

Psalms: Book Three (Part One)

A Pall of Judgment

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It seems strange with all that has been happening with the Supreme Court rulings and such over the past week or two happened just before Independence Day. What are they doing but taking away our freedoms? We can say with all honesty and hope that we are free in Christ, no matter what happens out there in the world. I think if you keep that thought in the back of your mind the sermon will mean a great deal more to you.

About two weeks ago, we moved from spring into summer. We went from the time in which the earth is regenerating itself and now we go into the heat of summer when things are beginning to ripen and mature toward the harvest.

Growing up, when we were going to school from fall through winter and into the springtime, summer was the most glorious season of the year. A time for getting up late, playing with neighborhood friends, going on vacation, going to the beach, going to the amusement park, eating ice cream, enjoying barbecues, watching fireworks (like on the Fourth of July), and generally having a fine, free time. As we got older, we did not get a summer break. When we got a job, we had to work right through it, so it was not quite so glorious. The weather is warm, sun is shining, and it just seems a bit more carefree in the summertime.

To the ancient Hebrews living in the Middle East between the contending powers of Egypt and Mesopotamia—sometimes it was Assyria, sometimes it was Babylon, sometimes it was Persia—summer was not such a great time, or it might not be such a great time. Every year, though, it was dry and hot and dusty. It was not a great time to be out and about. You probably tried to stay in the shade. You conserved water. It was just the way summer was and falling between the major harvest that took place before Pentecost and before Tabernacles. It was a relatively slow time.

You might have spent some time out with the flocks, but the crops were growing. There is not much you can do there; you might be able to cultivate a little bit, you might be able to irrigate a little bit, but it took God, in the sun and water and the soil, to make the crops come up. A farmer just had to be patient. Same thing with the crops on the hoof, as it were. You just had to watch those things grow fat. Keep them safe; move them around a bit until they were ready for the fall time when slaughter time would come.

It also happened to be summertime when the military machines of those areas of the world and the campaigns shifted into high gear. Oftentimes, it was summer when those military campaigns resolved themselves, and so summertime, actually starting with the spring when it was time for kings to go to war, the Bible says. Between spring and fall, there was a pretty a good chance that there was going to be violence during summertime, that there were going to be raids, that they were going to be military incursions. It just depended on how strong Israel was at the time.

I would like you to go to Amos 8, where God gives Amos a prophecy about summertime. We are going to read the first ten verses of Amos 8 and it is here that God begins to make some direct connections between summer and the crops ripening and His own judgment on Israel.

Amos 8:1-10 Thus the Lord God showed me: Behold, a basket of summer fruit. And He said, "Amos, what do you see?" So I said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the LORD said to me: "The end has come upon My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore. And the songs of the temple shall be wailing in that day," says the Lord God—"Many dead bodies everywhere, they shall be thrown out in silence." Hear this, you who swallow up the needy, and make the poor of the land fail, saying: "When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade wheat? Making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the scales by deceit, that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—even sell the bad wheat?" The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: "Surely I will never forget any of their works. Shall the land not tremble for this, and everyone mourn who dwells in it? All of it shall swell like the River, heave and subside like the River of Egypt. "And it shall come to pass in that day," says the Lord God, "that I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight; I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist, and baldness on every head; I will make it like mourning for an only son, and its end like a bitter day."

The imagery here concerns a basket, and it is full of summer produce that the ground has brought forth, and it is being displayed. We can think of it, maybe, in terms of how we display fruit and such in a cornucopia. What God does here is He makes a direct connection between the summertime when those fruits are ripening and the ripe fruit and God's judgment on Israel.

The fruit represents not what *God* had produced, but what *Israel* had produced. The fruits were baking in the summer sun. Their fruit had matured, but it had ripened to the point of rotting. At that point, God saw that their fruit was bad, that it was not worth anything. It was not worth eating or displaying, it was not worth any good thing. He acted in judgment, and He brought an end upon Israel.

There is a word play here that we do not see, but this "basket" and the word "end" are very similar in sound in the Hebrew. What he is saying here is this basket of summer fruit typifies or is a symbol of the end of Israel when their bad fruit had shown that He needed to act in judgment.

Now this idea of the basket of summer fruit derives from Deuteronomy 26. We are not going to go there as it is a longer section where an offering is described. The people of Israel were supposed to bring the first fruits of the land in a basket before the priests and make some comments, or declarations about how God has blessed him. They were to bring only the best fruit in this offering, and they bring it before God for acceptance, that this is what they had produced with the blessings that God had given them in the land.

