

Introduction to Book 3 (Psalms 73-89)

586 BCE (400 years after
Psalm 72)

Destruction of the temple
5,000 survivors went into
exile in Babylon

King Zedekiah's sons killed
Theological Dilemma:

How could God abandon his
house, his city, his anointed
king, and his people?

For many today, this is
personal



1

Book 3 (Psalms 73-89)

- Compiled for use in the Babylonian exile (586-516 BC)
- Addresses the question of **theodicy**
 - The problem of evil in the context of divine good
 - Why does God permit evil?
 - The philosophical dilemma stated: *God cannot be both all powerful and all good*
- Relevant to the church today as we live as “exiles, strangers and aliens” in this world (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11)
- Relevant pastorally as we help people deal with their disappointment with God.

2

Psalm 73: When Good Things Happen to Bad People

- Author: Asaph
- Occasion: a crisis of faith
- Genre: Wisdom
- Compare to Psalm 37



3

A Psalm of Asaph.

Proposition

¹ Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.

Dilemma

² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.

³ For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4

Idealized Description of the Wicked

- ⁴ For they have no pangs until death;
their bodies are fat and sleek.
- ⁵ They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.
- ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.
- ⁷ Their eyes swell out through fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.
- ⁸ They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.
- ⁹ They set their mouths against the heavens,
and their tongue struts through the earth.
- ¹⁰ Therefore his people turn back to them,
and find no fault in them.
- ¹¹ And they say, "How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?"
- ¹² Behold, these are the wicked;
always at ease, they increase in riches.

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The Dilemma Repeated

The Turning Point

- ¹³ All in vain have I kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.
- ¹⁴ For all the day long I have been stricken
and rebuked every morning.
- ¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
I would have betrayed the generation of your children.
- ¹⁶ But when I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,
- ¹⁷ until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I discerned their end.

6

The Precarious Position of the Wicked

- ¹⁸ Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.
- ¹⁹ How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!
- ²⁰ Like a dream when one awakes,
O Lord, when you rouse yourself,
you despise them as phantoms.

² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.

7

Confession of Trust

- ²¹ When my soul was embittered,
when I was pricked in heart,
²² I was brutish and ignorant;
I was like a beast toward you.
- ²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.
- ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me to glory.
- ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth
that I desire besides you.
- ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength^[b] of my heart
and my portion forever.

[Psalm 73:26](#) Hebrew rock

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The Central Truth

²⁷For behold, those who are far from you shall perish;
you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.
²⁸But for me it is good to be near God;
I have made the Lord GOD my refuge,
that I may tell of all your works.

9

In this life, the wicked may get good things,
but the faithful get God

“God, being a merciful God, often allows those who reject Him to have a great life in this world. It will be, after all, the best they ever have it. For believers, this world is the worst they will ever have it.”

– Erick Erickson

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Psalm 73 and Theodicy

The psalmist never finds a direct answer to his question, Why?

Instead, God says,

- I’m continually with you
- I will guide you with my counsel
- I hold your right hand
- I will receive you to glory
- I will strengthen your heart
- You will find satisfaction in me

He doesn’t give us answers, He gives us himself

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Psalm 74: When Bad Things Happen to Good People

- Author: Asaph
- Occasion: Destruction of the temple, 586 BCE
- Genre: Communal lament following a national trauma



12

A maskil of Asaph.*Complaint (1)*

¹ O God, why do you cast us off forever?
Why does your anger smoke against
the sheep of your pasture?

Why?*Remember Your People and Your Place (2)*

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.

13

Remember the Babylonian Destruction of the Temple (3-8)

³ Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins;
the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary!
⁴ 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.

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The Complaint Renewed (9-11)

⁹ We do not see our signs;
there is no longer any prophet,
and there is none among us who knows how long. **How long?**
¹⁰ 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? **Why?**
Take it from the fold of your garment and destroy them!

15

God of creation and salvation (12-17)

¹² 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^[d] on the waters. **Chaos**
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. **Order**
¹⁷ You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth;
you have made summer and winter.

Psalm 74:13 Or the great sea creatures

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Tannin/Tanninim (sea monster)

- **Genesis 1:21**
So God created **the great sea creatures** and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.
- **Job 7:12**
[Job:]Am I the sea, or **a sea monster**, that you set a guard over me?
- **Psalms 148:7**
Praise the LORD from the earth, you **great sea creatures** and all deeps
- **Also translated as simply "serpent"**

mythopoeic imagery
(the figurative use of mythological language for polemical purposes).

Leviathan

- **Job 3:8**
[After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth...] "Let those curse it who curse the day, who are ready to rouse up **Leviathan**."
- **Job 41:1-34**
A dragon-like sea creature [armored, fierce, fire-breathing]
- **Psalms 104:26**
"There go the ships, and **Leviathan**, which you formed to play in it."
- **Isaiah 27:1**
"In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish **Leviathan** the fleeing serpent, **Leviathan** the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea."

17

Prayer to Defend and Restore (18-23)

- Psalm 68:13**
13 Even while you sleep among the sheep pens, the wings of my dove are sheathed with silver, its feathers with shining gold."
- 18 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!

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Summary of Psalm 74:

- 1) God's people have suffered a horrible catastrophe
- 2) God is the all-powerful creator, who brings order from chaos
- 3) Petition God to apply his power to do justice and defeat the enemy

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When Bad Things Happen...

- Look to creation
– God makes order and beauty out of chaos
- Look to the cross
– God redeems suffering
- Look to the resurrection
– God has crushed the head of the dragon (Genesis 3:15)

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