

A National Lament: From Exaltation to Exile (and Back Again)

Psalm 73–89

Beep. Beep. Beep. . . . Beep. . . . Beep. . . . Beep. Beep. Beeeeeeeepp

If you've ever been in the hospital room when a loved one dies, this beep is haunting.

It's haunting b/c it indicates the life-giving heart of our loved one has stopped.

To witness this sound is almost beyond words.

We were created to live . . . and when we witness death, in any form, the trauma is not easily forgotten or fixed.

Indeed, the only thing that enables us to even talk about death without losing our minds . . . is the fact that we know the One who died and rose again.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the defining reality of the Christian.

And the resurrected Christ is the One who enables us to stare death in the face and say . . . **Where oh death is your victory! Where oh death is your sting!**

That said . . . until our resurrected Lord returns . . . the beeps, the bombs, and bellicose words of White Supremacists, Islamic Terrorists, political leaders will continue.

This morning our sermon brings us to Book 3 of the Psalms . . .

But if you have paid any attention to the news this week, your mind and heart may still be elsewhere this morning . . .

Indeed, it is tempting to take a whole Sunday to apply the gospel to the ongoing racism we see in our nation.

We must say . . . racism in any form is a satanic attack upon the image of God . . . and that belief in the gospel denies any and every form of racial superiority . . .

Our gospel saves racists and terrorists by empowering them to repent of their idolatrous love of self . . . and giving them a new love for their neighbor.

But such a special statement is not needed this morning . . . because Ps 3 instructs about the abuse of power, God's judgment on sin, and the effects of sin on a nation.

Indeed, this morning as we come to Psalms 73–89, . . .

1. We learn WHAT happens when a nation turns away from God.
2. We learn HOW God speaks to a people who are rejecting his law.
3. We learn WHERE hope and healing comes from in a nation under God's judgment.

To put it more succinctly . . . we need to see three things . . .

1. **Israel's History** . . .
2. **Israel's Heralds** . . .
3. **Israel's Hope**

Israel's History

The first thing we need to see if we are going to understand our text (Pss 73–89) and our world . . . is the way in which God redeemed, blessed, judged, and led the nation of Israel.

Indeed, from its inception Israel was chosen by God to be a light to the nations.

Deuteronomy 4:5–6 reads, “See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶ Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”

So . . . the purpose of separating the nation of Israel was to make them a light unto the nations, a city on a hill . . . whereby the nations would be drawn to them.

In Israel's best moments, like when Solomon reigned in righteous wisdom, this happened.

As Psalm 72 depicts it . . . the nations came to Zion, rendering tribute to the king, offering gifts and service to heir of David.

But . . . Israel's history also shows what happens when God's people refuse to walk in his ways . . .

During the period of the Judges . . . Israel did what was right in their own eyes and the nation rebelled like Sodom and Gomorrah.

For this reason, God gave them a king . . . a Psalm 1 man who would meditate on the law of the Lord and rule God's people as God had instructed.

The two names associated with this kind of rule are David and Solomon. The story of their exaltation is told in **1 Chronicles** and sung in **Psalms 1–72**.

Now I point to Chronicles, instead of Samuel and Kings, because Chronicles was written in the same era as the Psalms.

That is . . . it was written for the same reason the Psalms were compiled . . . they were both written to instruct and encourage the exiles who returned to Jerusalem.

Unfortunately, in our Bibles . . . 1–2 Chronicles comes after 1–2 Kings and most of us when we get there are already behind in our Bible reading . . . so we skip it.

Because after all . . . Chronicles the same thing as 1–2 Kings, right? No, it's not.

In the Hebrew Bible, 1–2 Chronicles is purposefully the last book in the Old Testament. Because it is meant to interpret the whole history of Israel and prepare the way for the coming messiah . . . just like the Psalms.

And this . . . is where we must begin . . .

1 Chronicles follows the history of David, just like Books 1–2 of the Psalms.

1 Chronicles ends with David's prayer for Solomon and David's death; this is the same as Book 2 of the Psalms . . . with David growing old and gray in Psalm 71 and praying for Solomon in Psalm 72.

Now in Book 3 we come to the period after Solomon . . . and from Psalm 73 to 89 we can watch as the sons of David fall and rise and fall again . . . until their crown lies in ruin.

To unpack the comparison . . .

Ps 72 displays the exalted king, which 2 Chron picks up and describes in ch. 1–10.