What God shows in this particular prophecy here in Amos 8 is that offering being turned on its head. It is an inversion of the offering of Deuteronomy 26. What they were now bringing before God was rotten fruit. When you bring such horrible offerings before God, He must react to it. Just in the same way, when we give Him good offerings, he reacts in kindness and blessing. If we bring before him bad offerings, He is going to react in judgment.

So the summer fruit that is being displayed now represents judgment and destruction. The fruit is bad. It is time for them to be cut off if all they are producing is bad fruit. Let us go to Joel, who is just here in the same neighborhood, just a few pages back. If you want to jot down in your margin there is a similar imagery in Revelation 14:15-18.

Joel 3:9-10 Proclaim this among the nations: "Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords . . .

This image that is used for farming to produce good fruit is now being changed into an image for warfare.

Joel 3:10-13 . . . and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, 'I am strong.' " Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD. Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great."

What we have here is very similar imagery to what we saw in Amos 8. It is not a basket of summer fruit being brought before God and being rotten. Here the imagery is that the harvest is ripe, that it is time for reaping. For reaping such a harvest, a sickle is needed. The reaper has to use a sickle, which is an implement of cutting to remove the bad that has been brought forth.

It changes a little bit, but the element of judgment and the process of judgment are more focused here. Before we just had a basket of summer fruit and God saying He was going to do this. Here we have God not only saying He is going to do it, He shows the weapon that He will use, and He is going to cut the heads off of the grain as it were because it is ready to be reaped.

At the end of the second half of verse 13, he changes from a wheat image or of grain being reaped with a sickle, to the grape harvest being reaped and then put into a press to squeeze out the juice. The press is God's judgment, and the juice is blood. It is going to be a bloody, terrible, violent judgment that is going to occur because the fruit is not good, the fruit is evil. There must be a judgment from God because He cannot let it stand.

It has to be punished. The wages of sin is death, and it gets to the point where the sick smell of rotting fruit comes up before God's nostrils. He says, "I have to wipe this off the face of the earth." There is this image that runs through both the Old Testament and the New of the grapes of God's wrath. And they are crushed in the winepress of His wrath, and there is going to be blood up to the horse's bridle. I was going to say his reins. It is a very deep filling of that valley of Jehoshaphat with blood.

There is something that you need to know, you probably do know this, but I thought I should just mention it. The harvest of grapes is at the end of summer. We have, once again, this idea of summer fruit and the season of summer being highlighted here. It was actually *the* major harvest in Israel. There are two harvests in Israel: the early harvest during or before Pentecost was a lesser harvest, and the greater harvest was in the fall, just as it is pictured in the holy days.

The Pentecost harvest is small, but the one that is represented by the Feast of Tabernacles is very large. The question, at this time is, will the harvest be good or bad? In the case of Amos, the judgment was bad and that means destruction and death. We are not finished.

Turn to Isaiah 28 and see this brought out again. The one being judged is Ephraim, which represents the nation of Israel in particular. It applies to Judah as well, all Israel.

Isaiah 28:1-4 Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower [It is not pretty anymore. It is starting to get ugly. It is starting to get brown and wilt. It is like that rotting fruit.] which is at the head of the verdant valleys, to those who are overcome with wine! [We see the problem here, God has sent a punisher.] Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one, like a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, like a flood of mighty waters overflowing, who will bring them down to the earth with His hand. The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, will be trampled underfoot; and the glorious beauty is a fading flower which is at the head of the verdant valley, like the first fruit before the summer, which an observer sees; he eats it up while it is still in his hand.

This section speaks of the impending doom of Israel. God is promising here to bring down their overweening pride, their intoxication, and their addictions. He says He would trample their beauty, just rub it right into the dust. He would do this with overwhelming force, describing this juggernaut that he sends before Him to do His will as a destroying hurricane, a tempest, a big storm, and following that, a flood. He says here He will trample them underfoot. I get the image in my mind of God stepping on them and smashing them like bugs that are trying to scurry out of the way.

The phrase in verse four where it says like the first fruit before summer is not a very good translation; it should be more literally like an early fig before the harvest. This places it not before summer, but in summer because figs were gathered in August. That is the time when they are ripe, so the same imagery is coming up again. We had fading flowers and ripe figs here, and it is summer time, and it is the time of judgment, the time of destruction and what he does here at the end of verse 4, he compares God's judgment to a man eating a ripe fig with the heat of the summer, destroying it, using it up, making it disappear.

Let us go back to II Kings 25. This is one of the one of the chapters (actually it is mentioned three or four times in the Old Testament), where the fall of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem is recorded. We are going to look the first twelve verses.

