

Psalm 74: a comment on the modern church

Introduction

It is my belief that God has given us the Psalms as an introspective comment on every situation that the church would face throughout its entire history.

The individual saint can turn to the Psalms and find comfort through finding that previous saints have been through exactly the same afflictions, comforts, woes, worries, and blessings. Furthermore, in times of affliction and tribulation, the Psalms show us what to do, how to pray, how God's word applies, and where to seek help; they show how God uses such times to train us in righteousness.

Churches too can find the same measure of application and edification in the Psalms; many of which regard something affecting the people of God as a whole. Thus there is teaching and application for churches when they go through the fire.

Nothing is hidden or kept outside of evaluation in the Psalms. Often there are very dark situations under review, including details of personal and corporate sin. Some are truly hard for modern people to take, such as the imprecations of violence. Everything that we could experience is covered in the Psalms; which is why they are so helpful and why, for generations, they have been a preferred reading and study for God's people.

This being the case, there should be a Psalm that speaks about the current times of appalling apostasy in the modern church. I believe that Psalm 74 is one such psalm. Thus it behoves us to examine it for wisdom to help us in our current situation.

Psalm 74: a comment on apostasy and breakdown

A Contemplation of Asaph. O God, why have 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, The tribe of Your inheritance, *which* You have redeemed -- This Mount Zion where You have dwelt.

3 Lift up Your feet to the perpetual desolations. The enemy has damaged everything in the sanctuary.

4 Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place; They set up their banners *for* signs.

5 They seem like men who lift up Axes among the thick trees.

6 And now they break down its carved work, all at once, With axes and hammers.

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

8 They said in their hearts, "Let us destroy them altogether." They have burned up all the meeting places of God in the land.

9 We do not see our signs; *There is* no longer any prophet; Nor *is there* any among us who knows how long.

10 O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?

11 Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? *Take it* out of Your bosom and destroy *them*.

12 For God *is* my King from of old, Working salvation in the midst of the earth.

13 You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters.

14 You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces, *And* gave him *as* food to the people inhabiting the wilderness.

15 You broke open the fountain and the flood; You dried up mighty rivers.

16 The day *is* Yours, the night also *is* Yours; You have prepared the light and the sun.

17 You have set all the borders of the earth; You have made summer and winter.

18 Remember this, *that* the enemy has reproached, O LORD, *And that* a foolish people has blasphemed Your name.

19 Oh, do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beast! Do not forget the life of Your poor forever.

20 Have respect to the covenant; For the dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty.

21 Oh, do not let the oppressed return ashamed! Let the poor and needy praise Your name.

22 Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; Remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily.

23 Do not forget the voice of Your enemies; The tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually.

A Contemplation of Asaph.

Literally, 'a maschil of Asaph'. A maschil [sometimes 'maskil'] literally means 'instruction' and was a poem or song of contemplation, being an instruction to the singers and musicians. It occurs in the title of thirteen Psalms (32, 42, 44, etc.) and denotes a song enforcing some lesson of wisdom or piety, a didactic [teaching] song.

It is interesting that the number 13 signifies apostasy or rebellion in Scripture.¹ If you look at the maschil psalms they include topics regarding apostasy or rebellion, such as personal sin (Ps 32), being cast off by God (Ps 44) etc. So this psalm has something to teach us about apostasy.

Asaph means 'gatherer or collector'. He was a Levite and one of the leaders of David's choir (1 Chron 6:39); Psalms 50 and 73-83 are attributed to him. He is mentioned along with David as skilled in music, and a prophet (2 Chron 29:30, 'seer'). The sons of Asaph (1 Chron 25:1; 2 Chron 20:14; Ezra 2:41) were either his descendants, or a group of singers who were his disciples.

¹ Gen 14:4, 'In the thirteenth year they rebelled'. Ishmael, the rejected son of flesh not promise and later rebel, was thirteen when Abraham circumcised him to admit him into the covenant (Gen 17:25). Jericho was encompassed thirteen times by Israel's army before suffering punishment for its rebellion against God's law. The duration of the ten tribes of Israel from the day they rebelled against Rehoboam until the captivity was a multiple of 13 (390 years, or 30 x 13). The siege of Jerusalem lasted 390 days or 13 months.¹ Ezekiel was called to prophesy all this by lying on his side 390 days (Ezek 4:4-5). The gematria of 'Satan' in Hebrew is 364 or 13 x 28. The gematria of 'Satan' in Greek is 2197 or 13 x 169. The gematria of 'Beelzebub' (with article) is 598 or 13 x 46. The gematria of 'Belial' is 78 or 13 x 6. The gematria of 'Dragon' is 975 or 13 x 75. The gematria of 'the apostasy' (2 Thess 2:3) is 871 or 13 x 67.