Ps 89 concludes with the crown of David in the dust, the same way 2 Chron ends.

So you can see how the editor of the Psalms intentionally arranged Book 3 to follow the history of David's Sons.

As we'll see . . . we must know something of the history of Judah to understand Book 3.

We can say this in a number of ways . . .

Psalm 73 and 74 start with the reign of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, and follow the 20 rulers in Judah until we come to Zedekiah, the last son of David to reign in Jerusalem.

To understand Book 3, we must have an awareness of the royal generations after David.

Put another way . . . we should know that this soundtrack covers about 350 years, beginning in 930 BC and concluding in 586 BC.

930 is the start of Rehoboam's reign, when 12 tribes were divided North/South.

In response to Rehoboam's pride . . . Jeroboam led the 10 Northern tribes to separate themselves. And as a result Israel never reunited with Judah.

After Solomon, the nation was divided. And Israel in the North remained in a state of rebellion until Assyria destroyed them in 722 BC.

Judah, on the other hand, had seasons of faithfulness and wickedness; many times they forgot God . . . and other times they repented and God had mercy.

Book 3 of the Psalms is Judah's story . . . and it follows the ups and downs of their kings, the sons of David . . . until their kingdom is destroyed in .

For sake of time . . . we can't look at every king, but with two examples, I want to show you how the Psalms find their historical background in 2 Chronicles 10–36.

(My notes actually have multiple examples, but you'll have to go on line to see them).

First, let's consider **Rehoboam**.

He's the son of Solomon by Naamah an Ammonite. And 2 Chronicles 12:14 says, "He did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the Lord."

Now this is important because in his day, Rehoboam's wickedness invited God's judgment.

For one thing, instead of humbly uniting the nation, he divided it thru his harsh rule. And this, 2 Chronicles 12:15 says, was "a turn of affairs brought about by God."

Thus the division in Israel was in response to Rehoboam's sin. But so was the plundering of the temple that came during his reign.

In fact, long before Babylon marched into Jerusalem in 586, 1 Chronicles 12 recounts the way Egypt plundered the temple because of Rehoboam's sin.

Listen to verses 9–12, which fulfill the words of the prophet Shemaiah in v. 5:

So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. **He took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house. He took away everything.** He also took away the shields of gold that Solomon had made, ¹⁰ and King Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king's house. ¹¹ And as often as the king went into the house of the LORD, the guard came and carried them and brought them back to the guardroom. ¹² And when he humbled himself the wrath of the LORD turned from him, so as not to make a complete destruction. Moreover, conditions were good in Judah.

So . . . this history, we'll see, plays a key part in understanding Psalm 74, where the temple of God is desecrated and deflowered.

But the connection between 2 Chronicles and Ps 74 is not just thematic; it's also lexical.

Meaning that when destruction came to the temple and the people cry out, "Do not destroy." **Verse 12** says, because they humbled themselves, God did not permit a complete destruction.

This would become the pattern in Israel. Judgment would come to the neck of Israel, they would cry out; God would save them.

Importantly, **Psalm 75** . . . is set to the tune of "**Do Not Destroy**" (same word) and it begins with a word of praise for God answering their cries.

Thus, I believe these Asaph Psalms are meant to follow the history of Judah's kings.

(You can see this in the text box on the worksheet we handed out).

Similarly, knowing the history of **Asa** helps us understand Psalm 76.

Look at 2 Chronicles 14. Here, we learn that Asa goes to war against Ethiopia. In his reign, Zerah the Ethiopian came against Israel with 1 million men (v. 9).

v 11 says, **Asa cried out to God . . . v. 12 . . . so the LORD defeated the Ethiopians.**

Asa, unlike Rehoboam, is a righteous king. Accordingly, God blesses Israel b/c of his faithfulness. The result of the battle is described in v. 13: “The men of Judah carried away very much spoil.”

Included in this spoil are animals who become sacrifices. Look at 15:11, “They sacrificed to the LORD on that day from the spoil that they had brought 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep.”

What’s the point of THIS history? Well, listen to what Psalm 76:4–6 says.

⁴ **Glorious are you, more majestic than the mountains full of prey.**

⁵ **The stouthearted were stripped of their spoil; they sank into sleep; all the men of war were unable to use their hands.** ⁶ **At your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both rider and horse lay stunned.**

The connection between Psalm 76 and 1 Chronicles 14 is thematic – both books describe warfare and God bringing salvation to his people when they cry to him.

