

To Judge the Living and the Dead

Psalm 74:1 *A Maskil of Asaph.*

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

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.

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.

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

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 on the waters.

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.

¹⁷ You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth; you have made summer and winter.

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!

Psalm 75:1 To the choirmaster: according to Do Not Destroy. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

We give thanks to you, O God (Elohim); we give thanks, for your **name** is near. We recount your wondrous deeds.

² "At the set time that I appoint I will judge with equity.

³ When the earth totters, and all its inhabitants, it is I who keep steady its pillars. Selah

⁴ I say to the boastful, 'Do not boast,' and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up your horn;

⁵ do not lift up your horn on high, or speak with haughty neck."

⁶ For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up,

⁷ but it is God (Elohim) who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.

⁸ For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs.

⁹ But I will declare it forever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.
¹⁰ All the horns of the wicked I will cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be lifted up.

Psalm 76:1 To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

In Judah God is known; his **name** is great in Israel.

² His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion.

³ There he broke the flashing arrows, the shield, the sword, and the weapons of war. Selah

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.

⁷ But you, you are to be feared! Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused?

⁸ From the heavens you uttered judgment; the earth feared and was still,

⁹ when God arose to establish judgment, to save all the humble of the earth. Selah

¹⁰ Surely the wrath of man shall praise you; the remnant of wrath you will put on like a belt.

¹¹ Make your vows to the LORD your God and perform them; let all around him bring gifts to him who is to be feared,

¹² who cuts off the spirit of princes, who is to be feared by the kings of the earth."

Psalm 74-76

Here Comes The Judge

We don't confess an encyclopedia's worth of theology as Christians. Though we are robustly confessional and find those distinctives important and helpful for local fellowship and church life, on the level of "essentials," what we confess takes up less than a page of paper. God isn't trying to make this impossible. For instance, *The Apostle's Creed* is one of the earliest extra-biblical creeds and is accepted as orthodoxy by every single Christian denomination. It has only 12 points, and legend has it that each Apostle contributed one point. All of the earliest creeds are short like this, making what they talk about important to such a degree that it cannot be overstated.

Among its few short lines are the famous words, "He ascended into heaven | He is seated at the right hand of the Father | and He will come to judge the living and the dead."¹ In 180 A.D. the [Presbyters of Smyrna](#) (modern day [Turkey](#)) said this was "handed down" to them by

¹ *The Old Roman Symbol*, which dates even earlier and upon which it was based, has the same lines.

earlier Christians.² The same year up in Gaul (modern France), Irenaeus said that “The Church, though scattered through the whole world to the ends of the earth, has received from the Apostles and their disciples the faith,” which includes, “the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father ... that He should execute just judgment towards all.”³ Twenty years later, Tertullian writing from Africa confirmed all this when he said that Christ “was received in the heavens, sitting now at the right hand of the Father, coming to judge the quick and the dead.”⁴

Judgement. This is not a word that the guilty like to hear. However, for those who are on trial but who are

² “We also know in truth one God, we know Christ, we know the Son, suffering as he suffered, dying as he died, and risen on the third day, and abiding at the right hand of the Father, and coming to judge the living and the dead. And in saying this we say what has been handed down to us.” *Profession of the Presbyters of Smyrna* (c. 180).

³ Irenaeus, “The Rule of Faith” (First Form), *Against Heresies* 1.10.1. Later, he wrote it more like the creed saying that Christ “was received in glory, shall come in glory, the Savior of those who are saved, and the judge of those who are judged; and sending into eternal fire the perverters of the truth and the despisers of his Father and his advent.” Irenaeus, “The Rule of Faith” (Second Form), *Against Heresies* 3.4.2.

⁴ Tertullian, “The Rule of Faith” (First Form), *Veiling of Virgins* 1.

not guilty, the anticipation of a Just Judge rendering his judgment (verdict) is the strongest desire of their life. Nothing could be more eagerly awaited (though also more anxiety inducing) than the Judge's sentence upon them. For when it comes, it means that they are finally and totally free from the punishment demanded by the law.

Jesus. His is a name associated today by most people with the word *love*. And for good reason. Among men, he was the most patient, kind, content, humble, long-suffering, unconceited, gentle, and respectful person who ever lived. And these virtues are Scripture's very definition of "love."

But love is also *just*. And something many people do not want to consider is Jesus' relationship to Judgement Day, which is the Great Day of Justice. Now, Christians realize that that Bible does speak about a Judgment Day, and they recognize that this judgment belongs to "God." When asked to explain this, the default mode is that *the Father is the Judge*. Scripture indeed tells us that this is true. Jesus put it this way, "So also my heavenly Father

will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (Matt 18:35). Peter, learning from his Lord said, “If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile” (1Pe 1:17).

But believe it or not, much more often, the NT teaches us that judgment is the work of Jesus. God is One. “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2Co 5:10), and “Christ Jesus ... is to judge the living and the dead” (2Ti 4:1).⁵ Herman Bavink puts it this way, “[The Father] accomplishes this work through Christ, to whom all judgment has been given, whom he has appointed as judge, and who will therefore summon all human beings before his judgment seat and judge them according to what they have done.”⁶ Or as Paul puts it, “On that day

⁵ Cf. John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom 14:9 and Matt 25:32; Rom 14:9–13 KJV; 2Co 5:10; 2Ti 4:8; 1Pe 4:5; Rev 19:11–21.

