ps 79; La 2). Its relationship to the ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel is uncertain. Thematically the psalm divides into two halves of 11 verses each, with v. 12 highlighting the primary thematic element that unifies the prayer. Verses 1–11 are framed by the “Why’s” of the people’s complaint (vv. 1, 11); the whole psalm is framed by pleas for God to “remember”(vv. 2, 22). Note also that the “they’s” of vv. 4–8 have their counterpoint in the “you’s” of vv. 13–17 (highlighted in the Hebrew by seven emphatic pronouns)—the mighty acts of God are appealed to against the destructive and haughty deeds of the enemies. (CSB)

Format: Vv 1–3, remember Your flock; vv 4–8, the sanctuary burned; vv 9–11, how long will the foe scoff?; vv 12–17, God conquered and created; vv 18–19, do not forget Your people; vv 20–21, remember Your covenant; vv 22–23, defend against the scoffers. (TLSB)

74:1–2 Initial complaint and appeal. (CSB)

74:1 *Why ... ? Why ... ?* Cf. “How long ... ?” (v. 10) and “Why ... ?” (v. 11). Such language of impatience and complaint is found frequently in the prayers of the Psalter. It expresses the

anguish of relief not (yet) granted and exhibits the boldness with which the psalmists wrestled with God on the basis of their relationship with him and their conviction concerning his righteousness. (CSB)

forever. So it seemed, since no relief was in sight. (CSB)

Describes divine judgment; cf 2Th 1:9. (TLSB)

anger. God's anger is always an expression of his righteousness. (CSB)

sheep of your pasture. A widely used metaphor for kings in the ancient Near East, and also in Israel. (CSB)

74:2 *purchased.* Or "acquired"; or "created." (CSB)

tribe. Here referring to all Israel. (CSB)

your inheritance. See Dt 9:29. (CSB)

redeemed. Here, as often, a synonym for "deliver." (CSB)

Mount Zion. This verse recalls the victory song of Ex 15 (see especially vv. 13–17, and compare the center verse of this psalm, v. 12, with the last verse of the song, Ex 15:18) and thus sets the stage for the other exodus recollections that follow. The Babylonian destruction of Zion seems to be the undoing of God's great victory over Egypt when he redeemed his people. (CSB)

74:3–8 The Babylonians' high-handed destruction of the Lord's temple. (CSB)

Many years later when Nehemiah came to rebuild the walls of the city, the piles of rubble were still so large that they hindered his tour around the city. (PBC)

74:3 *direct your steps toward.* Hurry to restore. (CSB)

perpetual. Apparently, the temple has been in ruins for a number of years. (TLSB)

74:4–6 The temple was desecrated by the presence of unbelievers, their symbols of pagan religion, or their military standards. (TLSB)

74:4 *own signs.* Probably troop standards (see Nu 1:52; Isa 31:9; Jer 4:21). (CSB)

as signs. Signifying their triumph. (CSB)

74:6 *carved wood.* See 1Ki 6:15. (CSB)

74:7 *your Name.* See note on 5:11. The NIV capitalizes "Name" when it stands for God's presence at the sanctuary (see Dt 12:5). (CSB)

74:8 *They said.* The arrogance with which the wicked speak, especially their easy dismissal of God's knowledge of their evil acts and his unflinching prosecution of their malicious deeds, is frequently noted by the psalmists. (CSB)

all the meeting places of God. Lit. “all the meeting places of God” (see v. 4). The reference is uncertain. At the time of the Babylonian attacks there may have been a number of (illegitimate) places in Judah where people went to worship God. (CSB)

Likely refers to the temple courts rather than the high places. (TLSB)

74:9–11 The complaint and prayer renewed (see vv. 1–2). (CSB)

74:9 *not see our signs.* As there were at the time of the exodus (see vv. 13–15; 78:43). (CSB)

Real tragedy is that God’s Word through prophets and His forgiveness in the sacrifices (“signs”) of the temple worship had been removed; cf Am 8:11. (TLSB)

no longer any prophet. Jeremiah had been taken to Egypt (see Jer 43:6–7), but whether Ezekiel was no longer prophesying is unknown. Perhaps this psalm was composed by an Asaphite who remained in Israel, part of a small group overlooked by Johanan when that army officer led the remnant to Egypt (see Jer 43:4–7). (CSB)

74:10 *scoff... revile your name.* See v. 18; see also v. 22; 2Ki 18:32–35; Isa 37:6, 23. (CSB)

The situation seemed hopeless, but the faithful few would not give up hope. (PBC)

