

Lessons from Asaph

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Let me ask you a question. The local folks know the answer already because we send out announcements as to what the subject is, but those of you who are listening or who will watch the DVD later, you don't know yet. I'm going to ask a question. "Who am I?" Who is this biblical personality?

I lived 3,000 years ago. I wrote more of the Bible than Peter, James, Jude, Obadiah, Jonah, Joel, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, or Malachi—wrote more of the Bible than all of those. I was a priest. I was prophet. I lived in Jerusalem. I worked in the temple. I played the cymbals. And over 500 years after my death when people recall the "Golden Years" of Israel they mention King David and me in the same breath. Who am I?

Let's go to Nehemiah 12:46 and see who we're talking about. This is talking about the days of David. Now notice this.

Nehemiah 12:46. *For in the days of David and Asaph of old ... (KJV)*

In the King James, the words "there were" are in italics. They are not there in the original. So, if we remove those words, we read the scripture this way:

46) For in the days of David and Asaph of old, chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God. (KJV)

He was chief of all of that and he is mentioned in the same breath as David—David and Asaph, chief of the singers, chief of the songs of praise, chief of thanksgiving to God through music.

We don't often think about Asaph and I can't remember hearing a sermon ever about Asaph, but he's an important figure in the Bible. He's credited with writing twelve psalms. And he saw the rise of Israel under David and Solomon. It appears also, as we will see, that he also saw the decline of Israel. He probably saw as it was torn apart into two nations, the Northern Ten Tribes and then Judah and Benjamin in the south. Yet, despite watching all of this, experiencing all of this, he remained faithful. Asaph remained faithful.

It also appears that he possibly saw the curse of disobedience when the nation that he loved was attacked, the temple was looted—the very temple that he served in every day. He saw that with his own eye. In his life, he witnessed the highest of the highs, the lowest of lows. As we're going to see, he experienced joy and fear and he wrote about them. God caused those writings to be preserved for us today. We have to

remember God does nothing by accident. There is a purpose for God causing the writings of Asaph to be recorded.

What we're going to do in the sermon today is we're going to look at two things, two big points. We're going to ask and answer the question "Who was Asaph?" We're going to learn about him. And then the second is what lessons we can learn from his life. So the title of the sermon is:

Lessons from Asaph

1) Who was Asaph?

We have to begin with the historical context. David was made king over Israel. He establishes his capital at Jerusalem. He brings the ark from Beth Shemesh up to Jerusalem. Remember the ark had been in Beth Shemesh for over twenty years when the Philistines returned it after God cursed them for keeping it in their land when it was lost in battle. David places it in the tabernacle. The temple had not yet been built. It is one of the most joyous occasions in the history of Israel. Remember David was dancing in the streets. So with that in mind, let's go to 1 Chronicles 16 and we will begin in verse 1. We're going to define and learn about who Asaph was. They're bringing the ark to Jerusalem, a wonderful joyous occasion!

1 Chronicles 16:1. *So they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it: and they offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings before God.*

2) *And when David had made an end of offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the [Eternal].*

3) *And he dealt to every one of Israel, both man and woman, to everyone a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine.*

4) *And he appointed certain of the Levites to [1] minister before the ark of the [Eternal], and [2] to record [what had happened], and to thank and praise the [Eternal] God of Israel [as we're going to see with music]:*

5) *Asaph the chief, ... (KJV)*

The Hebrew word for "chief" means *the head*.

5) *Asaph the chief [or the head], and next to him ... (KJV)*

The Hebrew word for "next" means *second in order or second in rank*. Then it lists nine men which it says performed music with:

5) *... psalteries and with harps; but Asaph made a sound with cymbals; (KJV)*

We see here that Asaph is the director of music, the chief and the head of all music but that he also played the cymbals.

7) Then on that day David delivered first this psalm to thank the [Eternal] into the hand of Asaph and [all those associated with Asaph.] (KJV)

It appears that David wrote a psalm for the dedication of the ark and he delivered it to Asaph to be set to music and to be performed by all the musicians and singers.

I grew up in a house that was not musically inclined. We didn't have any musical instruments. My parents weren't involved in music all that much and those of us with that background tend to maybe minimize music in some ways whereas opposed to somebody who grew up in a musical family, but it's easy for us to overlook the effect of music and the value of music in worshipping God. And we see here that David made sure that music was not neglected and he made sure to the point that he would write psalms and then Asaph would set it to music. So, by studying the life of Asaph, we're going to see how important music is to God.

Let's fast forward forty years to 1 Chronicles 23:1. We're moving ahead forty years. David is about ready to die and he is giving his son, Solomon, instruction on what he wants to happen. Remember David was not allowed to build the temple. Solomon now is tasked with doing just that.