We cannot be sure which Asaph this was; the historical allusions of Ps 74:6-8 almost certainly relate to the captivity, the author was, therefore, probably a descendant and namesake of Asaph.

The introductory request: help in suffering

1 O God, why have You cast *us* off forever? *Why* does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?

God can be angry with his people. Those that deny this have not read Scripture. Smoke implies fire and fire speaks of anger – thus God’s anger is said to smoke here. If it refers to the Babylonian captivity, then God was indeed angry with his people, who were exiled in punishment for apostasy.

The blessings of being in Christ do not mean that God cares nothing about our behaviour and failings. I explain this in my paper ‘Are Christians ever condemned?’.

In New Covenant terms this does not mean a casting off forever, but results in fatherly discipline, as explained for individuals in Hebrews 12. The severest type of judgment is the removal of rewards so that the believer enters heaven but with no responsibility in the new world. In some cases God takes the life of the sinning believer (such as Ananias and Sapphira). I have explained this in many papers, such as ones on rewards.

Asaph is, however, here talking of corporate Israel, which was eventually cast off completely (Matt 21:43), cursed (Mk 11:21, symbolically) and crushed to powder (Matt 21:44; Lk 20:18).

Similarly, churches can be disciplined severely by God and can be cast off. Individual believers within them are not castaway forever, but the church can be destroyed by God. We see examples of threats of this in Rev 2-3. The lampstand being removed is the withdrawal of the presence of God, of all spiritual life, from a church. I have seen this with my own eyes. The church may continue in the flesh by the works of men, but it has no value and is a dead thing. Believers in such dead churches waste their lives and enter heaven with little.

2 Remember Your congregation [lit. assembly], *which* You have purchased of old, The tribe of Your inheritance, *which* You have redeemed -- This Mount Zion where You have dwelt.

This is a plea to God from a godly man to save the body of God’s people that is in trouble ‘Assembly’ (‘synagogue’ in the Greek version) refers to the whole body or assembly of the nation.

Those of us in the church today, that can see what is happening in the rebellion of the churches against God’s word, need to intercede in a similar way.

The reference to where God has dwelled means that this is not a professing church today but God’s church, which has lost its way. This is strengthened by the mention of being redeemed and being God’s inheritance.

There are genuine believers in the apostate modern churches; however, it is not a historic apostate church in view (such as Roman Catholicism) but evangelical churches that have become apostate.

The problem: apostasy and enemy success

3 Lift up Your feet to the perpetual desolations. The enemy has damaged everything in the sanctuary.

Note how serious the damage is. The enemy had damaged everything in the sanctuary. In a like manner today, everything in church life has been damaged by the entrance of false teachings and practices. The worship is damaged, the teaching is damaging, fellowship has been ruined, good works are few, giving is not to the poor but to rich church leaders. We could go on and on.

‘The perpetual desolations’ means ‘ruins of perpetuity’. In other words for our situation, the historic works of godly men through generations of church history are being ruined by the inroads of heresy and apostasy today.

Historically, God’s material temple had been desecrated three times: by Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus, and Titus. The one before us in this psalm was by Nebuchadnezzar. Each of these should give us lessons to learn today.

4 Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place; They set up their banners *for* signs.

This is the nub of the problem, both then and now – the enemy is in the midst of the church.

People need to start seeing with spiritual eyes instead of fleshly ones. The problems in the churches are not external issues or mere failings and weaknesses, they are the result of real spiritual warfare. While many have been focused upon a false spiritual warfare and doing nonsensical fleshly things that are worthless, meanwhile the enemy has been infiltrating all the systems of the church and corrupting them from inside.

The enemy today is in the midst of the church. Satan is not an enemy raging threats from outside, but has infiltrated the heart of the church and has perverted all that goes on inside it.

‘Roar’ refers to the roaring of wild beasts and historically speaks of the war cry of those armies that profaned the temple. We could apply this metaphorically today to the roaring of many apostate things: such as Charismatic shouts, screams, roars, cries and so on which are part of the demonic deception that has encroached upon the modern church.