⁶ Herman Bavink, John Bolt, and John Vriend, [*Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*](#), vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 700.

when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (Rom 2:16).⁷

In his *Systematic Theology*, Louis Berkhof notices how the Bible explains that His judgment is closely tied to his death, resurrection, and ascension. He calls it “the honor of judging the living and the dead,” and says this was “conferred on Christ as Mediator in reward for His

⁷ **Going Deeper on John 5:22-24. (Point 1):** Someone might object to the Father as Judge because Jesus says, “For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). But Hendriksen comments, “That is, the Father never acts alone (in separation from the Son) in pronouncing judgment.” (William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001], 199). Thus, Jesus later says, “Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me” (John 8:16).

(Point 2): I don’t have time this morning to discuss the confusion that many have on this topic because of the Dispensational (popular) teaching that separates Judgment Day into different groups at different times, some individually others collectively, some by the Father and others by Christ, some for works and not for their works. Suffice it to say that Christ is the Judge of “the living and the dead” (2Ti 4:1) and there is no hint that he only judges Christians (or the Father only judges unbelievers), or that his judgment seat is different from that of the Father’s. I’ll let these words of Berkhof on John 5:24 be all that I say on the matter today. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life,’ he clearly means in view of the context, that the believer cometh not into *condemnatory* judgment. But it is sometimes objected that the sins of believers, which are pardoned, certainly will not be published at that time; but Scripture leads us to expect that they will be, though they will, of course, be revealed as pardoned sins. Men will be judged for “every idle word,” Matt 12:36, and for ‘every secret thing,’ Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:5, and there is no indication whatsoever that this will be limited to the wicked.” (L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938], 732). His entire discussion is succinct and helpful.

atoning work and as part of His exaltation.”⁸ This is exactly what we see in the Creeds, and is why his judgment always comes right after those things. The Judgment of Christ in the creeds is not an add-on that they didn’t know where else to put. It is logically tied to his work on earth.

Psalms of Judgment

What does all this have to do with our psalms today? Bavinck can get us started. He begins his treatment of Judgment Day by saying that it is “an event pictured in the Old Testament as a victory of the Messiah over all Israel’s enemies.”⁹ I found this comment very helpful and insightful. For it shows us up front what we should be seeing when we read about this in the OT Scriptures.

This morning we are looking at **three Psalms**: 74, 75, and 76. Like Psalm 73 to which they are all related, these

⁸ L. Berkhof, [*Systematic Theology*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 731–732.

⁹ Bavinck, 4:698.

are all **songs of Asaph**. The first calls itself simply “**a Maskil of Asaph**.” As we saw in Psalm 32, *maskil* is a word that probably means “**instruction**” or “**wisdom**.” In the way these Psalms are arranged for us, all three follow as **corporate** complements to Psalm 73’s **individual** lament. Psalm 74 begins with “**us**” and “**sheep**” and “**congregation**.” These are groups. Again, Psalm 75 begins, “**We ... we ... we**” three times (and I’m not talking about the Three Little Pigs). Psalm 76 speaks of God being known in “**Judah**” and “**Israel**,” the whole nation. Therefore, they are for the whole Church to sing and ponder together.

If Psalm 74 is an instruction, what is it trying to teach? **It is asking a question**. It is basically the same question raised in Psalm 73. Why are the bad guys prospering while your people are being trampled under their feet? The connection here is the “**sanctuary**.” In Psalm 73, the psalmist could not understand the answer “**until I went into the sanctuary of God**” (**Ps 73:17**). But in Psalm 74, there is a huge problem. “**The enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary**” (**74:3**). Even

worse, “They set your sanctuary on fire” and (importantly) “profaned the dwelling place of your name, bringing it down to the ground” (7). The “name.” We will have more to say about this later, because it, along with two other themes, is repeated in all three songs today.

If the **Name** is one theme, what are those other two? They are 1. God as **Judge**. 2. Divine **wrath** (see chart).

Judgement, Wrath, and the Name in Psalms 74, 75, and 76			
	God as (saving) judge	Divine wrath	The theology of the divine Name
Ps 74	74:22 Rise up, O God, plead your cause; remember how the impious scoff at you all day long. (all NRSV)	74:1 A Maskil of Asaph. O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?	74:7 They set your sanctuary on fire; they desecrated the dwelling place of your name, bringing it to the ground.
			10 How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever?
			18 Remember this, O Lord, how the enemy scoffs, and an impious people reviles your name.
			21 Do not let the downtrodden be put to shame; let the poor and needy praise your name.
Ps 75	75:2 At the set time that I appoint I will judge with equity.	75:8 For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed; he will pour a draught from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs.	75:1 To the leader: Do Not Destroy. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song. We give thanks to you, O God; we give thanks; your name is near. People tell of your wondrous deeds.
	4 I say to the boastful, “Do not boast,” and to the wicked, “Do not lift up your horn...”		
Ps 76	76:8-9 From the heavens you uttered judgment; the earth feared and was still when God rose up to establish judgment, to	76:7 But you indeed are awesome! Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused?	76:1 To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

save all the oppressed of the earth. <i>Selah</i>	In Judah God is known, his name is great in Israel. ¹⁰
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These themes of God as Judge, divine wrath, and the Name move in a particular direction in these songs. This direction is towards “the end.” It is eschatological. So in raising this question to the entire congregation, Psalm 74 via 75-76 is teaching you to look to the end! This is very wise counsel indeed.