II Kings 25:1-3 Now it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and encamped against it; and they built a siege wall against it all around. So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. [Which is the next year; no actually it is two years.] By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine had become so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.

This is part of the judgment.

II Kings 25:4-12 Then the city wall was broken through, and all the men of war fled at night by way of the gate between two walls, which was by the king's garden, even though the Chaldeans were still encamped all around against the city. And the king went by way of the plain. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him. So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they pronounced judgment on him. Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon. And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon,

came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls of Jerusalem all around. Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive the rest of the people who remained in the city and the defectors who had deserted to the king of Babylon, with the rest of the multitude. But the captain of the guard left some of the poor of the land as vinedressers and farmers.

Here we see the judgment worked out upon the people of Judah and upon the city of Jerusalem. The siege of Jerusalem began in the tenth month of the ninth year, it says here in verse one, and by the eleventh year, fourth month, the famine was bad. Jeremiah tells us in Lamentations 4:10 people were resorting to cannibalism. They were eating their own children to stay alive.

In early August of that year, the wall of the city was breached and the city fell. Just a few days after that, the Temple was destroyed, the palace razed, the majority of the city burned, and the walls were broken down so that they could not defend themselves anymore. Nebuzaradan then carried away many of the Jews that had not already been carried to Babylon and he left just a few in the land—the poor to work the land as serfs of the Babylonian empire. We see here God's judgment upon Judah and her sins was defeat, destruction, exile, and for many of them, death.

The Jews have a tradition that the Temple itself fell on the ninth of Ab, the fifth month. To commemorate that event they set aside this day every year for fasting and for mourning. This is especially poignant because the second temple built by Zerubbabel and remodeled by Herod the Great, the one visited by Jesus throughout his ministry, was also destroyed, this time by the Romans on the ninth of Ab in AD 70. That cannot have been a coincidence that the Temple of God twice was destroyed on the ninth of Ab in the middle of summer.

Let us go to Lamentations 1 and see another version of this, right after Jeremiah. We get a taste in Lamentations of the horrors of the siege in the fall of Jerusalem.

Lamentations 1:1 How lonely sits the city that was full of people! . . .

Jeremiah is clearly writing this after Jerusalem has fallen, and he is looking back on the city and it is empty, there used to be maybe hundreds of thousands of people there. And now there was no one.

Lamentations 1:1-5 . . . How like a widow is she, who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces has become a slave! She weeps bitterly in the night, her tears are on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies. Judah has gone into captivity, under affliction and hard servitude; she dwells among the nations, she finds no rest; all her persecutors overtake her in dire straits. The roads to Zion mourn because no one comes to the set feasts. All her gates are desolate; her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness. Her adversaries have become the master, her enemies prosper; for the LORD has afflicted her because of the multitude of her transgressions. Her children have gone into captivity before the enemy.

Lamentations 1:8-15 Jerusalem has sinned gravely, therefore she has become vile. All who honored her despise her because they have seen her nakedness; yes, she sighs and turns away. Her uncleanness is in her skirts; she did not consider her destiny; therefore,

her collapse was awesome; she had no comforter. "O LORD, behold my affliction, for the enemy is exalted!" The adversary has spread his hand over all her pleasant things; for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, those whom You commanded not to enter Your assembly. All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their valuables for food to restore life. "See, O LORD, and consider, for I am scorned." "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, which the LORD has inflicted in the day of His fierce anger. From above He has sent fire into my bones, and it overpowered them; He has spread a net for my feet and turned me back; He has made me desolate and faint all the day. The yoke of my transgressions was bound; they were woven together by His hands, and thrust upon my neck. He made my strength fail; the Lord delivered me into the hands of those whom I am not able to withstand. The Lord has trampled underfoot all my mighty men in my midst; He has called an assembly against me to crush my young men; the Lord trampled as in a winepress the virgin daughter of Judah."

Remember the word destiny from verse 9. That is all we need right now. I was going to go ahead and read from chapter 4 verses 4-16, where it gives you more of an idea of what went on during that siege. But I want you to pick up here, if nothing else, that God Himself afflicted and destroyed them for their vile sins. Chapter 2 is full of this. The Lord did this. The Lord did that. He did this. He did that.

In all of these what He is doing here is destruction after destruction after destruction and it is all because of their rotten fruit. Their apostasy, their idolatry, their injustice to one another, their sexual sins, the lying, cheating, and all their other iniquities just had become so piled up and overbearing to God that He had to act. He just destroyed them completely, wiped them off the face of the earth.