‘Meeting place’ is not the national ‘assembly’ but a local point of gathering by appointment. We could apply this to the local church or particular worshipping churches. It was used of the tabernacle – a tent of meeting. Thus the roaring is going on in the place where God meets his people.

‘They set up their ensigns for signs’ i.e. the enemy established his banners or standards indicating his sovereignty over God’s dwelling. This was a conquered place, the standards denoting the enemy’s rule over it. It was no longer a place sacred to God; it belonged to a demonic power. This is what has happened in the modern church. The signs in many churches (even some with literal banners) show that Satan has control not God.

5 They seem like men who lift up axes among the thick trees.

This is referring to the work of skilled men in destroying Jerusalem and the temple, such as breaking down the elaborate carved work; the spoilers destroyed the beauties of the temple with the violence of woodsmen.

The enemy is radical.² Unlike most church leaders he is not superficial and woolly, satisfied by top-show and not moral content. The enemy gets to the heart of the matter and does lasting damage. He is so thorough that most Christians in the midst of the corruption do not know that it is going on. Indeed, many Christians today are championing the very corruption that the enemy is peddling. He is laughing his socks off at the foolishness of church people.

6 And now they break down its carved work, all at once, with axes and hammers.

The carved work refers to the ornaments of the temple. The word used is the same word which in 1 Kg 6:29 is applied to the ornaments around the walls of the temple - the carved figures of cherubim, and palm trees, and open flowers. These were cut down, or knocked off, with axes and hammers. [Note this was equally done the Chaldeans (Babylonians) under Nebuchadnezzar, as intended here; by the Syrians under Antiochus, and by the Romans under Vespasian.]

The enemy ruins the work that took a lot of skill and time to establish. This is the hard work of previous generations of godly, spiritually gifted men that is smashed to pieces by demonically empowered leaders in the church. The enemy's task is to ruin the church; it smashes things up. Today this is the past work of godly church leaders that laid doctrinal foundations for the British church which is being destroyed.

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

Not satisfied by smashing things with hammers, the enemy also sets things on fire to destroy them permanently.

The real sin in the modern church is defilement, corruption. This is where the purity and holiness that God has established in the church is marred by evil. God hates corruption but the modern church is completely defiled by it.

8 They said in their hearts, "Let us destroy them altogether." They have burned up all the meeting places of God in the land.

All the meeting places (churches) are being burned up by the fires of satanic corruption, lies, false teaching and apostasy. The purpose of this is to destroy the church, to wipe it from the face of the earth.

Make no mistake, Satan, and those hordes that follow him in high places on earth, have a plan to destroy Christianity; it is being worked out in government policies and social reforms. Many Christians willingly sit and absorb this with no reaction, such as taking in

² Relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something; far-reaching or thorough. Symbolised by taking an axe to the roots.

all the fallacies, nonsense, rubbish and outright sin that floods into their minds through the television every night.

Aside

The fifth, sixth, and seventh verses historically parallel the ravages committed by the Babylonians; see: 2 Kg 25:4, 25:7-9, Jer 52:7, 52:18-19. Hammers and axes were used in the total ruin of Jerusalem and the removal of objects of value, especially gold, silver and bronze. These verses are what help us date the psalm.

The needs

9 We do not see our signs; *There is no longer any prophet; Nor is there any among us who knows how long.*

For Asaph 'signs' could be referring to the miracles that accompanied God's acts of saving the people in the past; or signs of the times that were failed to be observed in warning; or could be referring to the emblems of worship that were hacked down. These physical signs were items that pointed to true worship, true teaching; they were items with meaning and symbolism. They were the things designed by God to stimulate true worship and true meaning.

Regarding prophets, we do not know the exact time of this psalm. Before the exile there was Jeremiah, during the exile there were Daniel and Ezekiel. The ministry of some of these may well have been very local and not known to all. The date appears to be the time of the actual destruction of the temple (586) when Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel were either silent or their recent oracles not known to Asaph.³

We can apply the idea of signs further for us today. God has given his people signs to indicate his purposes. The real problem today is that Christians are not seeing the signs. Jesus warned us repeatedly to watch and to pray and to understand the signs of the times for example. God's word is full of signs and warnings. If you cannot see what is going on around you, how can you live your life correctly?

