

We are not given the occasion for the writing of this psalm, but some commentators believe it was written in the aftermath of a victory that God gave Jerusalem against an enemy army. This psalm celebrates God's overwhelming strength and power against the enemies of His people as well as His absolute sovereignty over all the earth.

To the chief Musician on Neginoth, A Psalm or Song of Asaph.

“To the chief Musician” – This psalm was written to be used by the “chief musician” (the song or worship leader) in the worship of the LORD.

“on Neginoth [a stringed instrument]” – Likely an instruction on how this psalm was to be performed. Neginoth may not have been a specific musical instrument but a class of stringed instruments.

“A Psalm or Song of Asaph” – This psalm was apparently written to be suitable for reading or singing. Asaph is described as the son of Berechiah (1 Chr. 6:39) and was apparently was one of the choir leaders at the tabernacle when David was king (1 Chr. 6:31-39). Several psalms list him as their author.

1 In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel.

“In Judah is God known [to be revealed; to make oneself known]” – Asaph states that the people of Judah know God, but the only way that they (or we) could know God was because He had revealed Himself to them. God's revelation of Himself to humanity takes two forms: (1) General revelation – God reveals Himself through His creation (Psa. 19:1-3; Rom. 1:20); (2) Special revelation – God reveals Himself personally to men in order to lead them to salvation. God chose to reveal Himself primarily to Israel, beginning with Abraham (Rom. 3:1-2; Eph. 2:11-12). The Bible is an example of God's special revelation.

“his name is great in Israel” – The name of God was not just another in a pantheon of gods that Israel worshiped. Rather, His name was the only name that Israel worshiped. When Israel was right with God, all worship was focused on the LORD God of Israel.

2 In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion.

Not only has God revealed Himself to Israel, but He has chosen Salem (Jerusalem) to be where He will dwell (**2 Chr. 6:6** “*But I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there; and have chosen David to be over my people Israel*”). Jerusalem was the center of worship of God in Asaph's day and will be again when Christ establishes His millennial kingdom on earth. Zion is another reference to Jerusalem, specifically the mountain in Jerusalem where the temple was built. Asaph is describing Jerusalem as the place where the LORD resided and so any aggression against Jerusalem was also aggression against the LORD.

3 There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Selah.

The imagery here is that of God defeating the armies of the enemy who would attempt to attack Jerusalem. No enemy could succeed against Jerusalem when Israel was trusting in God. Most commentators believe that “Selah” is a musical instruction to pause and reflect on what has been said. Perhaps Asaph wants us to stop and consider how powerful God is and how futile it was to attack the city where the LORD dwelt.

4 Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey.

The Hebrew word for “glorious” means “*to be illuminated by light*” and the one for “excellent” refers to greatness in the sense of majesty. The “mountains of prey” may refer to piles of dead enemy soldiers. God exhibits His superior glory in defeating the countless enemy soldiers.

5 The stouthearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands.

“The stouthearted [valiant; mighty] are spoiled [plundered]” – These mighty men of the enemy's army are usually able to win the battle and be the ones doing the plundering, but they are no match for God. He has defeated them and now they are being plundered.

“they have slept their sleep” – The sleep of death. They did not survive their attack on God and His people.

“and none of the men of might have found their hands” – The enemy thought they could win but God has neutralized their army so that even their mighty men cannot “find their hands” (fight or defend themselves).

6 At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep.

God is so powerful that all He has to do is speak and the chariot (and its driver) and the horse pulling it will immediately drop dead. This may look forward to the return of Jesus Christ at the battle of Armageddon when He rescues Israel from their enemies (**Rev. 19:15** “*And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God*”).

7 Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?

No one can stand up to God and prevent Him from acting when He is angry. The enemies of God will become afraid when they realize that they cannot win against Him (**Rev. 6:15-17** “*And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?*”).

8 Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared, and was still, 9 When God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth. Selah.

“Thou didst cause judgment [condemnation] to be heard from heaven” – God pronounced His judgment upon His enemies.

“the earth feared, and was still [quiet]” – Those on the earth could not ignore it when the judgment of God was pronounced. They had to stop in fear and listen to what was being said.

“When God arose to judgment [to decide a case; execute justice], to save all the meek [poor; weak] of the earth” – The wicked of the earth had to fear and be still without protest when God arises to give justice to the poor and weak people of the world by punishing those who oppress them. This also looks forward to the return of Christ.

“Selah” – The wicked should stop and consider these things because they will not escape God’s judgment of their evil deeds.

10 Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee” – God gets glory because men’s wrath against Him accomplishes nothing. He is sovereign and righteous and wicked men cannot change that no matter how much they complain and express their anger. Also, the wrath of some will turn into praise when they repent.

“the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain [to gird oneself with a belt]” – Those who don’t repent will still bring glory to God as He wears their wrath with pride like a belt. The wrath of the wicked against a sovereign God brings Him glory, showing His absolute power is unaffected by their protests and anger.

11 Vow, and pay unto the LORD your God: let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared.

“Vow, and pay unto the LORD your God” – Asaph calls on us to make and keep vows of love, loyalty and thankfulness to God.

“let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared” – God is One that ought to be feared and He is worthy of our gifts to show our love for Him. God is to be feared because He is righteous and punishes the wicked.

12 He shall cut off the spirit of princes: *he is* terrible to the kings of the earth.

“He shall cut off [enclose; to make inaccessible] the spirit of princes” – This speaks to God breaking the spirit of those who would rebel against Him. These princes are lifted up in their pride and self-will and yet God will humble them.

“he is terrible [to instill fear or astonishment] to the kings of the earth” – It does not matter how powerful men may become (like kings), because God is still able to cause them to be fearful of His power. The most powerful king on earth must still bow in fear and reverence before Almighty God.