What we see here in Lamentations, in Jeremiah, in some of these ends of the Chronicles and the Kings, where all of this is recorded for us, is God doing just what He said He would do in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 if they did not obey Him and keep His covenant. He was as good as His word. This was the result of sin—unrepented sin.

You may have guessed that we are going to plunge into Book 3 of the Psalms because that is the book of Psalms that has to do with summer. I wanted you to understand the thematic underlayment of summertime because Book 3 deals with this very issue, not in full, but that is a major theme of this section. God does what He says, God curses for sin. God wants repentance, and He is happy to forget and to forgive if we do.

If we do not, there are penalties and He will bring it out. He will destroy because He cannot abide sin. It cannot remain, and that is a lot of what we will see in Book 3. I started this in the first week or so of January in 2012. Here it is 2015 and we are just now getting to Book 3. We have done 1, 2, 4, and 5. I have wanted to do all these in their season, so it would be meat in due season, as it were, so here we are in the summertime, and we are going to go into Book 3 and the seasonal theme of summertime.

Remember, just as a review, that the Old Testament contains several groups of five. You all know this, but somebody might be hearing this for the first time, so I will go through it quickly. But these groups of five parallel each other thematically. It is these groups of five that I have made the organizing principle of these sermons on the Books of Psalms.

The Hebrews divided their liturgical calendar along the lines of God's festivals, meaning it falls into five seasons of the year and those seasons are Passover, Pentecost, Summer as we will be going into, actually we have already done that. Now we will go into some of the Psalms. Tabernacles is the fourth one and the long time of winter between the end of the fall holy days and the beginning of the spring holy days, that is the time of winter. Now as the Bible makes plain.

We look at the Psalms will see that Book 1, Book 2, Book 3, Book 4, and Book 5 are inscribed there, so we know there are five books of Psalms, and there are five Summary Psalms—146 through 150. These five summary psalms go with Book 1, Book 2, Book 3, Book 4, and Book 5.

There are also five books of the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. There are five festival scrolls. The Hebrews called them Megilloth and they are the Song of Songs, which corresponds with the festival of Passover, Ruth which corresponds with the festival of Pentecost, Lamentations with corresponds with the ninth of Ab and the summertime, Ecclesiastes which corresponds with the Feast of Tabernacles, and Esther, which corresponds with winter time, specifically the feast of Purim, which is mentioned in that book. Those are the fives. They are all intertwined, these groups of five.

I will just give you an example of Book 1 of Psalms, which is Psalm 1-42, with the summary Psalm of 146, is parallel to the Book of Genesis. The Song of Songs is also called The Song of Solomon and the time of Passover, all of those have similar themes. They feed off of one another and the same with Pentecost and Book 2, summertime, Book 3, the Fall Feast, and Book 4, the wintertime in Book 5. They all mesh together. They all have feed off of similar themes.

What about Book 3 in particular? Book 3 is chapters 73-89. It is actually the shortest of the books. It has 17 psalms which is actually the same number as Book 4 which also has 17 psalms. There are shorter chapters in Book 3, so it is technically the shortest of the books. The Summary Psalm is 148, and as we have already seen, we are dealing with the parallel theme of summer and ripening fruit, which is a major theme and the same themes are found in the book of Leviticus and the book of Lamentations, of which we just got a taste.

What are the themes of Leviticus? If we were to go back there and go chapter by chapter, we could quickly see that it deals with, as its name suggests, the Levitical things. It is mostly focused on the Levites. It opens up with offerings. Levites had to do all kinds of stuff with offerings, and it also talks about their priestly service to God. It talks a great deal about bringing things to the Tabernacle and later to the Temple. So the sanctuary is a theme.

There is, as I have given sermons or at least one sermon in the past, a whole section of Leviticus called the Holiness Code. Leviticus is very much about holiness, distinction, separateness, set apart, and purity. All those ideas that are caught up in what holiness is.

There are also references to the feasts. Leviticus 23 has all the feasts in it. Leviticus 16 particularly talks about the Day of Atonement. What do you do on the Day of Atonement? You afflict your soul. There is this idea of affliction that starts popping into it. That is part of all the holiness and the judgment and all kinds of things that were going on there.

What do we have but the blessings and the curses in Leviticus 26? This means that God is going to say, if you are obedient, I will do all these wonderful things for you. If you are disobedient and you renege on the covenant, then these bad things are going to happen to you. That is God's Word. Those

are His promises, the promises are both good and bad. God says something, He is faithful to what He says, and He will bring it to pass. Isaiah 55 says that when His Word goes forth, it does not come back to Him empty. He says what He means and means what He says. That is part of all this judgment of God that we are getting to in this Book 3.