The connection is also lexical – meaning they both use the word “spoil” to describe a key part of the story.

So, just like Exodus 15 sings a song about the defeat of Egypt and Judges 5 sings a hymn describing the events of Judges 4 . . . so Book 3 gives the lyrical arrangement of Judah’s kings.

So far . . .

We’ve seen two points of connection between Psalms 74–77 and Rehoboam and Asa.

Psalm 78 stands as a historical lens to understand the history of David’s covenant.

And then the history picks up again in Psalms 79–83 and 84–89.

Consider another example, in Ps 83 we have the mention of many nations rising against Judah.

Like the raging nations of Psalm 2, Psalm 83 recounts the hostility of the nations.

Listen to vv. 4–8: They say, “Come, let us wipe them out as a nation; let the name of Israel be remembered no more!”⁵ For they conspire with one accord; against you they make a covenant—⁶ the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagrites, ⁷ Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; ⁸ Asshur also has joined them; they are the strong arm of the children of Lot. *Selah*

In one way . . . we can understand these words w/o knowing all the historical details.

But in another . . . these historical nation-states demand us to ask: **What is Asaph talking about? What are the nations doing? And WHEN are they doing it?**

Remember . . . Asaph was a prophet. 2 Chron 29:30 calls him a “seer” and 1 Chron 25 says he, Jeduthun, and Heman “prophesied with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals”^(v. 1)

So even though Assyria’s invasion came in the 8th C, long after he lived in the 10th C . . . we have reason to believe the Egyptian invasion which occurred in his lifetime may have led him to write a song like this . . . a song that could later be arranged to fit the historical events of the Assyria’s invasion. (Something prophesied back in Num 24, no less).

Indeed . . . Psalm 83’s placement in Book 3, with the mention of Asshur, or Assyria, helps us to see what is happening from **Psalm 79 to 89**.

Earlier . . . Psalm 79 speaks of the temple being destroyed by the nations.

What destruction or desecration is this?

Well . . . 2 Chronicles 24 tells how young King Joash restored the house during his reign, indicating its previous defilement by Jehoram and/or Athaliah . . .

Likewise, Joash himself later turned from the LORD and set up idols in Jerusalem. So . . . **Psalm 79 could be associated with either of these desecrations . . .**

Thus, as it often happens, wickedness does not just come thru invasion, but imitation.

The kings of David’s house did not protect God’s house and God’s people . . . Rather . . . they permitted the ways of the nations to destroy God’s dwelling place by imitation.

So . . . we must read these Psalms with the history of David’s sons in mind . . . and when we do . . . we find they follow the rise and fall of the kings in Jerusalem.

Indeed . . . we could say a lot more about the historical relations between Book 3 and 2 Chronicles . . . but we need to look at the text itself.

And this brings us to . . . **Israel's Heralds**

That is . . . to get the message of Psalms 73–89 . . . we need to ask three questions . . .

1. WHO is speaking . . .
2. WHAT are they saying . . .
3. WHY are they saying it . . .

First, the WHO.

In Psalms 73–89 . . . we find six names in the superscriptions, those titles atop each Psalm:

- **Asaph** is the author of **Pss 73–83**. Again . . . he was a key figure in David's kingdom, a musician appointed by David who functions also as a prophet.
- Then, in Ps 77 **Jeduthun's** name shows up. He too is temple musician, from the tribe of Levi who is a peer of Asaph and Heman (see 2 Chron 29:14).
- After Asaph, we find four Psalms by the **Sons of Korah** (84, 85 . . . 87, 88).

We are familiar with the Sons of Korah because of **Pss 42–49** . . . where these temple singers praise God for the king's covenant marriage and the establishment of Zion.

Indeed, in that context and here . . . the sons of Korah love to sing about the temple.

But something is different this time . . . instead of singing youthful songs of a new royal covenant . . . NOW the Sons of Korah's sing about the last stand of David's house.

Indeed . . . as the Davidic covenant is under threat, the # of Korahite songs go down and the # of Asaph's songs go up. **Why?**

→ **happy to be proven wrong**

Here's my interpretation . . . whereas in Book 2, there is one Asaph Psalm calling Israel to repentance (50). Now as David's sons' sins increase, so do Asaph's songs.

Just as God sent prophets to Israel to call them back to covenant faithfulness . . . now Asaph, as a prophet in his own right, speaks to Judah.

