



# Community Group Discussion Guide

July 28, 2024

Psalm 74 | Rise Up and Remember

## MOTIVATE

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Starter Question:

- ⇒ *What negative remarks have you heard people make about religion or religious belief?*
- ⇒ *Share an experience when someone said, "If there was a God, why would He allow...?"*

## DISCUSS

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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 rebellion, God allowed the Babylonians, under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, to take the capitol city of Jerusalem. The Babylonians tore down the walls, ravaged the city, destroyed the temple, and then burned it (2 Kings 25:8-15).

Jerusalem in ruins is the setting for Psalm 74, this Psalm of Lament from Book Three of Psalms. Psalm 74 is a communal lament, designed for use in public prayer and lamentation ceremonies. Lament Psalms record the writer's cry and appeal to God for divine deliverance in moments of despair. Whether laments are communal or personal, these prayers of pain, confession, complaint, anger, and desperation are seeking God's deliverance, comfort, and refuge (see [Psalms Overview](#) for additional information).

The superscription of this psalm is *A Maskil of Asaph*. Most Bible translations suggest that *maskil* is a literary or musical term. Most likely, it relates to the purpose of specific psalms or how they were performed or recited. In this case, this may be a plea and a prayer in great sorrow, because of the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians.

The historical, biblical character called Asaph lived during the reigns of David and Solomon, not during the invasion of the Babylonians. However, in a number of places at the time of the return from exile around 539 BC descendants of Asaph emerged to once again take prominent places in Jewish worship (Ezra 3:10). One of three "Sons of Asaph" or one of their fathers probably wrote this psalm a few years before the return from exile.

In Psalm 74, the psalmist cried out to God, pleading with Him to remember His people. 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. The psalm begins with a cry of distress and ends with an extended entreaty to God for His intervention in reestablishing His covenant people in their land.

- ⇒ *How does God's past faithfulness give us confidence that He will be faithful again?*
- ⇒ *Why are the promises of God important to remember in times of desperation?*

***Psalm 74:1-3*** *O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture? 2 Remember 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. 3 Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins; the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary!*

Feeling spurned by God, the psalmist began by asking two searching questions that related to His covenant with Israel: *O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?* This distress due to a ferocious attack by Israel's enemies against the nation's central place of worship. The sanctuary had been burned and left in total ruins. However, the psalmist's anguish extended beyond that of the physical damage. The major problem was the seeming indifference and inactivity of God. The temple could be rebuilt, but what of the faith in God which it represented?

- ⇒ ***Discuss this quote by Charles Spurgeon: The presence of God is the joy of His people, but any suspicion of His absence is distracting beyond measure. It is not the trouble, but the hiding of our Father's face, which cuts us to the quick.***
- ⇒ ***Had God actually abandoned His people or had He withdrawn the power of His presence from them? What is the difference?***
- ⇒ ***Does God need to be reminded of His promises to His people?***

***Psalm 74:4-9*** *Your foes have roared in the midst of your meeting place; they set up their own signs for signs. 5 They were like those who swing axes in a forest of trees. 6 And all its carved wood they broke down with hatchets and hammers. 7 They set your sanctuary on fire; they profaned the dwelling place of your name, bringing it down to the ground. 8 They said to themselves, "We will utterly subdue them"; they burned all the meeting places of God in the land. 9 We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long.*

With no respect for God, the enemy was ferocious in its attempt to shatter every vestige of Israel's institutions. Their goal was to destroy the meeting place of God with His people. Thus, they planned to change Israel's destiny and to remove any reminder of God's past loyalty and of the true worship of God.

They were like madmen as they used their hatchets and hammers on the beautiful, carved woodwork of the temple. Gold overlay was stripped off the wood. The temple was profaned and burned to the ground, along with all the other meeting places of God in Israel. These invaders "set up their own signs for signs." This indicates cloth flags or military banners with pictures on them, showing everyone that they had won the fight. The enemy was laughing at God and His people.

The Israelite nation in exile wept over the destruction of the temple. The temple symbolized the presence and the protection of God. Though the punishment of exile was deserved, the people nevertheless felt as if God had abandoned them forever. The absence of signs and a reliable prophetic voice made the people unsure about how long this tragedy would continue.

- ⇒ ***What role does the temple play in the psalmist's lament? How does this translate to believers today?***
- ⇒ ***The psalmist mentions the absence of prophets in verse 9. How important are spiritual leaders during times of crisis?***

**Psalm 74:10-11** *How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever? **11** Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the fold of your garment and destroy them!*

The psalmist continued with more searching questions: How long? Why? Questions like these express depth of emotions that arose because of the magnitude of God's anger, the proximity of their past relationship as God's sheep, and their present alienation. The questioner wondered if God could be angry with His own people forever while not addressing the actions of His enemies. The psalmist did not question the correctness of God's judgment but used his lament as the basis for an appeal to God's fatherly heart.

In verse 11, Asaph asked God to not hold back His right hand. The right hand was often associated with strength and authority, and the psalmist was pleading for God to exert His power and to intervene on behalf of His people.