Psalm 73 already anticipated this, which is just one way that it, too, is part of this same nexus of songs. When he went into the sanctuary, “Then I discerned their end” (73:17). “You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you” (27). In the three songs today, this works itself out this way. Psalm 74 is a “community lament,” musing over judgment, wrath, and the Name. Psalm 75 is a “divine oracle with announcement of divine intervention.” Psalm 76 is poetic “proclamation of the successful or hoped-for intervention of God” (Psalm 76).¹¹ So the last two look forward to and then proclaim

¹⁰ Scriptures from Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, [Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100](#), ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 250.

¹¹ Lothar, 250.

the future. And we see this direction even in the way Psalms 75-76 differ from 73-74 in their superscription. Both are “songs” “to the choirmaster” or more prophetically, “For the End” (LXX).

*Psalm 74: Arise O God, Defend Your Cause*¹²

Psalm 74 is divided into three main sections. *The first 11 verses* are a lament over the destruction of the Temple. This includes an accusation against God because of how this has affected Israel’s covenanted relationship to him, and it may end in the poetic center of the song with the questions “How long” and “Why?”¹³ If written by Asaph himself, this Psalm could recall when the covenant was captured. If Asaph stands for the line of priests who came after him, it could have been written later. But either way, as it stands in its position in the

¹² This and the next two are the headings given in the ESV Bible.

¹³ There are various possible chiasms in this psalm. One sees vs. 12 as the center. See *ALittlePerspective* blog. Another, using the tenses of the verbs (Imperatives, Perfects, Imperfects, Perfects, Imperatives) in the song, sees vv. 10-11. See Graeme E. Sharrock, “Psalm 74: A Literary-Structural Analysis,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21.3 (Autumn 1983): 212 [211-23].

book, the priests clearly want it to speak to the Babylonian captivity and what this did to the people.

The accusation begins at the start, “O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?” (Ps 74:1). Did he? Was it? This is the feeling of the Psalmist.

He then asks God to remember his covenant. “Remember your congregation [*edeh/synagoge*], which you have purchased of old, which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage! Remember Mount Zion, where you have dwelt. Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins” (2-3).¹⁴ This language of purchasing Israel and redeeming it to be his own tribe is Deuteronomy language that belongs to the Son of God (Deut 32:9), Israel’s “Angel of the LORD.”

It is symbolic language that recalls the Exodus when they were slaves in Egypt. But God paid no ransom to the Pharaoh. Instead, he *destroyed* Pharaoh in the Sea for his

¹⁴ That this is covenantal language is confirmed by the parallel sections: remember your congregation + defiling of the enemies (1-8) and respect your covenant + the reproach of your enemies (19-23).

abusive, sinful treatment of the Hebrews. He mocked and rendered powerless its gods in the plagues. In other words, *God judged them*. This was how he “purchased” Israel. For, this judgment meant Israel’s release from captivity. He opened their jail cell door. Now they would be His people (as it really was all along), for he took them to be his sheep, his nation, even as he had covenanted with the Patriarchs to do.

Why should he remember them? Because their situation is desperate. “*The enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary*” (3). This enemy is God’s “foe” who “*roars in the midst*” of God’s “*meeting place*” with his people (4). Here, the enemy set up its own signs, replacing those God had chosen (4). They went in like Paul Bunyan, “*swinging axes in a forest of trees*” (5). But this was the Temple! The ornamentation of the temple commanded by God was “*broken down with hatchets and hammers*” (6). Feel the language of beating and despair, for this was the very heart of the nation, their identity. But in a not so subtle way, the psalmist is also

directing it at God himself by saying, “They are attacking you, LORD! Not just us.”

“They set your sanctuary on fire; they profaned the dwelling place of your name, bringing it down to the ground” (7). The language feels like a rhythmic beating of a war-drum. “They said to themselves, ‘We will utterly subdue them’; they burned all the meeting places of God in the land” (8). “We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long” (9). God’s silence among his people is proof of his anger and wrath towards *them*. This is what it must have felt like during the 400 years between Malachi and Matthew, or, to an unbelieving Jew today, what they think it has been like for the last 2,500 years! When *they* read this, what must they think? It must be different than what *you* are permitted to think as a Christian.

“How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your Name forever?” (10). There’s the “Name” again. They profaned the dwelling place of God’s name;

they revile God's name. We will see this theme time and again this morning. But we won't discuss it just yet.

The section ends, “**Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand?**” (11). The Right Hand is a military term that we have seen before in the Psalms. We also saw it today in the Creed. Someone is at the right hand of the Father. And that Right Hand is about to do something in the Creeds. It is the same thing we see in the Psalm: The psalmist asks God to remove his Right Hand which is hidden **inside his garment**, and use it **to destroy these enemies**. This is powerful, passionate poetry. It is visual and visceral. One can only imagine the kind of tune the singers of Israel would have come up with to sing it. Probably not a Brahms's Lullaby. Imagine an entire nation of people singing this at the top of their lungs! It would surely make me start to cry.

