

“Remember Thy Congregation”

Psalm 74

I hold that Psalm 74 was written by **Asaph of David’s day** and that it **functions prophetically** rather than historically. Asaph was appointed not only as a musician **but as a prophet**, and prophetic Scripture often speaks from within future judgment as a means of instruction. Psalm 74 contains no specific historical markers tying it to the Babylonian destruction, but instead uses covenantal language centered on God’s name, God’s people, and God’s cause. As a Maschil, the psalm **teaches God’s people how to pray** when worship is devastated and when God’s purposes seem delayed. Read this way, Psalm 74 is not a post-event lament but a **prophetic appeal** grounded in covenant faithfulness.

I take this view because of **several factors**:

- Asaph was explicitly **appointed as a prophet**.

1 Chronicles 25:1

¹ Moreover David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of **Asaph**, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should **prophesy** with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals: and the number of the workmen according to their service was:

2 Chronicles 29:30

³⁰ Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the LORD with the words of David, and of **Asaph the seer**. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped.

- The psalm **lacks the markers** of post-Babylonian authorship.
 - Names no foreign power
 - Mentions no king
 - Uses no exile terminology
 - Focuses on worship, not politics
 - Speaks in covenant language, not chronological

- The **“name” language** (vs. 7) points to covenant terminology, not the end of the temple.
- Prophetic Scripture **regularly speaks from inside future judgment**:
 - **Isaiah 5:13** — captivity spoken as already accomplished
 - **Isaiah 53** — Messiah’s death described as past
 - Lamentation-style prophecy scattered through the Old Testament (**Habakkuk**, for example).
- The Maschil designation **supports a forward-looking purpose**.
 - Because of the instructional nature, its purpose is not just to lament or record history but **to teach God’s people how to pray and prepare them for the loss that would come**.

Although this psalm is **primarily about Israel**, there is a **clear application** we can see for us today. Every point of this psalm may not be applicable, but the overall theme is. Israel chose to defy God and they were judged for it. The psalmist is coming to the Lord, pleading for His presence to return and for Him **to “remember” them**. God didn’t abandon them nor forget them as we understand the ideas today. He allowed them to go their own way until they reached the point where they **knew they needed Him again, much like we do today**. That’s the principle behind the psalm.

The psalmist is asking God to:

I. REMEMBER OUR REDEMPTION (vs. 1-2)

God’s covenant claim upon His people.

A. God’s people need to plead in prayer (vs. 1)

1. The question by the psalmist as to **“why”** (or **“how long”** as in verse 10-11) is from the viewpoint that **their sin had caused fellowship to cease**.

1 John 1:6–7

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

2. The reference to the anger of the Lord being **“smoke”** is meant to give the idea that the chastisement (or judgment) was **outward and visible and severe**.

B. God’s people are His possession

1. **“The sheep of thy pasture”** — there’s a tenderness here in the psalmist’s plea.
2. **“Thy congregation”** — a term for God’s people, both Israel and the church are known by this term.
3. **“Thine inheritance”** — not that God can forget, but this is the psalmist reminding God who His people are.
4. **“Thy turtledove”** and **“thy poor”** (vs. 19 – more on this later in the study).

C. God’s people are a purchased possession

1. **“Purchased of old”** — the word for **“purchased”** (קָנָה) means to acquire by cost. Not only did God purchase Israel to be His people, this points to the price **Christ paid for the sins of mankind**.

Exodus 15:16 [part of the song of Moses after they crossed the Red Sea]

¹⁶ Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, *which* thou hast purchased.

2. **“Which thou has redeemed”** (וְגָאֹלִים) — the act of a

kinsman-redeemer — **to buy back from bondage.**

II. REMEMBER THE RUIN (vs. 3-8)

The devastation of those places set apart for worship.

A. The destruction was intentional (vs. 3-4)

There is reference here to what **Antiochus Epiphanes** (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) would do during the days of the Maccabaeans as well as an even further future prophecy of what the **Antichrist** will do in the Temple during the Tribulation (Matt. 24:15).

B. The destruction was defiling (vs. 5-7)

1. “Done wickedly in the sanctuary” (vs. 3)
2. Verses 5-6 are a simile that pictures the enemy as **wood-cutters hewing down a forest.**

“[H]is fame was to be derived from another source, namely, the skill and power with which he cut down the elaborately-carved work of the sanctuary, despoiled the columns of their ornaments, and demolished the columns themselves.” (Barnes)

3. “They have cast fire into thy sanctuary...” (vs. 7) — the word for “**sanctuary**” (מִקְדָּשׁ) is one that means anything sacred or set apart for God, not just the Temple building itself.