Whereas Book 2 celebrated God's covenant with David thru 7 songs of Korah . . . now there only 4 songs . . . and the last one (88) is the darkest song in the Psalter.

This reading of the end of David's covenant also explains . . . the placement of Heman and Ethan's songs at the end of Book 3.

Both are temple musicians. And when the temple is destroyed the only response is abject sorrow and doubt about God's promise to David . . . the very question raised in **Psalm 89. Look at verse 49** . . .

So . . . in Psalms 73–89 . . .

We find a singular explanation of why God abandoned David's sons – **it was their sin!**

In the voices of 5 Levitical musicians . . . we hear a remnant crying to God on behalf of a sinful people and through their voices . . . we hear God's covenant word to his people.

Now . . . the priestly nature of Book 3 is easily lost on us . . . B/C we don't operate with Levitical priests, we may not even know every psalm in Book 3 comes from a priest.

But to the nation of Israel . . . these priestly were as famous as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King Jr are to us.

Therefore, the priestly nature of Book 3 gives us a feel feeling of intercession for the kings and the kingdom of Israel . . . which leads us to one other name.

In **Ps 86** we find the name **David** . . . which should lead you to ask: **What is he doing here?**

If we take Psalm 72:20 literally . . . we should not expect to see David's name again. It says "The prayers of David are ended" . . . and yet here he is . . .

What's going on? Is this accidental? . . . No, not at all.

Just as Jeremiah and Ezekiel began to speak of a new David in their prophesies . . .

. . . so this Psalm is the first indication that the Psalms are moving to a new David.

This will be developed more in Books 4 and 5 . . . but for now,

. . . the mention of David . . . surrounded by Psalms oriented towards the temple . . . tells me . . . that a final moment of David-like revival has come to Judah

And I believe this return to David is best grounded in the life of Hezekiah.

2 Chronicles speaks of Hezekiah as doing "what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done." (29:2) . . . And again 30:26 says . . . there had been nothing like Hezekiah's reign since time of Solomon, . . .

Under Hezekiah, the priesthood, temple, and Passover were all restored.

These historical reformations explain to a great extent the joy of Psalm 84–87.

And . . . they explain why after Hezekiah's and Josiah's reforms end . . . the sons of David returned to their wicked ways . . . and hence the darkness of Psalms 88 & 89. . .

So . . . these songs of Asaph and Korah . . . stand as heralds of righteousness during the generations between Solomon and the destruction of his temple.

And we can learn a number of things from . . . **Let me list three:**

1. God's people need the Word of God to be proclaimed to them . . . we never drift towards faith and love and holiness . . . and thus we need faithful preachers and faithful friends to speak God's truth to us . . .
2. God's grace is seen . . . in the sending of faithful ministers of the Word.

God's grace does not come in like a gas . . . it's communicated thru teaching. And these heralds exemplify that teaching . . . as they call people to repentance/ faith

3. Faithful teaching isn't enough . . . This is problem in Book 3.

If you notice . . . faith, hope, and trust are nearly absent in this book . . . And thus . . .

. . . we see a biblical principle . . . the Word of God is not enough . . . faith never comes by the Word alone . . . it must come with Spirit that gives life.

This is what marks the difference between the OC and the NC.

And this is why any faithful teaching of the Psalms must move from the OC to the New Covenant work of Christ.

Our ultimate hope is never found in getting abstract truths about God.

Our ultimate hope is found in Christ . . . the son of David to whom the Psalms bear witness.

So . . . to catch the Psalms message . . . let's hear from Book 3 itself.

When you enter Book 3 . . . you know two things.

1. The Psalms of David are ended – **72:20**
2. The Glory of David's throne has never been higher.

As we've said, Psalm 72 is the high point in the Psalms.

But as soon as we enter Book 3 . . . we are immediately struck with covenantal vertigo.

The world defined and declared by God is not as it should be.

Psalm 1 says that the righteous man will prosper, and the wicked will perish.

But Psalm 73 says the reverse. The wicked have peace and the righteous feels like an outsider in his land . . . UNTIL (v. 14 says) he enters the temple.

And in the presence of God . . . he is reminded of the wicked's destiny.

But importantly, the wicked here are not the gentiles . . . but the nation of Israel.

Israel has broken covenant with God . . . and thus Israel's blessed state is in jeopardy.

In fact, **Psalm 74** begins to tell the tale of God's judgment upon Israel for their sin.

Of course, . . . this judgment is not immediate, nor simple to understand.