The second section moves away from the raw emotions of God's silent judgment on Israel in order to remember his **universal kingship** over the world and especially over his people. This is **vv. 12-17**. It contains

some very interesting imagery. It recalls both Creation and the Exodus.

It begins with a statement of faith in the midst of such doubt and horror. “Yet God my King is from old, working salvation in the midst of the earth” (12). God has always been there, and he has always been King, since the day he was enthroned over the waters at creation on the Seventh Day (Gen 1:3, 2:3), then over the waters of the flood (Ps 29:10), and over the waters of the Red Sea (Ex 15:2). He is from of old, and he does not change.

But it is more. Augustine rightly says, “We can appropriately apply the same line of interpretation to a passage in the psalms, where it says, ‘Now God our king before the ages has achieved salvation in the midst of the earth.’ We may take ‘our God’ to mean the Lord Jesus, who is before the ages (since the ages were created by him); for he ‘achieved salvation in the midst of the earth’ when the Word was made flesh and dwelt in a human body.” (*City of God* 17.4).¹⁵

¹⁵ Another Father says, “The understanding of Asaph proclaimed earlier in the heading passes on to the second part, with the spirit of prophecy foretelling that the Lord Savior will come; in order

“You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness” (13-14). This imagery clearly refers to the Exodus. For we read next, “You split open springs and brooks; you dried up ever-flowing streams” (15). Remember when the LORD made water come out from the Rock or when he made the Sea become dry land?

Here, **Egypt** is likened to **Leviathan**, that terrifying creature at the end of Job that no man can tame. The word “sea monsters” is *tannin*. It is a synonym. It is sometimes translated as “**dragon**,” such as in this verse, “In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent

to provide proof of this he recounts all the miracles that the Lord performed in heaven and on earth. Because he intends to speak of his incarnation, he attests that the Lord was already King before the foundation of the world, so that no one would believe that he was a mere lord in time. As he himself says in the Gospel: “I was born into this world.”³ Ages (*saecula*) are so called because the seasons circle back on themselves (*in se*). Next comes, “He has worked salvation in the midst of the earth.” Although this can be interpreted as relating to the miracles he performed, which he is known to have achieved before people’s eyes, it would be better for us to understand it as referring to the salvation of souls which he achieved by his life-giving preaching.” **Cassiodorus**, *Expositions of the Psalms* 73.12.

(*nachash*), Leviathan the twisting serpent (*nachash*), and he will slay the dragon (*tannin*) that is in the sea” (Isa 27:1). This is a verse that talks about the future judgment of Satan, where he is called the dragon, the serpent, and Leviathan.

One more word used to describe this is **Rahab**. Not the woman from Jericho, but a giant sea-monster which means, “**Insolence**” or “**Fierceness.**” Isaiah says, “**Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD, awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon?**” (Isa 51:9-10). Earlier he said, “**To Egypt, whose help is utterly useless. Therefore I call her Rahab the Do-Nothing**” (Isa 30:7 NIV). So Egypt is likened to a the great satanic beast and God is said to have defeated it.

But the language here is also of **Creation**. “**Yours is the day, yours also the night; you have established the heavenly lights and the sun. You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth; you have made summer and winter**” (Ps 74:16-17). This refers to the covenant of creation, which includes also the heavenly being Satan,

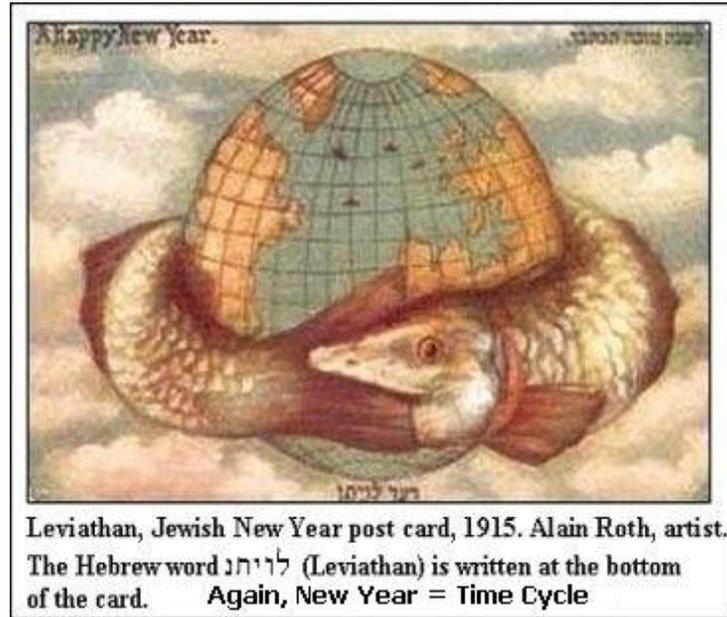
whom God also made.¹⁶ Curiously, all across the ANE, the creation stories always include the god defeating the chaos-monster (which is sometimes called Leviathan) as he establishes order to the world. This creature is depicted as a sea-monster with many heads.¹⁷ In the

¹⁶ Gen 1:21 refers to God creating “the great sea monsters (*tannin*).” Gen 1:16 says that God created the sun and moon “and also the stars.” Both of these are images used of heavenly beings. One refers metaphorically to their original place of origin (heaven). The other their (the fallen one’s that is) chaos that they bring to the world, including to the underworld (Sheol).