There are a few examples of God's acts of judgment in the book, the one that is most significant for us to think about in terms of Levities and those who should have known better is what happened to Nadab and Abihu. They should have known better, yet they died because they did not honor God and do what He said to do in detail. They were very careless about what God had said.

Finally, at the end of Leviticus, there is a little bit about redemption, redemption of property, and redemption of persons. You get this little meager bit of hope at the end of the book of Leviticus.

What about Lamentations? There are a lot of the same themes. Obviously, this book is also named very descriptively for what it is talking about. Lamentations, wailing, grief, and sorrow, you feel terrible because all these bad things were happening. Lamentations brings in the ideas of grief and consternation as a result of judgment, correction, curses, afflictions, and trials. The consternation comes because it is very clear that God is doing this to His own people, even though He is maybe using others.

God is judging. The people are saying, "Why, Lord, what have we done? Why are you bringing this on your people? How could you do this?" This makes me think of Habakkuk. The Chaldeans of all people! "They are the worst on the face of the earth and You are going to use them to punish us?" A very similar idea goes through the book of Lamentations as well as Book 3; and in the end, just barely, there is a little sliver of possible repentance and redemption. Right at the end of Lamentations, there might be some good that comes out of this.

The psalms of Book 3 talk a lot about Zion, Jerusalem, the Temple, and the sanctuary. Oftentimes it is the sanctuary, but they are talking about the Temple itself and the presence of God. God is there. God is accessible, as it were, even though He may not seem to be accessible. He is accessible to certain a group of people. Many scholars believe that this Book 3 reflects the attitudes and the circumstances from the end of David's reign, meaning Solomon's reign, to the fall of Judah and Jerusalem.

Much of what takes place in Book 3 is happening during the monarchy of Israel and Judah. Mostly Judah, it concentrates on Judah because that is where the Temple is. That is where the sanctuary is, that is, Zion. In addition, one thing we need to understand is that except for Psalm 86, all the psalms there in Book 3 have a broad, communal, or national perspective. They are not personal, like in Books 1 and 2, where David was the main author and he was saying, I went through this, or God help me, or this is what is happening in the kingdom, what do I need to do?

For the most part, all of these psalms are much broader in significance in that the whole nation is involved, that the actions of a single person have consequences, which affect the whole community of Israel, certainly all of Jerusalem. In this particular instance, where we are talking about what was happening in Israel, we could say that the nation rises or falls, rejoices or weeps together. What happens to one happens to all. This is reflected in I Corinthians 12:26, where Paul takes this principle and applies it to the church that if one suffers, we all suffer. But if what one rejoices, we all rejoice.

What he is saying here is that we can not necessarily divorce ourselves from what is happening around us. We are still going to be affected by what happens in the world, and we have to make sure that we have the right godly reaction to these things, because what is going to happen to the nation is going to happen to the nation—despite us. We have to be ready, which is a good object lesson for what we are going through here. We are not. We are in the nation and it is going to affect us. We do not have to be part of it, if you know what I mean. We can be holy. We could be separate and we can do what God wants us to do despite what is happening out there.

Most of the psalms are connected with two non-Davidic writers; one is Asaph which takes up the bulk of Book 3, Psalm 73 through 83. He has 11 psalms right in a row, bang, bang, bang. They are Asaph's, he was a chief musician and perhaps a choirmaster during the time of David. There is pretty good evidence, if you want to put it that way. Some think that he lived into the time of Solomon, that he was younger than David, and he directed the choirs and such into Solomon's reign. (If you want to look him up go to I Chronicles 15:17-19, then I Chronicles 16:4-5.)

The other major writer or writers in the book are called the sons of Korah. We have run across them before in one of the other books, and they wrote, whoever it was, Psalm 84 and 85 as well as 87 and 88. There are four attributed to the sons of Korah. They were a group, a division of the Levites, and they seem to have concentrated on composing and or performing music in the Temple. They were either a choir or a small group that did composing and performing of these psalms in the Temple.

Many of the psalms, seeing who wrote them, it is very clear that they reflect an insider's view of the service of the sanctuary. Whoever wrote them knew what was going on in the Temple.

Only Psalm 86 is ascribed to David, and this is the one that is individual. David wrote from what he knew. Here Psalm 86 is slipped in as a prayer of an individual, David, suffering, undergoing public persecution. He says there is a whole crowd after him, so it is very apropos to going on into our time with the whole world seeming to go into its perversions. We are no different.

