

Psalms: The Songs of the People of God
Psalm 74: Praying in the Midst of the Ruins
Sunday, June 16, 2019

Introduction

In 586 B.C. the nation of Israel experienced one of the most devastating events in their history as a nation. Because of their sin and their rebellion God allowed the Babylonians, under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, to take the capitol city of Jerusalem. They tore down the walls, ravaged the city, destroyed the Temple and then burned it (2 Kings 25:8-15).

It's hard to put into words how significant this loss was for the nation of Israel. Jerusalem was the city of God. The Temple was built as the dwelling place for the presence of God. They were a people who had started as slaves in Egypt and who were now a strong nation with a capitol and the presence of God dwelling in their midst. And then it was gone.

This city in ruins is the setting for Psalm 74. It's Psalm of Lament. The psalmist is crying out to God and pleading with Him to remember His people. But while it is rightly called a lament, it is also a psalm that displays great trust and confidence in God. God has always been faithful in the past and now the psalmist calls on Him to be faithful once again.

A Model Prayer

In several ways Psalm 74 can be looked to as a model prayer. The reality is that many of us will find ourselves at times in our lives "standing in the midst of the ruins." It may be a consequence of sin or simply the effects of living in a fallen world, but most of us will have times when we feel like the world has been turned upside down. We may even feel like God has *cast us off*. Psalm 74 is a helpful guide for how we should pray in times like these.

The Psalmist's Plea – In the midst of disaster the Psalmist cries out to God (74:1-2)

- The psalm begins with an initial plea to God for reprieve. It's helpful to hear the honesty that is expressed: The psalmist feels cast off and forsaken. He is very aware of the anger of God toward His people.
- **Responding with Prayer** – It's worth noting that even though the psalmist feels abandoned by God, his response is prayer. He goes to God with his frustration and his requests: this is right response.
- **An Appeal to Relationship** – One thing that is repeated in the first two verses is the psalmist's appeal to the nation's relationship to God. They are His sheep, His congregation, His purchased and redeemed people.

The Situation – In the midst of disaster the Psalmist is honest about the situation and the depth of the tragedy (74:3-11)

- **The Destruction of the City (vv. 3-8)** – As part of his prayer the psalmist recounts the destruction. He uses vivid language to describe the enemy, their obvious disregard for God and their thorough destruction of the city, especially the Temple (Lamentations 2:5-9).
- **The Silence of God (vv. 9-11)** – The nation of Israel was used to hearing from God. He would speak to them through signs and through prophets. But now the psalmist expresses an absence of communication from God. Not only have they been defeated, but also God is no longer speaking. The resounding question is, how long?

A Declaration of Trust: Remembering the Lord (74:12-17)

- **A Shift in Tone** - While the psalmist has emphasized the devastating nature of the situation and the seeming silence of God, he remains confident in who God is and His power to intervene. He takes time to recount God's sovereignty, power and past acts of salvation.
- **God's power in past acts of Salvation (vv. 12-14)** – The psalmist uses metaphorical language to recall the way God has defeated enemies and rescued His people in the past. He refers to Egypt and the rulers of Egypt as sea monsters whom God defeated.
- **God's power and sovereignty in Creation (vv. 15-18)** – The psalmist's confidence in God is further revealed as he recounts God's sovereignty and power in creation. He created all things and controls all things.

The Final Plea: God, for the sake of Your name, for the sake of Your praise, remember Your people and Your promises (74:18-23)

In this final section the psalmist continues to plead with God for deliverance, and his requests are incredibly God-centered. He asks God to intervene on behalf of His people for His own name's sake.

- The psalmist prays for the sake of God's name and reputation (vv. 18, 22-23)
- The psalmist prays for the sake of God's praise (vs. 21)
- The psalmist prays for the sake of God's covenant faithfulness (vs. 20)