¹⁷ **Going Deeper:** Leviathan is a word related to a Ugaritic term for “the twisting one” or “the wreath-like,” or “the circular.” The word is *lītānu* (C. Uehlinger, “Leviathan,” *DDD*, 511). The Hebrew form is related to the root *lavah* (“to cleave”) and the Arabic root is *lawa’* (“to bend”). Hence, the twisting or coiling of a serpent (Walter William Skeat, “Leviathan,” in *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882], 245). Others suggest a relation with Levi (“a band”) and tan (“a serpent”) (see Edward G. King, *Akkadian Genesis* [Cambridge: Deighton, Bell and Co., 1888], 49). Whether Leviathan depicts a creature a true monster that humans knew (a dragon or dinosaur, and I am quite open to that possibility), isn’t the point of its usage in most places in the Bible.

The figure is sometimes depicted as a serpent eating its own tail.

Bible, so as to help the people make sure that there is no war going on between the LORD and other gods, the Bible mentions sea-monsters and stars as almost after-



This idea is truly ancient and is known by all cultures on earth. They depict it when they describe the Milky Way Galaxy (i.e. stars!) or when they talk about a serpent surrounding the fabled Tree of Life (which all cultures also have).

Milky Way, Ouroboros, and Leviathan				
<p>the Milky Way from earth (top) serpentine Tail (how it is described by many cultures)</p>				
	Jörmungandr Norse	Greek Ouroboros	Aztec Ouroboros	Chinese Ouroboros
	American Indian	Tree of Life	Yggdrasil	The unrelated V838 Monocerotis Hubble, 2004

thoughts compared to the stories told by the pagans. Why? Because they are not a problem for him. He has total, immediate authority and control over them.

Scripture	"Sons of God"			Serpent					Human Power	
	Satan	Seraphim Holy One Angel	Helel/ Lucifer/ Shining	Seraph Ophis	Nachash Ophis	Tannin Dragon	Leviathan Dragon	Rahab	Egypt	Pharaoh
Gen 3	Implied									
Ex 7:9-15										
Num 21:6-9		(?)								
Job 26:12-13	(?)									
Ps 74:13-14									Implied	Implied
Ps 89:9-10									Implied	Implied
Isa 14:1	Implied				Implied				(Babylon)	
Isa 27:1	Implied									
Isa 30:7										
Isa 51:9-10									Implied	Implied
Ezek 10:9			(gleam)							
Ezek 28:14	Implied		Implied		Implied					
Ezek 29:3										
Ezek 32:2										
Dan 10:6										
Matt 25:41										
Rev 12:13-14										
Rev 20:2										



Akkadian cylinder seal (ca. 2300 b.c.):
Two gods fight the dragon/serpent of chaos (Leviathan).
The god on the left side renders harmless the seven heads *Lothar*, 246–247.

The point of all this in the Psalm is to remind the people that God has not always been silent. In fact, he created Israel through mighty acts of old, so mighty that they can be likened to the greatest acts in all of history. These are the actions of The Great King. And this King is Israel's God, as he swore to be to Abraham.

The *third and final section* of the Psalm is a *list of supplications* to the LORD. These appeal to him to save Israel through divine, military intervention. “Remember this, O LORD, how the enemy scoffs, and a foolish people reviles your Name” (18). The Name yet again. “Do not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild beasts; do not forget the life of your poor forever” (19). Though he undoubtedly knows that Israel is anything but innocent, he appeals to God through the universal image of peace—the dove and the object of so much of God's concern—the poor. Israel is a fragile little dove, easily broken and crushed. Israel is the very poor whom God has sworn to look after. This song therefore requires that the people repent and humble themselves.

“Have regard for the covenant, for the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence” (20). He undoubtedly sees the violence as occurring at the hands of those who have destroyed the temple. “Let not the downtrodden turn back in shame; let the poor and needy praise your name” (21). Again the Name! The plea is to allow Israel to praise God for his works of salvation and mercy once more.

Therefore, God must “Arise ... defend your cause; remember how the foolish scoff at you all the day!” (22). Again, this is not merely Israel whom they have derided, but God himself. “Do not forget the clamor of your foes, the uproar of those who rise against you, which goes up continually!” (23), and thus the song ends with a fortissimo of shouts for God to do something! Yet, it leaves it so unresolved...