Psalm 88 is jointly ascribed to the sons of Korah and a man named Heman or He Man (not He Man the cartoon character). Heman the Ezrahite. Heman is known as a wise man (see I Kings 4:31). Asaph was also known as a wise man, it is in the same place. He is mentioned in I Chronicles 15, 17, and 19 as a musician and in I Chronicles 6:42 as a singer.

These are the psalms of Book 3 from professional Temple musicians at the height of the Temple's power and influence, probably mostly in the time of Solomon. That is the best guess that these were written in the late ninth century or tenth century or I should say, late tenth century.

Let us look at the keynote psalm of Book 3, which is Psalm 73, and I think we will get a pretty good view or good understanding of what is going on in this book of Psalms. We are going to read the first seventeen verses. I am actually going to split this into two parts.

Psalm 73:1-4 Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm.

It is like he is saying, hey, they just go on and then right at the end, they crawl into bed and they die peacefully.

Psalms 73:5-8 They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace [ornament]; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily.

No one is going to touch me. I am not going to suffer

Psalms 73:9 They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth.

Meaning they speak bold things against God. They scoff at God and their tongue walks through the earth. Oh, that is a rich one. We would say that their speech sounds like it comes out of the gutter. There is no nobility in their speech. Go out in the world, go on a school playground, or whatever, and you will hear enough of that gutter language, not to mention in the media, everywhere.

Psalms 73:10-11 Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them. And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?"

They do not need half cups. They get full cups, their abundance is evident. They say, how does God know, is there knowledge in the Most High? God does not care. He does not watch. He is way off somewhere. He does not care about me. I can do whatever I want. I could get away with anything. God is powerless.

Psalms 73:12-14 Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches. Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning.

What is wrong here? He is saying, these people have it great. They are strong, they are wealthy, they have mouths like fish wives, and they are just horrible people. They are prosperous. They have nice clothes. They can drink all they want. They have full cups. They have got full platters. They just have everything going for them.

But I am here trying to do well, trying to do good, trying to follow God. He has been innocent of wrongdoing, and he says, I have wasted my time doing that all day long. I have been plagued, he says. I just have trial after trial after trial, whether it is health, money, relationships, or car trouble. I get a flat tire every time I go down the road. Nothing works out for me. Every morning I seem like I am chastened and God does not love me anymore. He wants to scuttle behind me with a paddle and spank me every second step.

That is how he felt. He thought this; it did not go any farther than that. It was, as one commentator I read said, "It was Satan whispering these thoughts in his ear, driving his thinking process to make him feel all this self pity."

Psalms 73:15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.

He is talking to God.

Psalm 73:16 When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me—

This agony of thought about why these people were doing so well, they were living the high life and why I, with all of this knowledge of God and all of this activity that I am doing and this dedication to try to be righteous and holy before God, I just cannot take it. I just do not understand how these two things go together. It should not work this way. Does not Leviticus 26 say, if you will obey Me, I will give you all these blessings and do all these wonderful things? That is what I have been trying to do.

All these people out there in the world are disobeying. They are being horrible toward God, scoffing at Him. They speak gutter language. They do everything that God says not to do in their lives. They are beautiful. They live so well. Life is a beach for them. And he says, “I don’t get it. It’s too painful. What’s going on here? Why is this?” Then, he says in verse 17-

Psalm 73:17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end.

We understand what is going on here. Obviously, my dad's been going over this in his Ecclesiastes sermons. This is the paradox that Asaph and Solomon are contemplating. Why do the wicked prosper and God's people tend to be always oppressed and poor? Nothing goes right for them. It should be the other way around. It is a hard problem. It is a conundrum.

That is the subject here, at least in the first half. The conclusion is in the second half, which we will get to. But I want you to understand something of how this psalm is working. What we need to understand is that Asaph gives us the key in the first verse. Let us read that again.

Psalm 73:1 Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.

Who? Then he defines who Israel is, to such as be pure in heart. Now that you understand that you can understand the conundrum, the paradox, the conundrum which the paradox brings up. Asaph makes a distinction here in the very first verse about those whom God considers true Israelites. It is those whose hearts are fixed on God, those who are pure in heart.

The first thing out of Jesus’ mouth in terms of preaching the Sermon on the Mount, you know what He started with? “Blessed are the pure in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3) Jesus and Asaph were on the same wavelength. They started out their preaching with this same concept. Real Israelites are those who are pure in heart—pure in spirit, pretty much the same thing.