1 Chronicles 23:1. So when David was old and full of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel.

2) And he gathered together all the princes of Israel, with the priests and the Levites. (KJV)

3) Now the Levites were numbered from the age of thirty years and upward: and their number by their polls, man by man, was thirty-eight thousand [Levites]. (KJV)

Notice this.

4) Of which, twenty-four thousand were to set forward the work of the house of the Lord; ... (KJV)

To work around the temple, to keep it up, to make sure it was clean, and to do all of the duties of the sacrifices and the offerings.

4) [Then] twenty-four thousand were to set forward the work of the house of the Eternal]; and six thousand were officers and judges:

5) Moreover four thousand were porters; ... (KJV)

Notice this last part.

5b) ... and four thousand praised the Lord with the instruments which I made, said David, to praise therewith. (KJV)

So of the 38,000 Levites, 4,000 were dedicated to serving God through music. That's over ten percent. And it speaks as to how important music is to God. Overseeing these 4,000 was a huge job and that was Asaph's job. I doubt any of us have directly supervised 4,000 people. So it was a big job; it was an important job.

So, when we see some of David's psalms with a superscript above the psalm as in most versions of the Bible, many times it says "Given to Asaph the chief musician." We can see that his job entailed much more than standing up in front of a chorale waving his arms. His job was much bigger than that—composing music, performing that music to praise God. And we're going to see a whole lot more.

Now let's look at something interesting in two chapters down the road in 1 Chronicles 25; we'll start in verse 1.

1 Chronicles 25:1. *Moreover David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy ... (KJV)*

That's interesting.

1b) ... prophesy with harps, [prophesy] with psalteries, and [prophesy] with cymbals: and the number of the workmen according to their service was: (KJV)

Then in verse 2, we see the sons of Asaph; there were four that were listed. Going on in that verse:

2b) ... under the hands of Asaph, which prophesied according to the order of the king. (KJV)

David ordered them to prophesy with their voices and with musical instruments. Now the Hebrew word for "prophesied" is Strong's 5012. In English it is spelled *naba'*; and it's pronounced naw-baw'. It means *to prophesy; that is to speak (or sing) by inspiration*. So we see here that David ordered these Levites under Asaph to sing and they were inspired by God. They prophesied in that regard.

Hold your finger or put a marker here in 1 Chronicles 25. We're going to see something along the lines of psalms put to music being prophecy. Let's go to 2 Chronicles 29. We're fast-forwarding again 350 years. Hezekiah is now the King of Judah. He is restoring the temple worship and part of that restoration was restoring music. Verse 30:

2 Chronicles 29:30. *Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the [Eternal] with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer.... (KJV)*

So they were singing words that were composed and written by not only David but Asaph. And we see here that Asaph is called a "seer".

30b) ... And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped. (KJV)

Now, what is a seer? The Hebrew word for “seer” is Strong’s 2374 and it’s spelled “chozeh” in English and pronounced “kho-zeh’.” It means *a beholder in vision*. We’re learning a lot more about Asaph. Not only was he director of music, but he had visions from God Almighty. The Baker and Carpenter Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament says the following:

The functions of a seer as indicated by this term included, besides receiving and reporting the word of the [Eternal], writing about David’s reign...; receiving and writing down visions....

Receiving a vision and then recording the vision; we’re told here that that is one of the things that Asaph did. This goes far beyond what we normally think of as a music director or even a prophet. So not only was he called a prophet, he was called a seer and this implies direct communication with God. We need to keep that in mind when we read the psalms of Asaph because he had visions and God talked to him through visions. Therefore, the music written and performed by Asaph, as I said, wasn’t just about somebody up front waving his arms. He was called a prophet. He was called a seer. And it was a very, very important job to God. So important to David that Asaph reported directly to David. He wasn’t part of some staff, a guy way down the rank. He reported directly to David.

So with that in mind, let’s go back now to 1 Chronicles 25. We read verse 1; now let’s read verse 2 again.

1 Chronicles 25:2. Of the sons of Asaph; ... (KJV)

There are four listed and this clearly indicates that it was a family involvement. His sons were involved under Asaph’s supervision.

2b) ... the sons of Asaph under the hands of Asaph, which prophesied according to the order of the king. (KJV)

Verse 6:

6) All these were under the hands of their father for song in the house of the [Eternal], with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king's order to Asaph, [to] Jeduthun, and [to] Heman. (KJV)

So Asaph was in charge really of all of the musical worship services to God during David’s reign and we’re also going to see under Solomon’s reign.

With that in mind, let's turn to 2 Chronicles 5. This is the dedication of the temple and notice who is involved. Notice what happened and notice how music is involved. We're going to read verses 11 through 14 about dedicating the temple.

2 Chronicles 5:11. *And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place: (for all the priests that were present were sanctified, and did not then wait by course: (KJV)*

We know that there were courses for the priests so that they could divide up the work, but, obviously, at the dedication of the temple, all 38,000 were there.