Church leaders are mostly to blame in this since they are not sending out warning signs to their people. They are not naming and shaming false teachers so the people have no understanding that this or that is doing them damage every day. People should be warned about teachers, books, CDs, DVDs, TV programmes, meetings and so on. Where are the true shepherds that protect the sheep?

As for genuine prophets that warn the people and lead the way in edifying them out of a mess, there are none to be seen - or very few: 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge', (Hos 4:6).

10 O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?

11 Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? *Take it out of Your bosom and destroy them.*

³ Nebuchadnezzar first subdued Israel in 605 BC after conquering Egypt, taking away prominent citizens, which may have included Daniel. He besieged Jerusalem from 599 BC; Jerusalem was conquered in 587 or 586 when the temple was destroyed. Between 586-580 BC Jeremiah ministered in Jerusalem and Egypt. Ezekiel probably began his ministry around 593.

It is natural for those who do see the problems to ask God how long this will go on⁴ and when God will act to preserve his honour. This is due to the difference in timescales between God's eternal purpose and our small perception of a part of it.

'Enemy' and 'adversary' are singular. The repeated desecrations of God's dwelling place are but the operations of one singular enemy, Satan. The same is true today.

The enemy that has been said to defile God's dwelling place (the church) is here said to blaspheme. A noticeable characteristic of the corruption perpetrated by the enemy in the church today is the widespread presence of blasphemy.

The hiding of the hand is a euphemism for God not acting. Asaph wanted God to withdraw his hand from his garments an act in power.

The character of God

12 For God *is* my King from of old, Working salvation in the midst of the earth.

13 You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters.

14 You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces, *And* gave him *as* food to the people inhabiting the wilderness.

15 You broke open the fountain and the flood; You dried up mighty rivers.

16 The day *is* Yours, the night also *is* Yours; You have prepared the light and the sun.

17 You have set all the borders of the earth; You have made summer and winter.

This is a lesson in how we should pray. We should focus upon the character and works of God, remembering who he is and how great he is. We should remind God of his mighty acts, especially of how he saved us from sin. Celebrating God's sovereignty is useful to get us into the right frame of mind for praying for the honour of God to be restored in the church, asking him to re-establish his honour for the sake of his name.

As an aside, notice that the killing of a Leviathan (which I maintain to be an aquatic dinosaur type of creature, not a crocodile) was given for food in the wilderness.⁵ Moses does not mention this, showing that there is far more behind the history than we are aware of just as there was far more to the life of Christ than the Gospels could record.⁶ That is, unless Asaph means the wild tribes that inhabited the wilderness and lived off sea creatures. Making 'sea serpents' and 'Leviathan' to refer to Pharaoh is a stretch too far, despite the poetry.

⁴ Rev 6:10, 'they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"". Hab 1:2, 'O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" and You will not save'. Ps 79:5, 'How long, LORD? Will You be angry forever?'

⁵ Leviathan is only mentioned by Job, the Psalms and Isaiah. Leviathan is a transliterated Hebrew word (liviathan), meaning 'twisted or coiled'. It is variously said to denote a dragon, a crocodile (supposed by moderns) a large animal that moves by writhing or wriggling, a whale (unlikely) or sea monster. See: Job 3:8, 41:1; Ps 104:26, 74:14; Isa 27:1 (here it may be metaphorical for Israel's enemies).

⁶ Jn 21:25, 'And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.'

Notes:

- ‘Salvation’ (v12) is plural and refers to the multiple acts of salvation applied to save God’s people; physical and temporal as well as spiritual and eternal salvation. The next verse is a reference to one of these acts of salvation – the Red Sea deliverance.
- ‘Divide’ (v13) is literally ‘break’.
- Some commentaries say that Leviathan is a reference to Pharaoh and his hosts;⁷ but this cannot be the case since Leviathan was given to the people as food.⁸ It is also a plural image) ‘heads’ (if referring to an animal, ‘heads’ may refer to features that resemble a head, not multiple heads).
- Verse 15: ‘the fountain and the flood; You dried up mighty rivers’ is referring to the River Jordan. The fountain could also refer to the water from the rock; the rocks at Horeb and at Kadesh, from whence water flowed as out as a fountain. The repeated idea is that God broke open obstacles to the people in the past, why can’t he do that now?
- Verses 16 and 17 refer to the sovereign dominion of God as the Creator.