What is another word for pure? Holy? It is the ones who are separated because they are pure in heart. There they have a heart like God’s. They are different. They are put in a separate category and right away as we get into Book 3, holiness comes to the forefront. That is who God is working with, the holy, the consecrated, and the ones who have been set apart. We could say they are set apart by choice, by calling, that God said, I want you and you and you. They are also separate by their hearts. They have been changed.

So it is not Israel who was chosen out of the world by God as His people. It is the people within Israel whom God chooses to work with and gives His Spirit, the ones that He has not just called.

Many are called and few are chosen—it is the ones who He is trying to *make* holy. That is the ones he is talking about, and God is good to those people. That is the key. Let us go to Romans 9 and apply this to us.

Romans 9:1-8 I tell the truth in Christ [Paul says], I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ [Well, look into the purity of heart in this man.] for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

The children of promise are those who are chosen through Christ. He is the promised Seed and we come through Him. Asaph, back in Psalm 73, is talking about that group of people whom God is particularly working with, those who He has called to be holy through His Spirit. Paul mentions this again in Galatians 6:16 when he talks about the church being the Israel of God, those being converted now through the Holy Spirit.

These are the people that God is focused on, in bringing spiritual development toward holiness, toward being like Him, to having the character of Jesus Christ. And it is not a lot of people. It is a minuscule subset of Israel. It is the remnant. It is the few. It is the few chosen. It is the little flock. They are within the larger, visible people of Israel, most of them. We cannot forget that God has now brought in the Gentiles as well, and He is working with them. But He is working mostly within Israel, and so He is then working with that small group, and it is to those that He is good.

In Psalm 73, we read about the struggles of one of those few chosen children of promise, that is, as he observes and contemplates and reacts to the world he has to live in. And as that is the rest of Israel. They are just as wicked as the Gentiles. You could even say they are more wicked than the Gentiles because they should know better. God has given them His commands. They should know what they should be doing. And he is dismayed that he seems to be the one at a disadvantage.

All around him people are prospering, happy, respected. They are healthy; they are living the good life. That is clear; it does not take much insight to see that they are vile, sinful, proud, and ungodly in conduct speech, even their thoughts. They speak against God. They think only on earthly things.

What we see here is that paradox that my dad has been preaching about. It does not compute. It should not be. Those who are God's chosen should be blessed, should they not? Those who are not chosen should be cursed. It got to the point that this so dismayed him and so rocked his world that he had almost slipped. He almost took the plunge back into the world, apostatized, and said, "I've had enough. I want the good life," but he did not.

What saved him was that trip to the sanctuary, to the Temple. This image stands for his seeking God. Going to the source, we could call it. I am going to God in prayer for answers, focus, thinking, and meditation on God Himself and what He wants to make of us, what He is trying to do. What is His end game? What is man's destiny? What is, as he puts it, their end? That is what is important, not

what is going on right now, but the end, the destiny where God is trying to get us to go to. That is what is important.

When he finally got his mind focused on that, which we would say is the Kingdom of God—our destiny, living with God for all eternity—then he could see things in the proper perspective. He was looking at things through the wrong end of the telescope. He was just seeing it through his own personal lens, as it were, of how horrible his own life was compared to those people out there.

But what if he turned it around and saw what he was going toward and what he could be? Ah, that changes things, changes things significantly. And what he understood, which we see from the way he started this Psalm 73, is that what God brought to mind to him was:

Leviticus 19:2 ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.’

That is the end that he wants from us. He wants holiness. He says as he starts his psalm here, truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart; because they are on the same track as God. They are going toward God. They are developing the heart of God, and God will be good to those people. Physical blessings, once he gets this perspective, are gravy, they are not necessary because of the wonderful future the God has in store for us.

Another way we can look at it is that Asaph considered it from God's perspective. We have figured out that he was looking at it from his own human perspective. But God's vision is different than ours. We could go to I Samuel 16:7, which is where God said Samuel to find David and crown him king. Samuel looked at all those brawny, strapping sons of Jesse; this one must be him, no, not him. Oh, this other one must be it. No, that is not him. God finally had to tell him, “I look on the heart. I do not look at these outward appearances, that could be Clarke Gable for all I care. I want the little one with the red hair.” He became the king, the type of Messiah. God saw something in him that Samuel could not see.

Asaph was first letting outward appearances confuse and befuddle his spiritual perceptions of what is right and good. Once he visited the sanctuary and got his mind hooked into what God thought, how God looked on things, it restored his proper perspective. He saw what God wanted of him and he also saw what Israel's trajectory was for the bad guys. He saw where they were headed. He saw that they were headed toward destruction. And he did not want to be a part of that. Was he glad his foot had not slipped? Notice what it says here, when he came to that conclusion.