12) Also the Levites which were the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, being arrayed in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets:) (KJV)

I've never heard 120 trumpets blow at once, but obviously these were expert musicians. Then you have the 4,000 Levites dedicated to music. I've never heard a 4,000 member chorale with 120 trumpets. It must have been absolutely awesome, astonishing!

13) It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one [4,000 of them], to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the [Eternal]; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the [Eternal], saying, For he is good; for his mercy [endures] for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the [Eternal];

14) So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the [Eternal] had filled the house of God. (KJV)

So, we see here that Asaph apparently had the same job under Solomon as he did under David. And he personally saw this cloud descend into the temple at this momentous occasion.

We don't know how long Asaph lived. The Bible does not record his death. There is a possibility that he even outlived Solomon; a possibility that he lived into the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon's son. Here is evidence of that fact—we don't know for sure—but several of Asaph's psalms speak of war and fear and impending doom. Yet, none of that happened during David's life and his reign and none of it happened during Solomon's reign either.

With that in mind, let's go to 1 Kings 14 and verse 25. We're breaking into the context here, but this is the fifth year of the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon's son. Now remember the kingdom was divided when the people came to Rehoboam and asked him to lighten the load. He refused and there was a split between the tribes of Israel.

1 Kings 14:25. *It happened in the fifth year of King Rehoboam that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem.*

26) And 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 all the gold shields which Solomon had made. (NKJV)

This happened during Rehoboam's reign, the first five years. This seems to align very closely with a psalm that Asaph wrote. Let's go to Psalm 74 and we'll just look at verse 4. The superscription above this psalm says "A Contemplation of Asaph." Was he contemplating what we just read that happened during Rehoboam's reign?

Psalm 74:4. *Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place; ... (NKJV)*

The Revised Standard says, "in the midst of the holy place."

4b) ... they set up their banners for signs. (NKJV)

Verse 7:

7) They have set fire to Your sanctuary; they have defiled the dwelling place of Your name to the ground. (NKJV)

Is this what Psalm 74 is referring to—Shishak's invasion and his desecration of the temple? There is one problem with this theory. That is, history records Shishak's invasion at 925 BC. If that date is correct that would put Asaph's age at roughly 105 years old. It is possible, but not probable. So, we don't know. If he didn't live to see this with his own eyes, then what is Psalm 74 referring to? The other possibility is that he wrote this after receiving a vision from God as seer. This vision could have been what the Babylonians would do to Jerusalem some 400 years later when Judah was conquered and the temple was burned. He could have been referring to that. Someday we will find out.

So, it is possible that Asaph lived through the reign of David and Solomon and early into the reign of Rehoboam. Either way he died a very old man. It is possible that he saw the destruction that Shishak brought to pass on the temple or sometime during the reign of Solomon he had a vision, a prophecy and a vision, of what would happen down the road hundreds of years later to Judah. We just don't know. Someday we'll find out.

Now that we've learned who Asaph was, we need to remember that God does everything for a reason. So, we have to ask the question: What was God's purpose in recording these twelve psalms from Asaph? There is a reason for that and what can we learn from these inspired words that came directly from God to Asaph the seer? So I picked four lessons and you could probably pick many more, but we're going to look at four lessons to learn from Psalms 50 and then 73 through 83 which are the psalms of Asaph. We're going to see that Asaph talks about things that directly affected him. We

saw that he had seen the highs and the lows; he had joy and he had fear. So, the lessons that Asaph learned are applicable to us today.

We're going to discuss the lessons that we can learn from the life of Asaph. We're going to have four, A through D.

2.A. Asaph learned why God allows evil people to prosper and, conversely, why He allows God's people to suffer sometimes.

People have asked that today. We see so much suffering and the question can come from people, "Why does God allow this? Why does He allow the evil people, these wealthy mega-millionaires to have all this money and prosper?"

I just recently read an article. Do you know who the richest man in the world is today? It's not Bill Gates. It's Putin. Putin has confiscated so much money from the oligarchs in Russia. In some areas he has a 50 percent tax that goes not to the Russian government but to him. And you see people like that, evil people that just prosper.

Asaph experienced this too. He experienced it so deeply to the point that he almost felt a relationship with God wasn't worth it; that there was no physical benefit to have a relationship with God and to repent and live righteously because he was looking at the evil and the prosperity of the evil.

Let's go the Psalm 73. It is a psalm of Asaph; I'll read it out of the New King James. Notice where he's coming from, notice his attitude. And, if we're honest with ourselves, we probably all have had this attitude at one point or another in our lives after coming into the church. Notice what he says.

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

2) But as for me [Asaph], my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped.