In Israel's history, God is amazingly long-suffering . . . constantly extending grace to sinful Israel.

Nevertheless . . . by the time we get to Ps 89 . . . we see the reason why God's covenant with David is barren . . . **the sins of his sons have ruined it!**

Psalm 89:1–37 describe the blessings God promised David in his covenant.

But in that summary . . . **Psalm 89:30–33** state how the sins of David's sons will erase those blessings and invite God's righteous wrath.

Then verses 38–45 list God's judgments on David's house . . . **READ**

This judgment makes clear . . . after nearly 400 years, David's house has sinned so much, God must put an end to it . . . an end that will not be resolved until the NT.

So that is the big picture of Book 3 . . .

It is the history of David's house, from its exaltation in Solomon to exile in Babylon.

On the handout . . . we have put together a few graphs to help explain the storyline. But the slide from **Psalm 72 to Psalm 89** . . . is the most important thing to see.

And really . . . this slide is the continuation of Israel's history with God.

In the middle of Asaph's 11 Psalms stands **Psalm 78**.

Its length makes it stand out and so does its content.

Most of Asaph's Psalms are communal laments. But this psalm is an historical summary that is intended to give wisdom.

And the wisdom it gives . . . explains why Israel continued to experience the judgment of God under David's sons.

If you read Psalm 78 a couple times . . . a pattern soon emerges.

When Israel Forgets God . . . God responds in wrath and permits his people to experience the curses written out in his Law.

In a short time . . . under the vice grip of God's discipline . . . his people cry out to him . . . and in his mercy . . . he heals, delivers, and saves.

Yet in a very short time . . . they sin again and the pattern starts over.

In Psalm 78 . . . Asaph traces this pattern from the Exodus to the establishment of David's throne . . .

Accordingly . . . it would make sense that this pattern might halt now that a righteous king was anointed to shepherd Israel . . .

But of course . . . the history of David's household proves otherwise.

And Psalm 73–89 tell the rest of Psalm 78's sad story.

Tho' a few righteous kings sat on the throne . . . none of them were able to secure the promises given to David. All of them die . . . and most of them fail in some way.

Hence . . . Book 3's message is that you will not find your hope by looking back to them.

This is a word we all need to hear . . . To any one tempted to believe we must get back to the good ole days . . . Book 3 roundly rebukes you.

Whether it is white supremacists who look longingly at the white rule of antebellum plantations.

Or Whether it's a Muslim extremist who imagines the Islamic State spreading over the earth

Or Maybe it's an American Christian whose idolatrous pursuit of a Christian heritage lead them to despise the foreigner and the call to make disciples of all nations.

To all of us who look longingly on the past . . . Bk 3 rebukes us . . . It tells us there is no human king, no religious right, no man-made state . . . that can overcome the gravity of our sin.

Even in Hezekiah's day . . . when the priesthood, the temple, and the Passover returned . . .

They had no power to deal with the sin that separated Israel from God.

And this is why the message of Book 3 . . .

. . . was to keep going and looking for a salvation from God himself.

Friends . . . the best human shepherds will fail you . . . David and Moses are 2 examples.

the best human schemes will not bring you salvation . . . look at the shortest of Israel's reforms.

Hope and life and salvation only come . . .

as we look beyond these earthly vessels to the throne of God

and there we see the Son of God . . . seated at God's right hand

. . . Ready and willing to assist us in our hour of need.

Honestly . . . Book 3 is meant to be a rest area on the road to Christ.

When you stop at a rest area . . . you don't stay there. Only weirdos stay at rest areas.

A rest area may have the nicest bathrooms . . . the greatest vending machines . . .

But it's a rest area . . . **This is what Israel's history is ... it's a glorious rest area often overrun by corrupt maintenance men.**

Book 3 give us ample warnings about holding fast to sin and to the schemes of this world.

To those who fail to trust, hope, take refuge in God . . . you will experience devastation

But to those who have experienced the devastation that sin brings . . .

Those who know the pain of the hospital beep . . .

and who grieve over the wickedness of our world . . .

and who above all lament the wickedness in your own heart . . .

Psalms 73–89 . . . have a message of hope . . . that leads to God himself, the only one who can occupy David's throne and secure blessing, forgiveness, and salvation.

And that's what Book 4–5 is all about . . . and why Book 3 teaches us to hold lightly to this world . . . and cling desperately the king who is ushering in the next.