Psalm 73:18-19 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.

He sees them as totally different than the way he saw them before. He could see with the eyes of God what their future was, and what he saw was that their future was bleak. They were the ones who will slip and fall into terror and desolation.

Psalm 73:19-20 They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, so, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image.

It was like God was suddenly going to say, “Oh, what has been going on here;” as He wakes up out of sleep and He says, “Look at this terrible, sinful land. I’ve got to come in with My army and

devastate with judgment,” He says. He is going to come on them like a minute, like in a second. I should say a minute. That is slow compared to what it should be. When God wakes up, He will demand a reckoning as judge of all.

Psalm 73:21-22 Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.

What does he mean here? He is saying, “I was thinking, not even like a man.” What he is talking about here is that the beast is an animal, does not have the spirit of man, which gives understanding. He was saying, “I was completely thinking without any kind of normal understanding.” He was actually being like a beast that lives by instincts and simply follows his drives for food or safety or right or reproduction or whatever.

He was doing things without really thinking about it. He was just following his emotions and thinking about what he should have and what he has not been given. That is not thinking at all; that is thinking like a beast. This is an analogy to a Christian thinking without the use of God's Holy Spirit, which gives him perception and understanding of spiritual things.

Really, what Asaph is saying is, “I wasn’t applying Your Spirit to my thinking in all of this, I was thinking like a brute man,” without God in his thoughts at all. Once he put God in his thoughts, everything turned around and he saw things clearly. Like Rush Limbaugh says, he was functioning with half of his brain tied behind his back. It is no wonder he could not reach a proper conclusion because he was not thinking like God. We have verse 23, which is a reversal of all that.

Psalm 73:23 Nevertheless I am continually with You; . . .

I have God with me all the time. How is that possible? Because the Spirit is in him. God is in him.

Psalm 73:23 . . . You hold me by my right hand.

That is how close the relationship is. God has grasped his right hand, which is a symbol of him going on and doing the right thing and being on the right path. God is there every step of the way, guiding him through life, even though the world is going to hell, as it were. God is right there, and He is going to walk us right through all the way to the Kingdom of God. Notice what he says.

Psalm 73:24 You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.

How far is this guiding by the right hand going to go? Till your change comes! That “received me to glory” is an image of resurrection and ascension. That is the same thing that was said of Jesus Christ, that He was received into glory after His resurrection when He ascended to God. That was Mark 16:9, it is also said in Acts 3:20-21, the same thing “which heaven must receive.” I Timothy 3:16 speaks of it in terms of us and of Christ and I Peter 5:4 also is of the same image.

Psalm 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.

That is the attitude we have to have.

Psalm 73:26 My flesh and my heart fail [Meaning physically, he is nothing]; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

That is literally God is my rock and my portion forever. What he is saying here is that now he has the right perspective. He understands that God has set him up on Himself. He is on the Rock, it is like he is standing on a pinnacle of Rock and the world, those Israelites that were so sinful throughout this first half here, are all there down below. He has been placed, exalted on this Rock, on Christ, as it were, and he has refuge up there.

Then it says “and my portion forever.” So not only is he on the Rock and being led by that Rock, but he says that God is his portion, or his lot. Our inheritance, our share, our sufficiency, meaning God is everything that we need and what it actually implies is that God will give the complete expression of the relationship between them. All that God guarantees, all that God promises if we stay close to Him, is his in God, that he just sticks with the relationship. He has got it made. He has God. If you have got God, you have everything you need. He is our rock and our portion.

Psalm 73:27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.

It is a done deal. It is going to happen if people desert Him for harlotry, for all the idolatry and such that are in this world, He is going to pay them what they deserve.

Psalm 73:28 But it is good for me to draw near to God [Remember it said there at the beginning, “Truly, God is good to Israel.”]; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works.

This means that this psalm and his life would be a witness to everyone of the way God works with His people. Death is the portion of this world. No matter how a Christian is living now, no matter what his circumstances, it is good for a Christian to strengthen his relationship with God and trust Him.

That is what we need to do, especially what we need to do now with all that has been going on in the world, especially when circumstances are against us. We have to fly to the rock. That is the only protection that we need.

I was going to go into Psalm 148 as a way to close this message. I cannot do that. I am already out of time. It has a similar theme. I just want to leave you with this thought—if you stick with God, you will share everything that He has and He will give it to you.