3) For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4) For there are no pangs in their death, ... (NKJV)

They have an easy death. They don't suffer and struggle.

4b) ... but their strength is firm.

5) They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. (NKJV)

Verse 7:

7) Their eyes bulge with abundance; ... (NKJV)

This implies that they have so much food to eat they're just obese because their eyes are bulging out.

7b) ... They have more than a heart could wish. (NKJV)

And, of course, we've seen this and, like I said, all of us maybe have felt this at one time or another. Verse 13, notice his attitude now.

13) Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, ... (NKJV)

The New King James margin says, "Surely I have kept my heart pure in vain." He's saying, "What's the use? Why is it worth it?"

13) Surely ... in vain [I] washed my hands in innocence. (NKJV)

It almost sounds like he's saying, "It's a waste of time to follow God because there are no blessings. There's no benefit." Verse 16:

16) When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me — (NKJV)

So, the question is: What is Asaph referring to? In his past experience, what has brought this to the mind where the point is he says it's almost a vain thing to worship God and to cleanse your heart. Place a marker here. We're going to come back to Psalm 73. But what could he be referring to?

Asaph saw the fall of Solomon. Remember when David died—yes, it was a sorrowful event—but when Solomon his son was made king, and then the temple was built, Solomon was blessed. There were great hopes, great expectations, great joy in Israel. They were at the peak of their power. No nation could stand up to them. Then notice this, 1 Kings 11:1. I'll read it out of the New King James.

1 Kings 11:1. *But King Solomon loved many foreign women, ... (NKJV)*

Asaph saw this.

1b) ... as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: [the] women of the Moabites, [the] Ammonites, [the] Edomites, [the] Sidonians, and [the] Hittites — (NKJV)

All of these nations that God said to stay away from. Solomon loved their women of all of them.

2) from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you.... (NKJV)

Why? It's not because of race.

2b) ... Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. (NKJV)

And Asaph saw it firsthand because he was right there with Solomon as he was with David. Verse 5:

5) For Solomon went after ... (NKJV)

Not only did he have relations with these foreign women but he:

5b) ... went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

6) Solomon did evil in the sight of the [Eternal], and did not fully follow the [Eternal], as did his father David. (NKJV)

That must have been horribly disappointing. It would be analogous to us with our Worldwide Church experience when the Tkachs did not follow in the footsteps of Mr. Armstrong. We saw that. Now Asaph was right there at the top and he was watching this. Verse 9:

9) So the Lord became [very] angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, (NKJV)

God had spoken directly with him twice and, yet, look what he's doing.

10) and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the [Eternal] had commanded. (NKJV)

Asaph saw Solomon's disobedience. He saw the evil that Solomon perpetrated. He saw the corruption that was involved, the partying, that Solomon admitted to that he did—all of that at the very highest levels. And, indeed, the wicked appeared to prosper. All of this Solomon was doing and those under him were doing, they appeared to prosper.

Then Asaph saw the wrong priorities of Solomon. We won't turn there but you can find this account at the end of 1 Kings 6 and the beginning of 1 Kings 7. We're told that Solomon took seven years to build the temple of God. He took thirteen years to build his own house, his own palace. That speaks to his wrong priorities, his reversed priorities.

Also Asaph saw Solomon's lack of concern for the average Israelite. We see that today in government. They speak lofty things, but they have very little concern for the average American. That happened in Solomon's day. Let's go to 1 Kings chapter 12; we'll just read verse 4, one verse, out of the New King James. Remember I said earlier that this is when Rehoboam, Solomon's son, became king. The people came to him because they were complaining about the rule of his father Solomon. This is that account. The people are speaking to Rehoboam after Solomon's death.

1 Kings 12:4. *"Your father [referring to Solomon] made our yoke heavy [through taxes, through forced labor into all of his work projects, forced labor into the military]; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you." (NKJV)*

So, life was a bed of roses for those at the top but it was pain and suffering for those average Israelites, which is true for most people in the world today. And Asaph saw this. Why don't you take care of the people? Why don't you spend some of this money—instead of glorifying yourself—on the people? So the people asked Rehoboam to change that policy. He said, "If you think my dad was tough, wait until you see me." That caused the breakup of the kingdom.

As a result of all of this, Asaph was confused. He was frustrated. Why did God allow Solomon to do all this evil? I heard that comment at the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God. I even heard some people say, "Well, where is God? Why doesn't He stop this? How can this be God's church?" They had a very similar reaction. "Why is evil flourishing?" Asaph thought. "Why were the godly being persecuted? What is the point of cleansing my heart?" And he felt this way until one event.

Now we go back to Psalm 73. We'll pick up the story in verse 17. He thought, "I cleansed my heart in vain."

Psalm 73:17. *Until I went into the sanctuary of God; ... (NKJV)*

In other words, until he sought God.