The application for the church today is clear. We, the believer, **are to be “holy”** — we, as it were, **are the sanctuary**, as opposed to the church building being the sanctuary.

1 Corinthians 6:19–20

¹⁹ What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? ²⁰ For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your

| spirit, which are God's.

C. The destruction was widespread (vs. 8)

1. "All the synagogues of God in the land" — this is the only time the word "**synagogue**" is found in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word (מוֹעֵד) literally means "**appointed places of God.**" It is the same word as "**congregations**" in verse 4.
2. What is described here is not just the Temple destruction but **the widespread eradication of worship** and **systematic destruction** of every place where God's name was honored.
3. **This has always been the plan of Satan** — not just then, not just now, but until he is cast into the lake of fire.

III. REMEMBER THE REPROACH (vs. 9-11)

The silence that deepens the sorrow.

A. No Word from God that could be heard

1. **No "signs"** — speaks of the presence of God at the altar and the Ark of the Covenant as well as the visible symbols (the sabbath and the festivals).
2. **"No more any prophets"**
 - a) This is one reason that indicates this isn't speaking of the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians because **there were still prophets then.**
 - b) This indicates something later in date than the destruction and subsequent captivity in 586 B.C.
3. "Neither is there among us any that knoweth how long" — **speaks of the prophetic office.**

➤ The reason it seemed like the Word of the Lord had

ceased was because **they stopped listening for it (or to it)**. The same is true today.

1 Samuel 3:1

¹ And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; *there was* no open vision.

Proverbs 29:18

¹⁸ Where *there is* no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, *happy is* he.

Amos 8:11

¹¹ Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD:

- B. No help from God that could be seen (vs. 10-11)

IV. REMEMBER THY RULE (vs. 12-17)

Confidence anchored in God's eternal kingship.

- A. God is King before the circumstances surround His people (vs. 12)
- B. God is Redeemer over the chaos that surrounds His people (vs. 13-14)
- C. God is Creator over time and order (vs. 15-17)
 - Our faith is steadied by remembering **who God has always been**, not by viewing life by our circumstances and the chaos around us.

V. REMEMBER THY REPUTATION (vs. 18-21)

God's honor among the nations.

- A. Enemies reproach God's name (vs. 18)

The word "reproached" means to taunt or abuse with words. This reproach and blaspheme was direct **at God**, not just His people.

B. Enemies seek God's people (vs. 19)

1. The term "**turtledove**" is used here for God's people. It is a term used to show that they are **defenseless and easily preyed upon**. This is seen in the parallel of the second line as well: "**the congregation of thy poor.**"
2. When the psalmist calls God's people a "**turtledove**," he is **describing tenderness**. He is saying, "*Lord, we are weak, but we belong to You. Do not hand over those You cherish to those who would destroy them.*"

C. Enemies cannot prevent God's promises (vs. 20-21)

1. "Have respect unto the covenant" — this is the **covenant God made with His people**. "The prayer here is, that God would remember, in the day of national calamity, the solemn promise implied in that covenant, and that he would interpose to save his people" (Barnes).
2. The latter part of verse 20 was not only true then (the allusion was to the places where Israel's enemies came from as being dark regions of paganism and idolatry), but is **still very relevant and very true of the enemies of the church**.
3. "O let not the oppressed return ashamed" — return from the throne of grace, not having an answer to their prayer.
4. "Let the poor and needy praise thy name" — this is the parallelism to the first line. The "**poor and needy**" are the "**oppressed**," and their "**praise**" was that they did not, in fact, **return "ashamed."**

VI. REMEMBER THY RESPONSE (vs. 22-23)

A final plea for God to arise and act.

- A. “Arise, O God” — a call for divine intervention.
- B. “Plead thine own cause” — God’s interests should be first.
- C. “Remember...Forget not”

God will not forget those that were against Him, and if this is a prophecy pointing forward past the Babylonian exile to the “man of sin,” we know God’s response will be just and eternal.

- D. The final line of verse 23 shows the battle against the enemy will only get worse.

2 Timothy 3:13

¹³ But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

Conclusion:

While the sanctuary may be burned and the prophets may be silent, the covenant is the one thing the enemy cannot touch. For the New Testament believer, our “covenant” is the finished work of Christ — the ultimate purchased possession.” Even when the “dark places of the earth” seem to prevail, we look to the One who “purchased” us “of old.”