The point is that Asaph is centring on the glory of God as sovereign and Creator. The basis of his intercession is the glory of God.

18 Remember this, *that* the enemy has reproached, O LORD, and *that* a foolish people has blasphemed Your name.

For Asaph it is the enemy (Babylonian army) that has reproached (reviled) the Lord and blasphemed his name. They are foolish because they do not know the true God and worship demons.

However, today although it is the enemy that has corrupted the church it is the Lord’s people who foolishly find themselves blaspheming God. This is incredibly serious and I see it everywhere in the church today. The obvious comment is that many in the church cannot be true believers to fall into blasphemy. But where are the church leaders who should be curtailing this blasphemy? In fact, they are at the forefront of blasphemy themselves.

This blasphemy takes on many forms. Sometimes it is actual blasphemous speech where leaders on a platform have adopted the language of the world and actually used blasphemous terms while leading the people. Sometimes it is blasphemous actions; behaviour that dishonours God while leading the people – such as a man leading worship while wearing a head covering. Sometimes it is blasphemous strategies and actions whereby churches are brought into disobedience to God through the commands of apostate leaders.

The final call for help

19 Oh, do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beast! Do not forget the life of Your poor forever.

20 Have respect to the covenant; for the dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty.

⁷ E.g. Adam Clarke, John Gill, JFB, etc.

⁸ Some say that ‘people’ here means desert creatures that ate the bodies of the Egyptians. This is a stretch too far, despite the fact that occasionally Scripture does use ‘people’ to apply to beasts and ‘beast’ to apply to people.

21 Oh, do not let the oppressed return ashamed! Let the poor and needy praise Your name.

The turtledove is a general symbol of a beloved friend or relative; it is a gentle, innocent and weak thing that needs protection. Here it is a symbol of the church, beloved by God.

The church is like a defenceless turtledove ravaged by a wild beast, thus the need to pray for God's grace to help us in our time of need. Only God can turn around the apostasy of the modern church in his good time; perhaps by the return of the Lord and the end of all things. The return of Christ is preceded by a terrible falling away (2 Thess 2:1-10); we do not know if this is the final apostasy or not.

Our prayers should focus upon the testimony of God in the church, asking God to remember his covenant. This is the critical matter today – God's honour which is being blasphemed in the church.

'The dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty', refers to the darkness of sin and paganism that lie outside of the place of God's covenant. Israel was supposed to be a beacon of light in a dark world; outside was paganism, full of cruelty.

The big problem in the modern church is that the darkness of paganism is no longer outside in the dark places of the earth but is actually inside the church. This was the devil's overarching plan; to despoil the church and mar God's testimony by bringing paganism into the church and get it adopted by foolish people claiming to be Christians. The Charismatic Movement, for example, has been nothing less than a Trojan Horse to bring all sorts of evils (mainly occultism and paganism) into the church.

An early type of this was when the Israelites, freshly redeemed from Egypt, built the Golden Calf and started worshipping what the pagan Egyptians had worshipped.⁹ That generation of Israelites that tested God was removed from the kingdom, excepting Joshua and Caleb (Heb 3-4).

'Ashamed' i.e. disappointed. 'Return', i.e. from seeking God. Note that it is the oppressed (broken), the poor and the needy that are seeking God and still praise his name. The church today is full of apostate leaders who are rich beyond measure, but it is the weak, afflicted, oppressed, poor and needy believers (i.e. those that are dependent upon God) that are pleading for God to act to glorify his name.

22 Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily.

23 Do not forget the voice of Your enemies; the tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually.

'Plead your own cause'; literally 'contend your own contention'. The true intercessor seeks God to act to defend his own honour; he pleads for the glory of God, not his own comforts.

Although it is the people of God that are attacked by the enemy, the real issue is that the enemy has attacked God and seeks to revile him daily. Instead of a constant testimony to God in the church, the devil seeks to have a constant reproach to God in the church. This is the voice of the wicked rising up ['tumult' = shouting] continually. In Asaph's time it was the clamour of the army despoiling the temple; in our day it is the shouting of paganism in the church.

⁹ The Egyptian god Apis, depicted as a bull, symbolising fertility and strength in war.

The psalmist understands fully that only God can successfully defend his people. The claims of modern Charismatics to be able to defeat the enemy by their fleshly and mystical spiritual warfare is a joke perpetrated by Satan himself. Our job is to stand on the ground of Christ and to let God fight for us. We resist the enemy individually but God defends us corporately.

