

Psalm 76:1-12

"In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel. In Salem also is His tabernacle, And His dwelling place in Zion. There He broke the arrows of the bow, The shield and sword of battle. Selah. You are more glorious and excellent Than the mountains of prey. The stouthearted were plundered; They have sunk into their sleep; And none of the mighty men have found the use of their hands. At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob, Both the chariot and horse were cast into a dead sleep.

You, Yourself, are to be feared; And who may stand in Your presence When once You are angry? You caused judgment to be heard from heaven; The earth feared and was still, When God arose to judgment, To deliver all the oppressed of the earth. Selah. Surely the wrath of man shall praise You; With the remainder of wrath You shall gird Yourself. Make vows to the LORD your God, and pay them; Let all who are around Him bring presents to Him who ought to be feared. He shall cut off the spirit of princes; He is awesome to the kings of the earth."

Farful Awe

It is usually a quiet and pleasant experience to stand on the bridge above Muskoka Falls and watch the babbling brook cascade down the ravine to the Muskoka River off in the distance. However, during spring run off, this peaceful experience turns to fearful awe as the quiet brook is changed into a rushing torrent, spewing mist high above the bridge, foaming with rage as it engulfs the immediate area with it's incessant roar and shakes the ground with it's force. Standing above this spectacle gains the viewer a new respect for the bridge railing, knowing that the slightest carelessness, placing spectator into contact with that torrent, would mean certain death. This sense of awe brings great care in conduct.

In Scripture, this "sense of awe" is termed "אָרֵ" (yaw-ray) and describes the proper response of man before Almighty God (Psalms 76:7). Here, Asaph refers to a deep sense of reverence and awe resulting from God being known in Judah (verse 1), where the people trusted Him to deliver them from battle, and God intervened with power and might. This practical, active fear of God caused the midwives of Israel to risk their own lives while protecting the children rather than report their births and be destroyed. Such fear produced Israel's desire for righteous living and was learned through the reading of Scripture: "when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people--men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns--so that they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law." (Deuteronomy 31:11-12 NIV).

There was a day when God descended upon Mount Sinai in thunder and lightning and thick cloud to give Moses the record of this law. The people trembled with fear in the presence of Almighty God, and rightly so, because to approach meant death (see Exodus 20,21). Those of Israel who held that occasion within their minds learned to fear the LORD and were blessed. Nevertheless, many ceased to fear the Lord (2 Kings 17:25) and found only emptiness.

So it is in our present society; emptiness from fearlessness. How our world needs to cast it's eyes anew upon the Lord, to see afresh the glory of God: "For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD? Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings? In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them." (Psalms 89:6-9 NIV). God does not change. The same message given to Israel in it's forgetfulness is applicable to all today: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline" (Proverbs 1:7 NIV).

What is my response:
