

Introduction:

Perhaps the hardest place for any of us to live is in the interim. That is, in the interim between God giving His promises and God fulfilling His promises. God's covenant promise is to deliver us from sin, setting us free, and leading us to our inheritance in heaven where tears, trauma, trials, temptations, and tragedy cease. Yet, here we live in a world full of these things. Sometimes, the onslaught can seem overwhelming. Satan wants us to doubt God's power, providence, and promises. Regrettably, Satan has sharpened his skills, and he is good at getting us to abandon God. The interim is a dangerous place for us, and yet, it is where we live. So, how can we survive? Many of the psalms demonstrate exactly this place. We could probably study any number of them, but a really good one to examine is **Psalm 73**. Asaph was definitely living in the interim. **Psalm 73:1-14** displays a man who knows God's promises to bless His people and curse their enemies. However, even though Asaph had been faithful to the Lord's covenant, his life was filled with hardship while those who betrayed God seemed to have easy lives. Consider five keys demonstrated by Asaph for surviving this interim.

Discussion:

I. Go to God's sanctuary.

- A. In **Psalm 73:17**, Asaph explains that he had spent a great deal of time meditating on this quandary. His feet had almost stumbled and slipped. What saved him was going to God's sanctuary. Of course, for Asaph, this refers to going to the tabernacle or temple of God. He heard the prayers of the priests, the songs of the singers, and witnessed the sacrifices offered to bring about forgiveness, to express thanksgiving, to demonstrate devotion. He witnessed this worship and was himself involved in it. The sanctuary of God saved Asaph from his own despair.
- B. For us, who are without the physical temple, this talks about turning to God's church, His New Covenant temple. Notice what it says in **Hebrews 12:22-24**. When we turn to God's church, we are going to the heavenly Jerusalem, the place of God's sanctuary. Notice also **Ephesians 2:18-22**. Christ's church is the temple of the New Covenant. And each congregation is to be a microcosmic representation of that temple. If you want to survive the interim, spend time in God's temple, spend time with God's church. Edify and be edified. Worship and witness the worship of others. Sing the songs and listen to them being sung. Pray and listen to the prayers of others. Participate in the memorial of Jesus's sacrifice on your behalf to grant your forgiveness and secure the promise of eternity for you.
- C. If you've been part of Christ's church for any significant period of time, you've probably heard multiple sermons on **Hebrews 10:25**. It is really easy to try to take that verse and beat people up with it, especially those who make a habit of forsaking assemblies (especially the ones on Sunday night). I have no desire to do that. If I get you to show up just because I convince you it is a rule, it probably isn't doing you any good anyway. But, understand from Asaph how important each assembly is. God has encouraged us to assemble because it helps us survive the interim. Don't abandon that support by missing. Rather, go to God's sanctuary as much as you can.

II. Discern the end.

- A. According to **Psalm 73:17**, when Asaph went to the sanctuary, he discerned the end of the wicked and the righteous. **Psalm 73:18-20** describes that end. The wicked will fall. They will be destroyed. They may spend a lifetime in ease, but their destruction will come in a moment. The Lord has his reasons for letting the wicked enjoy pleasure for a time. Perhaps it is to allow them fill up the fullness of their sins. Perhaps it is to give them time to repent. But if they do not, their destruction will come. He repeats this in **Psalm 73:27**.
- B. On the other hand, in **Psalm 73:28**, he says, "...it is good to be near God..." This is reminiscent of **Ecclesiastes 8:12-13**. We can look to the end. The world is topsy-turvy. It doesn't measure up to justice as we would have it. Many times the wicked prosper and the righteous founder. But, in the end, the judge of all the earth will do right. As **Ecclesiastes 12:14** says, God will bring every deed into judgment. **II Thessalonians 1:5-10** drives this home for us. The wicked who prosper now will not do so forever. The righteous who struggle now

will not do so forever. If you want to survive the interim, you have to hang on to God's promise and look forward to the day it is fulfilled. It will be fulfilled.

