

Psalm 74 (Henry Law)

by Henry Law

The Psalmist expresses his lament over the desolation of the Temple and calls upon God to intervene and maintain His own cause.

Topics: "Gods Intervention", "Temple Destruction"

Description

Henry Law preaches on the desolation and ruin brought by a hostile invasion, focusing on the Psalmist's lament over the destruction of the Temple and the city. The Psalmist implores God to remember His people, His congregation, His inheritance, and the Mount of His abode, appealing to God's role as the good Shepherd and the Redeemer. The cry is for God to intervene in the desolation caused by the enemy's wickedness in the sanctuary, with a deep conviction that such iniquity will not prevail. The Psalmist reflects on the destruction of the sanctuary and the oppression faced by the people, emphasizing the importance of seeking God's help and protection in times of extreme anguish and despair.

Transcript

Hostile invasion had brought ruin into the city. Grim desolation frowns where once the Temple magnificently stood. The outrage of the enemy is plaintively described. Importunity calls upon God to interfere, and confidence is expected that light would arise in darkness.

1-2. "O God, why have You cast us off forever? why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture? Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old; the tribe of Your inheritance, which You have redeemed; this Mount Zion, where You have dwelt."

The Psalmist thus writes with mournful eye fixed on the ruined city, and especially on the desolations of the Temple. In bitterness of heart he cries aloud to God. He seems to expostulate, 'Can it be that these miseries signify our final desertion!' The believer thus flies to the mercy-seat when adverse oppression casts him into the depths of grief. Let it be noted in what terms the aid of God is supplicated. His people are depicted as the sheep of His pasture. God is thus reminded of His tender office as the good and great Shepherd, who will never fail to tend His flock, and to protect them from all foes. They are described, also, as the congregation which He had purchased. Can Jesus ever forget the company for whom He shed His precious blood, and whom He bought at such high price out of the hands of their enslaving foes? They are described, moreover, as the portion assigned by the measuring-rod to be His inheritance--the possession which will be His pride and His glory. They are called, moreover, the Mount of His abode. Never will He withdraw His presence. He will always abide in them, and they in Him. Safe indeed must they be who thus

can claim an interest in God.

3-4. "Lift up Your feet unto the perpetual desolations, even all that the enemy has done wickedly in the sanctuary. Your enemies roar in the midst of Your congregations; they set up their banners for signs."

The cry is earnest that God would no longer tarry, but advance to view the Temple's sad state. With noisome tumult the insulting foe had burst upon the assembled worshipers, and hostile banners had been erected in most holy places. This wretchedness is spread before the Lord. The feeling is deep that such iniquity would not be permitted to prevail.

5-8. "A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees. But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers. They have cast fire into Your sanctuary; they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of Your name to the ground. They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together; they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land."

It is high privilege in any way to be permitted to promote the interests of true religion. Fame rested on those who felled the trees of Lebanon to aid the erection of the Temple. Substance and tools are never better expended than in raising the sanctuary in which God will be worshiped and His name proclaimed. No honor will be theirs whose parsimony expends on luxury and self-indulgence the means which might erect or beautify sanctuaries for holy worship. The Psalmist witnessed the destruction of what piety had raised, and the noble works of former zeal a prey for the devouring flames. But neglect may gradually accomplish what violence may rapidly effect. May such neglect be ever absent from us!

9. "We see not our signs; there is no longer any prophet; neither is there among us any who knows how long."

The eyes of the disconsolate in Jerusalem no longer rested on tokens that God was in their midst. The symbols of His presence had disappeared in smoldering heaps. The voices of accredited ministers no longer spoke in the Lord's name. No cheering predictions gave hope that this misery would soon brighten into former joys. Grievous indeed was such trial. No greater misery can oppress any people than to be deprived of godly teachers.

10-11. "O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme Your name forever? Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? pluck it out of Your bosom."

In such extremity of anguish prayer presents a ready refuge. All other help seems utterly to fail. But though the Temple be in ruins, God lives and loves, and is very near. He can repair the ruin; He can revive the services. To Him let approach be made. However hopeless the case may seem, let prayer be made, and all will be well.

12. "For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth."

When all is desolate, faith brightly sparkles. It sings amid surrounding ruins. It looks above all to God, overruling all things for His glory and His people's good. It is assured that through all the earth, in all events, His people will be safely guarded.

13-15. "You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the dragons in the waters. You broke the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gave him to be food to the people inhabiting the wilderness. You cleaved the fountain and the flood; You dried up mighty rivers."

God's wonders of old are the joy and comfort and support of His people in all ages. They read in them His constant love and His unfailing strength. The perils of the Church of old seemed to exclude all hope. But out of the furnace of Egypt He led forth His oppressed people. The sea parted and opened a safe passage for their feet. The monsters of the deep could do no hurt. They perished as the host advanced. The carcasses of mangled foes were cast along the shore. Did waters fail? Did the vast multitude look in vain for means to relieve their thirst? Did the parched wilderness afford no ray of hope? God graciously appeared. He gave the word. The smitten rock opened, and gushing streams flowed forth. He who worked these wonders in olden times, is still the same in tender love, in watchful care, in all-controlling power. He has raised His people from extreme desolation. He still will be their Savior.

16-17. "The day is Yours, the night also is Yours; You have prepared the light and the sun. You have set all the borders of the earth; You have made summer and winter."

The works of creation teach as clearly as the works of providence and grace. In the realm of nature how wondrous are the changes which occur. The day brightly shines, but shadow soon overcasts the scene, and night in thick darkness hides all things from view. Again the morning dawns, the night and shadows flee away, and joy and gladness smile on the face of the awakened world. The wealth and rich luxuriance of summer robes earth with beauty--makes it as Eden's garden of delights, and fills it with the melody of heaven. But bright days shorten--winter comes, and strips the fields and groves and gardens of their bright attire, and binds the babbling streams in fetters of ice. All these changes are the work of God. We are thus taught that changes, also, will mark the course of grace. It may not always be a summer-day. But faith knows that receding summer will return, and winter has its limits. Earth, also, has varying climates. God sets all the borders of the earth. Happy is it to mark His overruling hand, and to know well that He has done and will do all things well.

18. "Remember this, that the enemy has reproached, O Lord, and that the foolish people have blasphemed Your name."

Faith will remind God that the persecution of the godly is war against His kingdom. It will stir up God to bear in mind that His people are His chosen heritage. To touch them is to touch the apple of His eye.

19-23. "O do not deliver the soul of Your turtle-dove to the multitude of the wicked; do not forget the congregation of Your poor forever. Have respect unto the covenant; for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. O let not the oppressed return ashamed; let the poor and needy praise Your name. Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily. Do not forget the voice of Your enemies; the tumult of those who rise up against You increase continually."

The Church is here set before God under the tender image of a turtle-dove--timid and meek amid scenes of desolation. The gentle bird seems to enlist all sympathies. So God is moved to pity His disconsolate people. The Psalmist concludes with earnest cries for God to arise, to maintain His own cause, to extinguish all the cruelty and oppression of the wicked. Let the conclusion in our hearts be deep assurance that, though distress may be very great, God is still near, and will in due time manifest Himself for their comfort and deliverance.

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