17b) ... Then I understood their end. (NKJV)

That is, the end of these evil people who were prospering. What he's saying is: "I went into the temple of God and I got God's perspective." Remember Asaph was a seer. Remember God talked to him and he had visions. Asaph remembered that this physical life is just like a vapor. We're here only for a moment—a snap of a finger—compared to God's eternity. And this physical life should not be our focus. He understood that finally.

We know that Christ is the God of the Old Testament and we know Christ will return and will bring justice. Justice will follow. And Asaph learned that too.

Now place a marker here again, and let's go to Psalm 50 and verse 1. This is another psalm of Asaph. Christ will return; justice will follow. Asaph understood that because God told him.

Psalm 50:1. *The mighty God, ... (KJV)*

He's getting perspective.

1b) ... even the [Eternal, has] spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.

2) Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God [has] shined. (KJV)

Verse 3, look at this.

3) Our God shall come, ... (KJV)

This is Christ, the God of the Old Testament.

3b) ... and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. (KJV)

This is a prophecy of Christ's second coming. Those who practice evil, yes, they may prosper for a moment, but when Christ returns everything is going to be sorted out. Justice will occur and that justice will last forever.

Now let's go back to Psalm 73 and let's pick up the narrative here in verse 21.

Psalm 73:21. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. (KJV)

Because, now, he's upset with himself for having thought "I've cleansed my heart in vain."

21) Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.

22) So foolish was I, and [so] ignorant: I was as a beast before [you]. (KJV)

He was ashamed he could have been so shortsighted—this man who had visions, this man who had communication with God. He said, "I'm ashamed of what I said (in verse 13), 'I cleansed my heart in vain.' I'm ashamed I even got to that point." Verse 23:

23) Nevertheless I am continually with [You: You have held] me by my right hand. (KJV)

Through all the ups and downs of David and Solomon and possibly Rehoboam.

24) [You shall] guide me with [Your] counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.

"Receive me to glory." That means the resurrection. That means God's Kingdom.

25) Whom have I in heaven but [You]? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside [you]. (KJV)

That's where we should all come in this life, too—to the point that we desire nothing else but God. We desire nothing else but God's Kingdom because we know our focus should not be on this physical life. And Asaph learned that lesson.

26) My flesh and my heart [fails]: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.

Forever! We can have our human failings but if our focus is on God, as Asaph said, "God is my strength." God will take care of us. God will make up for our lack of physical strength. God will help us in times of trouble. Asaph's fixation on the wicked prospering went away when he had the perspective of eternity. It went away when he had the perspective of God's plan of salvation.

Now, if anyone had access to David's psalms, it was Asaph. Roughly half of David's psalms on the superscripts it says that they were delivered to the chief musician. So, if anybody knew the psalms of David backward and forward, it would be Asaph. And, as we saw, David and Asaph were close. It makes you wonder if Asaph when he was struggling with this issue, when he was all in a turmoil about the wicked prospering, it makes you wonder if he read David's psalm, Psalm 37. Let's go there. I'll read it out of the New King James and David wrote this psalm toward the end of his life. You wonder if this was a help to Asaph as he was struggling because it addresses the same topic: Why do the wicked prosper? Let's begin in verse 25. We're going to jump around a little bit in this psalm. David says:

Psalm 37:25. *I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. (NKJV)*

He's saying, "What I've seen is God ultimately takes care of His people, those who are righteous." Verse 12:

12) The wicked plots against the just, ... (NKJV)

We see that today. Asaph saw it then.

*12) The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth.
13 The Lord laughs at him, ... (NKJV)*

Those who persecute God's people.

13b) ... for He sees that his day is coming. (NKJV)

There will be vengeance. There will be restitution. Verse 22:

22) For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth, but those cursed by Him shall be cut off. (NKJV)

There is a day of reckoning coming. Verse 28

28) *For the Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off.*
29) *The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell in it forever. (NKJV)*

You wonder if Asaph read this psalm when he was struggling. We don't know if he realized it on his own or realized it when he was reading David's psalms or God appeared to him and put the answer in his head. The fact is that Asaph finally understood. The key to the question of "Why do the wicked sometimes prosper?" is because God doesn't view this physical life as we do. This physical life can be everything to us if our perspective is not right. But this physical life to God is just less than a nanosecond of eternity if you put it in those terms. God is showing us Asaph learned that this physical life should not be our focus. It is only a speck in time. God is concerned with eternity and ultimately God will provide justice. It will be done and that justice will last forever. Asaph finally learned this seeing the ups and downs over two kings and possibly a third. That's the first lesson we can learn and Asaph learned.

2.B. Asaph learned that a lack of faith can limit what God can do in each one of us.

A lack of faith, our lack of faith, can limit what God can do in each one of us. We've talked about this from a different aspect, but we're going to briefly talk about this in regard to Asaph and Asaph's life and how it applies to us today.