III. Seek and heed God's counsel.

- A. In **Psalm 73:23-24**, Asaph explained that he would be led by God's counsel. He would rely on God's lead. In other words, having become convinced that God will keep His promises, he would simply do whatever God had revealed for him. He wouldn't question God or dispute with Him. He would simply obey Him.
- B. As **Psalm 1:1-6** reveals, if we want to survive in the interim we will abandon the counsel of evildoers and disobeyers. Instead, we will meditate on God's Word, drinking it in, soaking it up, and bearing fruit from it. If you ever doubt the need for this, spend some time reading, studying, and meditating on **Psalm 119**. Many view this psalm as simply a didactic psalm extolling the virtues of God's Word. Not so. It is a lament of someone living in the interim. In **Psalm 119:25**, his soul clings to dust. In **Psalm 119:50-51**, he is in affliction, derided by the insolent. In **Psalm 119:67-71**, the insolent smear him with lies and he is afflicted. The list of verses goes on. Here is a man who is living in the interim. But what is he doing throughout this whole time? He is hanging on the Word and counsel of the Lord (cf. **Psalm 119:14-16**). If we will survive in the interim, we need to get in God's Word and heed His counsel.

IV. Let God's seeming absence increase your desire.

- A. In **Psalm 73:25-26**, despite Asaph's struggles, he claims his greatest desire is God. This suggests something to me. When we look around and recognize that we aren't in heaven, we will go in one of two directions. When we look around and wonder if God is really there, we have one of two options. We either, one, decide God's a bum and we don't want Him or, two, we realize what is missing and increase our longing for Him.
- B. As illustration, imagine a soldier on an extended assignment in a foreign field waging war. He knows that he isn't at home. He could on the one hand just be upset that folks back home sent him over there and build up resentment for home. Or he could remember that home is what he is fighting for and longing to return to. His absence increases his desire.
- C. We are soldiers on the battlefield. We aren't at home. Our citizenship is in heaven (**Philippians 3:20**). We can either resent home for letting us stay on the battlefield, or we can be like Asaph and let our absence for home simply increase our desire to be there and do whatever we can to preserve our place there. As stated in **Psalm 42:1-2**, we see this very thing. Like a deer panting for the water, we take delight in God and when He seems distant and absent instead of resenting, we long for him even more.

V. Tell others about God's work

- A. Finally, in **Psalm 73:28**, Asaph ends this psalm by claiming he would take refuge in God so he could tell others about God's work. Asaph's survival plan entailed not simply meditating on what God was doing and would do but on letting others know. This contrasted with his earlier anxious state when in **Psalm 73:15** he considered telling the generation how useless it was to serve God. Once he entered God's sanctuary and considered the end, he realized that sharing his fretting, anxious fear would have been a betrayal. Instead, he was going to be loyal to his God and his generation by sharing the fullness of God's real work on behalf of His people. Which is why this psalm begins with "Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart" (**Psalm 73:1**, ESV).
- B. If we want to survive in the interim, we can't just meditate on God and His works. We can't just believe in God and His works. We have to talk about God and His works. We need to confess God to those around us. If for no other reason, we need to do this because if we want Jesus to confess and acknowledge us, we must confess and acknowledge Him (**Matthew 10:32-33**). However, there is more to it than this. The more we talk about God and His will and way, the more entrenched it becomes in our minds, the deeper it takes hold. How often have we heard that we learn most when we are the teachers? And that is exactly right. When we are the confessors and professors, it delves into our hearts the deepest because when we tell others, we are reminding ourselves.

Conclusion:

God has made great promises. But sometimes Satan clouds our vision, hoping we will lose sight of them. Right now we are living in the interim between when God made His promises and when God fulfills them. It is a dangerous place to be, but we can survive. Spend time in God's sanctuary, remember the end, seek and heed God's counsel, let God's seeming absence increase your longing, and tell others about the work of God. This is your survival plan. How are you doing with it?