74:12–17 Psalmist points to God’s mighty works in both creation and the exodus (the act of creating Israel); God’s gracious deeds are the reason why the Almighty should grant the psalmist’s prayers for deliverance. These mighty acts included the crossing of the Red Sea (v 13) and the defeat of Egypt (v 14), providing water during the wilderness wanderings (v 15), the crossing of the Jordan (v 15), and the creation of days and seasons (vv 16–17). (TLSB)

74:12 The center verse (center line in the Hebrew text; see note on 6:6). The whole psalm presupposes the truth confessed here: God is Israel’s King, her hope and Savior; Israel is God’s people (kingdom). This accounts for both the complaint and the prayer, and why the destruction of Israel brings with it the mocking of God. (CSB)

Gregory of Nyssa: “Of God’s eternity ... we have heard from prophecy.... We define Him to be earlier than any beginning, and exceeding any end” (*NPNF 2 5:97–98*). (TLSB)

my. Communal use of the singular pronoun. (CSB)

from of old. From the days of the exodus (see Ex 3:7; 19:5–6). (CSB)

74:13–17 The Lord is the mighty God of salvation and creation. (CSB)

74:13–14† Recollection of God’s mighty acts when he delivered his people from Egypt. The imagery is also found in ancient Near Eastern creation myths, in which the primeval chaotic waters were depicted as a many-headed monster that the creator-god overcame, after which he established the world order. The poet here interweaves creation and salvation themes to celebrate the fact that the God of Israel has shown by his saving acts (his opening of the Red Sea for his people and his destruction of the Egyptians) that he is able to overcome all hostile powers to redeem his people and establish his new order in the world. For poetic use of this imagery (1) to celebrate God’s creation works see 89:10; Job 9:13; 26:12–13; (2) to celebrate the deliverance

from Egypt see Isa 51:9; (3) to announce a future deliverance of Israel see Isa 27:1. Echoes of the same imagery are present in the judgment announced against Egypt in Ez 29:3–5; 32:2–6. (CSB)

74:15 Recollection of God’s water miracles at the Red Sea, in the desert and at the Jordan. (CSB)

74:16–17 God is the One who established the orders of creation; he (alone) is able to effect redemption and establish his kingdom in the world against all creaturely opposition. (CSB)

74:18–23 A prayer for God to defend his cause and restore his people. (CSB)

74:18 See vv. 2, 10. (CSB)

foolish people. The “foes” of v. 10 are here called fools for their contempt of God. (CSB)

reviles your name – He prays as we do in the Lord’s Prayer, “Hallowed be thy name.” He prays for delivery, not only for his own benefit, but also that God’s honor may be upheld. This will be done when the arrogant boasts of the Babylonians about the power of the gods are silenced. (PBC)

74:19 *your dove.* Israel—probably a figure of endearment. (CSB)

Pictures how precious Israel is to the Lord. (TLSB)

This is God’s name for his beloved bride. It stresses the greatness of God’s love for Israel. (PBC)

wild beasts. It is a convention in the Psalms to liken the attack of enemies to that of ferocious animals, especially the lion. (CSB)

74:20 *the covenant.* God’s covenant to be the God of Israel, who makes them secure and richly blessed in the promised land (see Ex 19:5–6; 23:27–31; 34:10–11; Lev 26:11–12, 42, 44–45; Dt 28:1–14; see also Ps 105:8–11; 106:45; 111:5, 9; Isa 54:10; Jer 14:21; Eze 16:60). (CSB)

God’s covenant (Gn 12:1–3; 15; 17:1–14; Ex 19:4–6; Dt 4:10–13; Ps 89:3–4) is His promise of blessing and salvation. The psalmist entreats the Lord to forgive and deliver Israel on account of this covenant. Cf Mt 26:28. (TLSB)

74:21 *poor and needy.* Here, as often in the Psalms, “poor” characterizes not necessarily one who has no possessions, but one who is (and recognizes that he is) without resources to effect his own deliverance (or secure his own life, safety or well-being)—and so is dependent on God. (CSB)

praise your name. May they have cause to do so. (CSB)

74:22–23 Psalmist entreats the Lord to defend His honor by keeping His promises to save His people; cf Ex 32:11–14; Nu 14:13–19; Dt 9:26–29. (TLSB)

74:22 *arise.* Hebrew idiom frequently prefaces an imperative calling for immediate action with the call to arise. (CSB)

74:23 *clamor ... uproar.* See 64:2 (the Hebrew root underlying this expression is the same as that for “conspire”). (CSB)

Ps 74 When calamity strikes, we ought to see God calling us to repentance in it (Lk 13:1–5). In repentance, we flee to God for mercy, not because of anything in us but by what He Himself has done for our redemption. • You, O Lord, are my Redeemer; deliver my life. Amen. (TLSB)