Asaph also reminds God to remember the actions of the enemies of the church in his righteous judgment. It is Biblical to call upon God to repay with vengeance those who sin against him. We love our enemies to ensure that we walk righteously, but we seek vengeance by God upon those who war against his glory and honour. We need to understand the difference between being angry for selfish reasons (which is sin) and being righteously indignant about the sins of enemies of God (such as unrighteous governments that legislate sin).

Notice also that the rebellion against God in the church at that time was increasing continually. This is what we see today with alarm. The unprecedented and appalling apostasy of decades ago is being overtaken today by worse apostasy still. Arthur Pink walked away from a church that he considered as fully apostate in his time (1940s) but the falling away and heresy today is exponentially worse than those days, which seem calm by comparison.

The big difference between Asaph and us

While we can draw many lessons from Asaph's psalm, there is a great difference between a man under the Old Covenant and a man under the New Covenant.

Asaph may have had portions of the OT but probably no OT saint had many scrolls of the OT, which was not yet even complete or collated.¹⁰ At one point in Israel's history the whole law was lost for a time. Very few people would have had expensive vellum scrolls of any of the word of God.

Godly as he was, Asaph did not know the person of Jesus Christ. He had faith in a coming Messiah and trusted that God would bring a deliverer to his people. His faith was in a future coming king and was genuine, but he did not know that king personally and had not heard his teaching. Asaph had to learn from the shadows of Christ.

Asaph lived before the cross. He trusted in the power of God's promised redemption, which was then mediated through the types of bloody animal sacrifices. He partook of the benefits of forgiveness by faith based upon the value of a future redemption purchased by Christ. He did not understand the fulness of what Christ's actual propitiation meant.

Crucially, Asaph did not have the Holy Spirit indwelling him. The Spirit could only be fully given to God's people after the cross, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus (Jn 7:39).¹¹ This was a coronation gift to the body of Christ after Christ was enthroned at the right hand of God.

What all this means is that believers today have far greater advantages than OT saints who longed to see the glory of what the New Covenant would mean (1 Pt 1:10). Asaph and his companions were faithful, despite their disadvantages; believers today have much more reason to be faithful.

¹⁰ The books of the OT would have required many long scrolls.

¹¹ The Spirit came upon OT saints to perform tasks, such as building the tabernacle, prophesying or writing Scripture, but this was not a permanent indwelling in all saints.

This means that the apostasy in the church is far more wicked than any apostasy in the OT. Asaph was bemoaning the advances of the pagan enemies of Israel into the temple, today we have supposed Christians desecrating God's house with paganism.

It behoves those of us who know the Lord Jesus to make him pre-eminent in our lives and stand as a testimony against the evils going on in the churches today. Christ must be Lord. Our lives must proclaim that Jesus is Lord in all that we do, and particularly when we gather as the local church.

Conclusion

There are lessons in history from certain things that have occurred in the past just as they occur in the present. Sometimes there is an escalation in the power of such events but the principle of the events are the same. There is nothing new under the sun (Eccles 1:9). Thus we learn from the past if we are prudent.

Apostasy of the church is nothing new, there have been multiple occasions in the past from the example of Israel in the OT through the generations of church history right up to today. We must learn from these.

For instance, we learn that dead churches produce dead people; past a certain point and they cannot be restored or reformed. Christians must not stay in dead churches but must flee from them.¹² The reformers learned this in the Reformation. What began as a movement for reform of the Roman Church soon became a new movement of new churches.

Another is that there has to be a prophetic leader to lead God's people away from apostasy into safety. If there is no leader it just does not happen. Thus it behoves God's people to pray for such a leader. The power of the Reformation was that God raised up a number of great men for several generations (1st continental generation: Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Bucer, Farel; 2nd British generation: Knox, Ames, Perkins, Tyndale, Cranmer; 3rd British generation: the later Elizabethan / Stuart Puritans etc.).

This generation must learn from history and learn from Scripture. It must put God first and obey his law. It must worship Jesus in Spirit and truth. It must celebrate the word of God as our final authority in all things. But we must stand together in faith and dispel all the works of darkness that have despoiled the church. We must contend for the faith with all the saints and stand against corruption.

All glory to the Lord Jesus. May he be praised in the church.

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¹² Rev 18:4, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues'.