- ⇒ ***Have you ever felt like the psalmist, questioning God's presence during a time of crisis?***
- ⇒ ***How did you navigate that experience, and what was the outcome?***

**Psalm 74:12-17** *Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. **13** You divided the sea by Your might; You broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. **14** You crushed the heads of Leviathan; You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. **15** You split open springs and brooks; You dried up ever-flowing streams. **16** Yours is the day, yours also the night; you have established the heavenly lights and the sun. **17** You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth; You have made summer and winter.*

Remembering God's past actions on behalf of His people, the psalmist pivoted to a new direction beginning with the words, "Yet God . . ." Asaph represented the community in its worship of their great and powerful King who made everything. This remembrance caused Asaph to sing a hymn of praise for God's acts in creation and for His deliverance of Israel from Egypt and on through the wilderness. As King, God led His people from victory to victory.

- ⇒ ***What is a "Yet God" moment in your life?***

With his focus on God in verses 13-17, Asaph used the word "You" or "Yours" twelve times. It's as if he were saying, "It was You, God, that made everything. It was not the false gods that some people worship. You are the basher of sea-monsters' heads and the One whose power overwhelms every challenge to divine kingship. You are sovereign over creation. You made land, sea, seasons, and set the boundaries of it all. You are in control of perceived powers of this world." This is Israel's God.

- ⇒ ***How does the psalmist describe God's sovereignty over creation in verses 12-17?***
- ⇒ ***How does the psalmist use references to God's past acts of deliverance and creation to build his appeal for help? What does this tell us about the importance of remembering in faith?***

**Psalm 74:18-23** Remember this, O Lord, how the enemy scoffs, and a foolish people reviles your name. **19** Do not deliver the soul of Your dove to the wild beasts; do not forget the life of Your poor forever. **20** Have regard for the covenant, for the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence. **21** Let not the downtrodden turn back in shame; let the poor and needy praise your name. **22** Arise, O God, defend your cause; remember how the foolish scoff at you all the day! **23** Do not forget the clamor of your foes, the uproar of those who rise against you, which goes up continually!

Once again, the psalmist called on God to remember the afflictions of His people and the conduct of His enemies who mocked and reviled His name, Yahweh. For Israel, the name of the Lord was sacred, as it was His guarantee that He would fulfill His covenant promises. The enemies thought they had autonomy over God's people and therefore over the God of Israel. They were nothing but "foolish people" for denying the power and name of the Lord. The praise of God's name is in contrast to the desecration of His name.

The psalmist prayed that God would not hand over the life of His people to an enemy described as wild, violent beasts who filled the land with darkness. At stake was the future of Israel as well as God's covenant to preserve them as a great nation.

⇒ ***The enemies in this psalm are unnamed. What might this tell us about the universal application of this text?***

In desperation the psalmist prayed that God would have mercy on His own so that they could renew their praise of Him. The suffering remained, and the psalm ends with a stream of urgent prayers, asking God to deliver Israel and not ignore His enemies: Arise, O God. Remember.

⇒ ***What comfort can believers today derive from this psalm in times of national or personal crisis?***

⇒ ***How do you react during times of hardship and uncertainty? Does this psalm offer any guidance?***

## TRANSFORM

**1. Make personal application:** As long as God reigns, defeat of His kingdom is impossible. Because God rules for His own glory, God's people have an assured future. When the disappointing setbacks of life occur, especially in serving God's Kingdom, believers should turn to the Lord. No matter how devastating the defeat may be, failure is never final as long as the grace of God is available.<sup>1</sup>

⇒ ***Despite the lament, where do you see signs of hope or trust in God in Psalm 74? How can you find hope in the midst of your own challenges?***

⇒ ***Psalm 74 is a communal lament. How important is the role of community in dealing with collective or individual suffering?***

⇒ ***How can the themes and emotions expressed in Psalm 74 be applied to contemporary situations of injustice, conflict, or disaster? What lessons can you draw for today?***

<sup>1</sup> Lawson, S. (2004) Psalms 1-75. (M Anders, Ed.) (Vol. 11, p. 375). Nashville, TN: Holman Reference

**2. Pray:** Ask God to show you where He is working and pray He will allow you to join Him in that work. Pray that we as His people will be helping others while we hurt; encouraging others while we seek healing; remembering how He has never failed and will keep His Word always.

## STUDY

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### Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *Holman Old Testament Commentary, Psalms 1-75, pages 372-375.*
- *Tate, M. E. (1998). Psalms 51–100 (Vol. 20, pp. 247–255). Word, Incorporated.*
- *VanGemeren, W. A. (1991). Psalms. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs (Vol. 5, pp. 484–490). Zondervan Publishing House.*
- *Kidner, D. (1975). Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary (Vol. 16, pp. 293–299). InterVarsity Press*
- *Henry, M. (1994). Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume (pp. 850–852). Hendrickson.*
- *Lawson, S. (2004) Psalms 1-75. (M Anders, Ed.) (Vol. 11, p. 372-375). Nashville, TN: Holman Reference*
- [www.enduringword.com](http://www.enduringword.com) on Psalm 10, available July 1, 2024.