We ask the question: "Can anything limit God?" The people that say, "God's all powerful. He can do anything He wants. No, God has no limits." No, that is not true. That is simply not true. The answer is yes, something can limit God. Do you know what that something is? It's us. We can limit God because He allows us free moral agency. He allows us to choose whether we will follow Him or not, just as He allowed Adam and Eve to choose whether they would follow Him or not.

Let's turn to Psalm 78. Again, this is a "Contemplation of Asaph." We see here that Asaph is recounting the miracles that God performed for Israel when they came out of Israel and he lists at least five miracles. We're talking about lack of faith limiting what God can do us. Let's pick it up in verse 12.

Psalm 78:12. *Marvelous things did He did in the sight of their fathers [Christ, the God of the Old Testament], in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. (KJV)*

Verse 13, here's the first one.

13) He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as a heap. (KJV)

Verse 14, the second one:

14) In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire. (KJV)

Verse 15, the third one:

15) He clave the rocks [split the rocks] in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. (KJV)

Verse 24, the fourth one:

24) And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven.

25) Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full. (KJV)

Verse 27, the last one:

27) He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea: (KJV)

Now we know God performed many other miracles. These are just five. But the Israelites saw a miracle of every second of every day from God—every second of every day—because either the cloud was there or the fire was there. And every morning when they woke up, there was another miracle from God six days a week and, on the sixth day they had a double portion. So, they saw miracle after miracle after miracle. And it's easy for us today to think, "If I was an Israelite back then, I would have believed. I would have had faith. The miracles would have been enough." As we know, they weren't enough. No amount of miracles would have been enough because guess what? Verse 32:

32) For all this [all these miracles] they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works.

33) Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble. (KJV)

Despite a miracle a day or more, they still sinned. And we know that they didn't have the heart. Verse 41 out of the New King James.

41) Yes, again and again they tempted [tested] God, and [Notice!] limited the Holy One of Israel. (NKJV)

How did they do that? Verse 42 gives us an answer.

42) They did not remember His power: the day when He redeemed them from the enemy, (NKJV)

They forgot the power of God. They didn't remember, and because of the fact that they didn't remember, it limited what God could do with them. As we all know, they perished in the wilderness.

God wanted to give Israel everything! He wanted to fight their battles for them; He wanted to build their cities; He wanted to bless their crops—if they would only believe and if they would only obey, if they would just do that. And they didn't.

Let's turn to Hebrews chapter 3 because Paul writes about this very thing. Earlier in Hebrews 3—for the sake of time, we won't cover it—he recounts Israel's lack of faith. We're going to pick up the narrative here in verse 12 out of the New King James. And he applies it to the people in his day, but it also applies to us today.

Hebrews 3:12. *Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [just like the Ancient Israelites] in departing from the living God; 13) but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (NKJV)*

There is warning there. Paul links the deceitfulness of sin to unbelief, to not remembering the power of God. Now deceitfulness and unbelief lead to what? An evil heart. And God will not work with an evil heart. God can't work with an evil heart. We're being told here, "Don't be deceived by this. Don't allow unbelief and the deceitfulness of sin to end up in your life where you have an evil heart."

Let's jump over to Ephesians 2:8, a very familiar scripture quoted by people all over the globe, Ephesians 2:8. Notice this in relation to the fact that a lack of faith can limit what God can do in us.

Ephesians 2:8. *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is [a] gift of God, (NKJV)*

Grace is a gift—no question. But we see here that if there is no faith, there is no grace. We must have faith and that even is not of ourselves because it is the faith of Jesus Christ. That's a totally different subject but we have to be yielded to God and if we do and we obey, we will be granted the faith of Jesus Christ. Grace is a gift, but if there is no faith, there is no grace. If there is no grace, there is no salvation. Like with Ancient Israel, a lack of faith can limit what God wants to do in each one of us. Asaph learned that. We need to learn that today because we're going to need that faith more and more as we go forward.

2.C. Fear can cause us to ignore the power of God.

We can become so afraid that we ignore God's almighty power. Remember Psalm 78:41; we just read it. It said "Israel did not remember His power." That can happen to God's people. It can happen to all of us. I've dealt with people on their death bed in a hospital, maybe with cancer, and they can let fear overcome them. And they can forget

the plan of salvation. They can forget the power of God to resurrect them, even if He doesn't heal them then. And they die in turmoil.

I mentioned a lady here a while back that just died mad at God and afraid. Yet, I've seen so many people die that were in peace. I know a man who died in peace. One woman, who has cancer, is totally at peace and another woman is at peace because they understand the power of God, if not to heal in this life, to resurrect in the next life.