Psalm 75: God Will Judge With Equity

If Psalm 74 ends on that terrible note that there is no prophet in Israel who is able to answer the question “How long” before God comes to the rescue of his

people and judges his enemies in wrath, Psalm 75 becomes that prophetic voice so urgently needed. It is a very simple ABBA poem, with vs. 8 (8a and 8b) serving as the center. It has seven natural parts (1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8, 9, 10).¹⁸

It begins with **the congregation thanking God**. Imagine just singing Psalm 74 with its open-ended questions and great longing for God to do something. Now, suddenly, you sing the next song and begin to thank God! This is exactly the way it is supposed to be, for thanks is rendered to God because it is due to him, and not only after he does something in your current crisis. **“We give thanks to you O God (Elohim); we give thanks, for your name is near. We recount your wondrous deeds” (75:1)**. Again, the Name and deeds return, but this time it is associated with the word

¹⁸ You can almost see this in the ESV in its eight sentences. To see it better, one would put a semicolon after vs. 2 instead of a period. As we will note below, this seven parallel is to be found in the seven divisions of Psalm 76, which parallel each of the seven from Psalm 75 (see Christine’s Psalm 76 Chiastic Structure,” *A Little Perspective*, <http://www.alittleperspective.com/psalm-76-chiastic-structure/>).

“wondrous,” a Christological word if ever there was one (cf. Ex 15:3; 11; Jdg 13:18 with Gen 32:29-30; Isa 9:6).

Suddenly, God speaks. “At the set time that I appoint I will judge with equity” (2). “How long until you judge” suddenly becomes “a set time,” and God will judge fairly. His speech continues, not by setting a date like so-called prophets today so often do. Instead, he changes the subject ... to a word of comfort. Date setting is not a comfort but a tyranny. The Gospel is comfort. “When the earth totters, and all its inhabitants, it is I who keep steady its pillars” (3). Then, the first *Selah* we have seen in many songs appears. Rightly so. For this verse, far from fueling and igniting end-times speculations actually takes the prophecy where it should go—to the present.

We undoubtedly live in times when the very foundations of the earth are being shaken by the arrogance of man whose defiance against the laws of God knows no boundaries and whose cleverness is on the doorstep of bringing us back to the days of Noah and even stopping the curse of Babel with its language barriers (ever heard of Google Translate?). These are not

times for the faints of heart. But even when the earth totters, and all of its inhabitants seem to have gone mad, when man defies God to his Face, God steadies the pillars. This is his earth and he is in total control of the people on it. Though the earth be shaken, he remains the same. Therefore, his people need not be shaken, if they put their trust in him.

God warns the people. “Do not boast,” and “Do not lift up your horn; do not lift up your horn on high, or speak with a haughty neck” (4-5). The horn is a symbol of power and the picture is of total defiance, tearing down God’s signs and putting up their own. Just like Psalm 74 spoke about. The ultimate Horn is Christ, as Zechariah told us when Jesus was born. He is the **Horn of Salvation** (Luke 1:67). The haughty neck reminds us of the stubbornness of Israel with its stiff-neck, and also of the giants **Anak**, whose name means “neck” or “long-neck” and **Og** whose name also means “long-necked.” Such defiance is for demons, not men made in the image of God.

The warning continues, either from God himself or from the Psalmist who is inspired by his Spirit. We have a series of three “Fors” (*ki*). **One and two:** “For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up, but [for] it is God (Elohim) who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another” (6-7). You need to have it engrained here how the judgment of God is explained as a **putting down of some** and a **lifting up of others**. This shows that for some, the judgment of God is a good thing, but for others it is a terrible day of woe. Some are pardoned. Some are punished. Those punished are those who are boastful and wicked, who do evil and defy the God of Israel.

Three: The judgment is then described with an image. “For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs” (8). Sometimes in the Psalms, wine is a gift from God able to make the heart glad. But not here. Oh! Not here! Listen to someone much better able to wield the

pen to stir the heart than me. [The Prince of Preachers](#) said:

The punishment of the wicked is prepared, God himself holds it in readiness; he has collected and concocted woes most dread, and in the chalice of his wrath he holds it. They scoffed his feast of love; they shall be dragged to his table of justice, and made to drink their due deserts. *“And the wine is red.”* The retribution is terrible, it is blood for blood, foaming vengeance for foaming malice. The very colour of divine wrath is terrible; what must the taste be? *“It is full of mixture.”* Spices of anger, justice, and incensed mercy are there. Their misdeeds, their blasphemies, their persecutions have strengthened the liquor as with potent drugs:

*“Mingled, strong, and mantling high;
Behold the wrath divine.”*

Ten thousand woes are burning in the depths of that fiery cup, which to the brim is filled with indignation. *“And he poureth out of the same.”* The full cup must be quaffed, the wicked cannot refuse the terrible draught, for God

himself pours it out for them and into them. Vain are their cries and entreaties. They could once defy him, but that hour is over, and the time to requite them is fully come. *“But the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them.”* Even to the bitter end must wrath proceed. They must drink on and on for ever, even to the bottom where lie the lees of deep damnation; these they must suck up, and still must they drain the cup. Oh the anguish and the heart-break of the day of wrath! Mark well, it is for all the wicked; all hell for all the ungodly; the dregs for the dregs; bitters for the bitter; wrath for the heirs of wrath. Righteousness is conspicuous, but over all terror spreads a tenfold night, cheerless, without a star. Oh happy they who drink the cup of godly sorrow, and the cup of salvation; these, though now despised, will then be envied by the very men who trod them under foot.¹⁹

Not surprisingly—if you know who this God is that speaks to the psalmist, we find this verse returning in the Apocalypse of John. It says, **“From his mouth [that is**

¹⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, [*The Treasury of David: Psalms 56-87*](#), vol. 3 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 295.