Remember we read in Psalm 74 about the temple being burned and looted. Asaph either described that and what he saw, if he was there, when Shishak invaded or whether he saw in a vision about the temple being burned at the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Nevertheless, it left Asaph paralyzed with fear because of what he either saw with his own eyes or what he saw in vision.

Let's go to Psalm 77 and we'll begin in verse 1. This is a psalm of Asaph. I'll read it out of the New King James. He is crying out to God. He is down on his knees, as we will see. He has his forehead on the ground and he has his hands stretched out to God in prayer.

Psalm 77:1. *I cried out to God with my voice — To God with my voice; and He gave ear to me.*

2) In the day of my trouble I sought the [Eternal]; My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing [in prayer]; My [life] refused to be comforted. (NKJV)

There was no comfort in this prayer.

3) I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah (NKJV)

That's a pause.

4) You hold my eyelids open; ... (NKJV)

He's talking to God.

4b) ... [but] I am so troubled that I cannot speak. (NKJV)

He is so consumed with fear! Verse 7:

7) Will the Lord cast off forever?

He's feeling cast off.

7b) ... And will He be favorable no more?

8) Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore?

9) Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? (NKJV)

Perhaps what was more frightening to Asaph than having the vision of the temple destroyed was the fear that maybe God had forgotten Israel; God has turned His back on His chosen people. And Asaph was paralyzed with fear. He was so troubled he couldn't speak. And that can happen to us in life too, if we let it.

So what is the answer? We're going to see the answer is to focus on God's incredible power—to focus on his power.

10) And I said, "This is my anguish [Asaph is saying]; But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." (NKJV)

I will not forget as Ancient Israel did.

11) I will remember the works of the [Eternal]; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.

12) I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds.

13) Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; Who is so great a God as our God?

14) You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples.

15) You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

16) The waters saw You, ... (NKJV)

Now he's recounting those miracles.

16) The waters saw You, O God; the waters saw You, they were afraid; The depths also trembled.

17) The clouds poured out water; the skies sent out a sound; Your arrows also flashed about [the skies].

18) The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; the lightnings lit up the world; The earth trembled and shook.

19) Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known.

20) You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. (NKJV)

Now think about that. When his mind got on God and God's power, the fear evaporated. It disappeared. It went away.

Let's go to 1 John 4:18, something we need to remember when we get into a situation where there might be a trickle of fear come into our mind. This is a very familiar scripture but let's not forget this scripture. This psalm reminds me of 1 John 4:18.

1 John 4:18. *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear [has] torment.... (NKJV)*

If our faith in God falters, fear moves in to fill the vacuum. Whereas, with Asaph, he began to focus on God's great works for the nation of Israel and that began to force out the fear, and force out the fear, and force out the fear, until there was no fear because he understood God's perfect love for us. And he understood that God will do nothing for our harm. Even if we die, our death is for our ultimate benefit and for the benefit of those around us.

That's why Paul says in Philippians 4—let's go there. We'll read verses 6 and 7. They had troublous times when Paul wrote these words. We're going to probably have more troublous times as we get closer to the end. This is advice well taken on this third point of not letting fear overcome us and ignoring the power of God. Philippians 4:6, out of the New King James.

Philippians 4:6. *Be anxious for nothing, ... (NKJV)*

"Anxious" can mean also *worry or being afraid*.

6) Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, ... (NKJV)

There's always something to be thankful about.

6b) ... let your requests be made known to God; (NKJV)

And if we do that, verse 7 is a promise.

7) and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (NKJV)

People on their death bed can be at peace. Not a fear. Not a trouble in the world because they have perfect love and the love casts out fear. So, as with Asaph, we must remember God's power and God's love; and, therefore, fear will not have control over us.

2.D. The last lesson Asaph learned is that God wants evidence of our change and our overcoming.

This is particularly true as we approach the Passover. God wants evidence of our change and our overcoming. God is not content with our constant apologies, our constant "repentance" and no action. God gets tired of us saying, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry," and then nothing ever changes. God wants change and not words. That's what He wants.

Let's go to Psalm 50. This is a psalm of Asaph. Psalm 50 and we're going to begin in verse 7. Asaph wrote this and he understood that God wants change and not just syrupy words of repentance that have no meaning, which is not godly repentance but worldly repentance.

Psalm 50:7. *"Hear, O My people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you; ... (NKJV)*

Remember he is a seer. He's quoting God. God told him these words.

7b) ... and I will testify against you; I am God, your God!

8) I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices or [for] your burnt offerings, which are continually before Me. (NKJV)

At that time the temple was functioning or the tabernacle was functioning and there were continual sacrifices. Verse 9:

9) I will not take a bull from your house, nor goats out of your folds.

10) For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.

11) I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine.

12) "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness. (NKJV)

God doesn't need our food and God doesn't need our sacrifices either. There were physical sacrifices back then. He wants change. He wants cessation from sin. Look at verse 23.