Christ] comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty” (Rev 19:15). Sinner, you just don’t understand the peril you have put yourself in, and you must listen to the Word of God. The Day is coming and woe to you who must drink that cup.

The prophecy ends here, but the psalmist entreats his people not to suffer the silence of “when.” Instead, “I will declare it forever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob” (Ps 75:9). God’s judgment becomes his sweet song that he will declare to all men. “All the horns of the wicked I will cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be lifted up” (10). The Psalm ends by repeating earlier themes of the horn and the wicked and lifting up. This Day is not a day of woe *for all...*

Psalm 76: Who Can Stand Before You?

The prophecy of Psalm 75 becomes a reality in Psalm 76, thus taking us through our journey from “why” and “how long,” to “look at what I will do,” to “see what I

have done.” As I have been laboring since Psalms 1-2, learn to read the Psalms *together*. They were meant not only to be read by themselves, but with each other.

Psalm 76 has seven divisions that parallel Psalm 75 (76:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-9, 10, 11, 12). Notice for instance how they both begin with the Name. “**We give thanks, for you Name is near**” (75:1) and “**In Judah God is known; his Name is great in Israel**” (76:1). In the Psalm, why is his name known? Because “**His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion**” (2). The Psalmist uses the old name for Jerusalem found only in **Genesis 14:18**, “**Melchizedek king of Salem...**” He is clearly zeroing in on the word “**peace**,” for that is what Salem means. But maybe he is also signaling something about its priest-king?

Melchizedek met Abram after a great battle (against giants). The next verse in the Psalm says, “**There he broke the flashing arrows, the shield, the sword, and the weapons of war. Selah**” (Ps 76:3). It reminds us of that great battle for the life of Abram’s nephew Lot who had been captured as part of a greater battle and the reason

for the peace-meal between Melchizedek and Abram. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, Melchizedek seems to be identified as Michael, the great Prince of Israel (Dan 12:1).²⁰ In the NT, it is clear that the one who does this is Christ, as we saw in Revelation.

A praise ensues, “Glorious are you, more majestic than the mountains full of prey” (4). Why? “The stouthearted were stripped of their spoil; they sank into the sleep; all the men of war were unable to use their hands” (5). “At your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both rider and horse lay stunned” (6). Who is the “God [Elohim] of Jacob?” Why this language? Jacob identified him as the

²⁰ “See 4Q’Amramb 2.3 and 4Q’Teharotd 2.2 which identify the chief evil angel as having three names one of which is Melkiresha’. Since Michael is the opponent of this angel elsewhere in Qumran (1QS 3.20-21; 1QM 13.5-6, 10-16), and since he too has three names (4Q’Amram), a fair guess is that one of these names is Melchizedek. Furthermore Melchizedek executes judgment against Belial which is a function of Michael in 1QM 13.10-12 and 17.5-8. Those who identify Melchizedek with Michael are Noll, ‘Angelology’, p. 68; Newsome, Songs, p. 37; Dunn, Christology, p. 152; and Vermes, Scrolls, p. 300. Horton, Melchizedek, pp. 81-82, notes some similarities and some differences between the two.” Carl Judson Davis, *The Name and Way of the Lord: Old Testament Themes, New Testament Christology* (Library of New Testament Studies), Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 129 (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 44, n. 72.

Angel of the LORD (**Gen 48:15-16**). This passage again clearly refers to the Exodus, with its “horse and rider” thrown into the sea. And who did Moses and Isaiah identify as the God who did this? The Angel, a man of war, whose name is wonderful (**Ex 14:19-20; 15:3, 11; Isaiah 63:9**, cf. **63:1ff**). The way the Psalm is collected in the Psalter, it uses the past (Exodus) to describe the future! If you want to know why the NT sees Christ as the Judge, you need to know your Bible history.

“But you, you are to be feared! Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused? From the heavens you uttered judgment; the earth feared and was still, when God arise to establish judgment; to save all the humble of the earth. Selah” (**Ps 76:7-9**). Do you see again how judgment is punishment for one, but salvation for another?

“Surely the wrath of man shall praise you; the remnant of wrath you will put on like a belt” (**10**). The meaning is simply that those who defy God will bow before this God on the Great Day of the LORD.

Therefore, “Make your vows to the LORD your God and perform them; let all around him bring gifts to him who is to be feared, who cuts off the spirit of princes, who is to be feared by the kings of the earth” (11-12). Here, the Targum adds “Name” one more time. It is worth mentioning. “When your anger is hot against your people, you will have compassion upon them, and they shall turn and praise your Name, and you will turn away from your anger, but against the residue of the nations you will gird yourself with the weapons of your anger” (this is actually a composite of two Targum translations). So what is it with this whole “Name” thing?

The NT and the Judgment Seat of Christ

We began by thinking about the Church’s universal belief that Jesus Christ is the Judge on the Great Day of the LORD. We entered our Psalms with Bavinck’s observation that the OT pictured this Day as the victory of Messiah over all Israel’s enemies. We have now seen in three Psalms how the idea of Judgment belongs to

God, how he will defeat and judge his enemies and how his wrath will be poured upon them, while he brings salvation and deliverance to his people. And Christ has been very closely linked to all three of these songs.