Psalm 50:23. *Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; ... (NKJV)*

Notice this:

23b) ... and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God." (NKJV)

He says, "To him who keeps My law, keeps My commandments, not only in an outward sense, but in his heart, he who loves Me above all things, he who loves his neighbor as himself, I will grant salvation." It is demonstrated in deeds, not just words.

David learned the lesson the hard way. During the year David was separated from God because of the Bathsheba/Uriah incident, no amount of sacrifice would have restored his relationship to God—none. Asaph saw that with his own eyes. What did God require of David? Let's go to the next psalm up, Psalm 51 verse 16.

Psalm 51:16. *For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering.*

17) *The sacrifices of God are ... (NKJV)*

What?

17b) *... a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart — these, O God, You will not despise. (NKJV)*

So Asaph learned that he, who orders his conduct aright, will achieve salvation. It is what we do with our beliefs.

Just as an aside, there was an article in the paper today about this lady florist down in the tri-cities not far from our Prosser church. She has been persecuted by the state and she was sued by these two gay men because she wouldn't sell flowers for their gay wedding because of her beliefs. They have persecuted her and persecuted her. She said here a couple of days ago, "To follow my beliefs, the State is ruining my reputation, ruining my business, ruining me personally and financially."

Something happened because the State yesterday came and said, "Okay. All is forgotten. You just pay a \$2,000 fine and we'll forget everything." Guess what? This woman said, "No. I'm not going to buy this for \$2,000. I can still refuse who I want to refuse because of my religious beliefs." And the judge—this is the mentality of what we live in—the judge says, "You can have your beliefs, but if your actions on your beliefs offend somebody else, that's wrong."

What we're reading right here is that our beliefs are one thing but they have to be supported by deeds, by actions. This poor lady, who is not far from the Kingdom of God in certain aspect of her life—never met her; don't know her, but—she's saying, "My actions have to be backed up by beliefs. I can't just sit here in limbo and believe; I have to demonstrate my beliefs." And the judge said, "No, you can't. You can't do that."

Here what David is saying and what David learns is "I want a broken heart. I want a broken and contrite spirit. I want change." God says, "I want change not words." And His desire is that we overcome.

Look at Colossians 3:8 out of the New King James. This is what we have to do—not just talk about, not just believe. And this judge is totally wrong! God's going to do what God is going to do, but this is something to pray about that God would wrap His hand around this man's head and give him a good shake and put some common sense into this moronic judge.

Colossians 3:8. *But now you yourselves are to put off all these: ... (NKJV)*

These are deeds.

8b) *... anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. (NKJV)*

Put it all away. He says:

9) Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10) and have put on the new man [meaning with the new man's deeds] who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him [referring to Jesus Christ] who created him [referring to the new man], (NKJV)

It's not just enough to believe. We have to act on those beliefs. And God wants change from the old man or woman to the new man or woman. Asaph learned that God wants change from watching David in his own personal life and how David changed. After watching Solomon and what happened there, Asaph learned this.

So, as we conclude, today we've looked at both the life of Asaph and why God chose to preserve his writings. We read in the caption of many of David's psalms it says, "To Asaph, the chief musician." And we've seen that Asaph was so much more than just a chief musician. He was prophet; he was a seer. God communicated directly with him.

He reported directly to David; he was in charge of all of the musical worship of the temple. Yes, he was musician; he was a choir director. He was responsible for writing music, seeing that all the musicians performed it according to God's standards. He was incredibly close to King David and it appears that he and David shared a bond of music. I'm sure we're going to find out that they were very close and they spent many hours talking about music and how music should be performed. David designed those instruments.

Asaph witnessed all of David's incredible accomplishments, but also saw David's tragic sins and mistakes. He saw the rise and, apparently the fall of Solomon, and perhaps he saw the evil deeds of Solomon's son, Rehoboam.

He was a prophet; he was a seer. He witnessed the building of the temple. He witnessed the incredible time when God manifested Himself in the temple when that cloud came down. He saw that himself. He saw God's glory in a physical manifestation inside that building. Then, either in person or in a vision, he witnessed the destruction of that same temple—saw its destruction. Despite all of this and the agony that he went through and the fear that he went through and the doubt that he went through, he stayed faithful and true to his calling.

So, why did God choose to preserve these writings? So we can learn. So we can learn what Asaph learned in his very eventful, very fulfilled life. We learned why God allows evil to prosper. And Asaph learned why a lack of faith can limit what God can do in each one of us. He learned that fear can overwhelm people and cause them to forget God's power. He finally learned that God wants evidence of our change and our overcoming. He wants to see the fruits of what we believe in the form of what we actually do. So, as we approach the Passover, let's learn the lessons from the life of Asaph.