One song lamented God's present seeming absence from making things right for the people who abuse his sheep (whom he purchased), and his Name. The next predicted a coming judgment while the people worship the Name. The final song used the past judgment of Jacob's God to give people a future hope, thereby making his name known in Israel. The Chronicler said, "If disaster comes upon us, the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before you—for your Name is in this house—and cry out to you in our affliction, and you will hear and save" (2Ch 20:9).

This hope and salvation is now realized in a way that the Psalmist could only dream about. And the NT teaches us that it is realized through this Name. Listen to the words long written down, "The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be

judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your **name**, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth” (Rev 11:18). What name? “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a **name** written that no one knows but himself” (Rev 19:11-12). “And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his **name**” (Acts 10:42-43). Christ Jesus the Lord.

But now listen carefully. This **forgiveness** is actually **Christ’s present judgment** upon certain people of the race of Adam. “Jesus said, ‘For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind’” (John 9:39). “I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord,

because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service” (1Ti 1:12).

This 500th year of the Reformation we celebrate a judgment long eclipsed during the middle ages, but which again has fallen into darkness. That is that God justifies guilty sinners who bow their knee in humility and repentance to the King of kings, confessing him as Lord, believing that his death is a just substitute for their own judgment in hell, who then obey by faith all that he commands because he loves them and they love him.

I said earlier that there are sometimes people on trial who are not guilty. Awaiting the verdict is their greatest anticipation, but it is fueled with doubts and anxiety, just in case the court decides against them. Before the judgment seat of Christ, no person who ever lived can say they are not guilty. But that doesn't mean that anyone has to be anxious as that Day approaches. For, there is a present declaration of “not guilty” that is available today that you can hear with your own ears, and it should erase all doubts about the future judgment to come, for it is one with that very judgment.

Though all people are in fact truly guilty, justification by faith in Christ is a declaration from the court of heaven, from the King of kings himself, that this person will not be counted as such by God for the sake of Christ who alone was not guilty of any sin. Through faith in him, God will treat that person as if they really are not guilty for the sake of he who was punished on our behalf. Do you have the confidence that this is the verdict the Court of Heaven and King Jesus will render towards you? The only way you can have that assurance is if you are trusting in him alone for such a declaration, for it is by his grace alone that he has offered it to those who by faith alone know that there is no other hope for their eternal salvation.

I said earlier that you are not permitted to think like the Jews that we have gone 2,000 years without a prophet, for Christ Jesus is the Final Prophet who has brought to pass in his present judgment and is soon going to render his future judgment described in the Psalms of Asaph. And if he has decided for you, you are free from sin and death and are free to serve him with

all your heart in obedience. Worry, doubt, fear, anxiety are all taken away. The terror of the law's thunder has been silenced in the voice of the Lamb of God who takes away your sins.

There is a very peculiar correspondence between **Psalm 74:1-2** and the words of Paul in Acts. The initial cry of God to remember the sheep of his pasture and his congregation which he has purchased of old *has begun to come to pass* in the final sense. Therefore, God's shepherds are warned by the Apostle (here, they are the elders of the church at Ephesus), "**Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). This fascinating verse which calls Jesus "God,"²¹ follows**

²¹ A fascinating variant has "Lord" (*Adonai*) rather than "God" (*Theos*). It is so well attested in the manuscripts that Metzger gives "God" only a {C} rating. But his comment on why "God" gets the nod is good, "It is undeniable that θεοῦ is the more difficult reading. The following clause speaks of the church "which he obtained διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου." If this is taken in its usual sense ("with his own blood"), a copyist might well raise the question, Does God have blood?, and thus be led to change θεοῦ to κυρίου. If, however, κυρίου were the original reading, there is nothing unusual in the phrase to catch the mind of the scribe and throw it off its balance. This and other considerations led the Committee (as well as a variety of other scholars) to regard θεοῦ as the original reading." Bruce Manning Metzger, United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New*

immediately after one of your favorites, “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (27).

To you, this day, part of that counsel has been proclaimed from the songs of Asaph, from the writings of the NT, and from the Universal Church and her confession of Faith in Christ. This warning of Paul’s is to be faithful and obedient to the Word, to trust in Christ, and to look only to him for your security and pardon. Thus, it is a warning covered with Gospel and the good news of what Jesus Christ has done for his people. If you are in Christ, do not fear the coming Judgment, for that Day will render you not guilty, because Jesus satisfied the wrath of God toward you. But if you are not, then do not hesitate one moment longer. Your sins will find you out. You will not get away with them forever. Your end has been proclaimed. You are without excuse. And Christ the Judge is Coming.

Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 426.

The Judgment is a central article of our Faith. For those in Christ, it is good news, because on that day the already/“not-yet” verdict rendered through justification will result in a public declaration of not-guilty that will bring you to final glorification, thereby allowing you to enter the new heavens and the new earth. But for those who are self-seeking, who reject the truth, and follow their own evil hearts, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth on that Day. And no one will be able to help them. They will be exactly what justice demands and what they deserve. Do not let that be you. Come to Christ and get something you do not deserve. A positive verdict that results in the free gift of God in Christ which is eternal life.