

Israel's Hymnal
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PSALM SEVENTY-FOUR

[Pss 74:1] O God, why hast thou cast (us) off for ever? Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?

[Pss 74:2] Remember thy congregation, which thou hast gotten of old, Which thou hast redeemed to be the tribe of thine inheritance; (And) mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt.

[Pss 74:3] Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual ruins, All the evil that the enemy hath done in the sanctuary.

[Pss 74:4] Thine adversaries have roared in the midst of thine assembly; They have set up their ensigns for signs.

[Pss 74:5] They seemed as men that lifted up Axes upon a thicket of trees.

[Pss 74:6] And now all the carved work thereof They break down with hatchet and hammers.

[Pss 74:7] They have set thy sanctuary on fire; They have profaned the dwelling-place of thy name (by casting it) to the ground.

[Pss 74:8] They said in their heart, Let us make havoc of them altogether: They have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land.

[Pss 74:9] We see not our signs: There is no more any prophet; Neither is there among us any that knoweth how long.

[Pss 74:10] How long, O God, shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?

[Pss 74:11] Why drawest thou back thy hand, even thy right hand? (Pluck it) out of thy bosom (and) consume (them).

[Pss 74:12] Yet God is my King of old, Working salvation in the midst of the earth.

[Pss 74:13] Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: Thou brakest the heads of the sea-monsters in the waters.

[Pss 74:14] Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces; Thou gavest him to be food to the people inhabiting the wilderness.

[Pss 74:15] Thou didst cleave fountain and flood: Thou driedst up mighty rivers.

[Pss 74:16] The day is thine, the night also is thine: Thou hast prepared the light and the sun.

[Pss 74:17] Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: Thou hast made summer and winter.

[Pss 74:18] Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O Jehovah, And that a foolish people hath blasphemed thy name.

[Pss 74:19] Oh deliver not the soul of thy turtle-dove unto the wild beast: Forget not the life of thy poor for ever.

[Pss 74:20] Have respect unto the covenant; For the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of violence.

[Pss 74:21] Oh let not the oppressed return ashamed: Let the poor and needy praise thy name.

[Pss 74:22] Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: Remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee all

the day.

[Pss 74:23] Forget not the voice of thine adversaries: The tumult of those that rise up against thee ascendeth continually.

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THE DEVASTATION OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL AND PRAYER OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE FOR DELIVERANCE

I. The devastation of Israel

From verse 1 we learn that the people of Israel will ask why God has cast them off forever and why His anger perpetually smokes against them. The first question implies that the nation has been cast off for a long time. The second assumes that God has been indignant against them in fury.

A. Exposition of the text

According to verse 2 the people implore the Lord to remember His congregation which He has "gotten of old," and which He redeemed to be the tribe of His inheritance, and to remember Mount Zion wherein He has formerly dwelt. The congregation which He got of old is without doubt the people of Israel. He went down into Egypt and delivered them from their servitude. He redeemed them to be the tribes of His inheritance. On this point see Deuteronomy 32:8,9. God selected the people of Israel above all other nations to be the tribes of His inheritance. The people pray that the Lord will remember Mount Zion wherein He has dwelt. The implication is that He has forgotten to be gracious to His people and seemingly has forgotten Zion, because He no longer dwells there. These words assume that He has forsaken His ancient people--at least temporarily.

In verse 3 the petitioners implore the Lord to lift up His feet to the perpetual ruins--to all the evil that the enemy has done in the sanctuary, the Temple. This verse presupposes that the enemy has wrought great

havoc throughout the land, especially in regard to the Temple. Those who have perpetrated such atrocities and committed such acts of vandalism are the very enemies of God himself. They roar in their wrath and indignation in the midst of His assembly. Moreover, they set up their ensigns and insignia everywhere. From the fourth verse it is evident that the ones who perpetrate these things are avowed enemies of God, atheists. To the psalmist, who beheld this vision, they are like lumber men who lift up their axes upon a thicket of trees in wanton destruction. Thus these men go into the sanctuary of God and ruthlessly destroy it; for in verse 6 they are said to destroy with their hatchets and hammers the carved work of the Temple. Their fury knows no bounds, until they actually set fire to the sacred structure and burn it to the ground. Then their hatred for God's Chosen People expresses itself in the exclamation, "Let us make havoc of them altogether." Anti-Semitism burst forth anew and an effort is made to exterminate the Jews. In order to do this, they, according to verse 8, burned down "all the synagogues of God in the land"--Palestine. This passage assumes the existence of synagogues throughout the country.

Such wanton destruction removes all signs of Jewish civilization according to verse 9. Moreover, from the time here foreseen there will be no more prophets in Israel. This verse assumes that the prophets are in Israel up to the time foreseen; but after this they are no longer among the people.

Again in verse 10 the plaintive question is asked,

"How long, O God, shall the adversary reproach?
Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?"

The prophets and the psalmists constantly asked this question with reference to the Lord's delaying His action against His enemies and His coming to save them.

Finally this section of Psalm 74 closes with the exhortation:

"Why drawest thou back thy hand, even thy right hand?
Pluck it out of thy bosom and consume them." (vs. 11).

Thus the people of Israel pray to the Lord to take the situation in hand and solve the national problem.

B. The time of the fulfillment

As to the time when this prophecy is fulfilled, different answers are given. Some scholars say that the psalmist was talking of the destruction of the Jewish state and Temple under Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. Still others are certain it forecast the desolations and the indignities of the Syrians under Antiochus Epiphanies. Still other commentators think that it referred to the Roman occupation and seizure of the land in the war of 70 A.D. There are still others who are convinced that this is a prediction of a future desolation. Let us look briefly at these theories.

It could not refer to the Babylonian siege because the synagogues were not in the land at the time that Nebuchadnezzar invaded the country and devastated it. Neither could it refer to the indignities and atrocities of Antiochus Epiphanies at the time of the Maccabean revolt; for the Syrians did not destroy the Temple. They committed great havoc throughout the country. Antiochus permitted blasphemous acts in connection with the Temple service, but he did not destroy the Temple itself.

Neither can we see in the Roman invasion of Israel and the subsequent subjugation of the country to them the fulfillment of this prediction. Titus, who conquered and took Jerusalem, gave strict orders that the Temple should not be molested. He did within his power to preserve it. Contrary to his orders it was destroyed. In view of these and other things we may be confident that this psalm does not refer to the Roman occupation and domination.

Since this prophecy has never been fulfilled, we may assume that it will yet be fulfilled in the future. It assumes the existence of the Temple at the time of the fulfillment. According to Isaiah 66:1-5 the Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Our Lord, in His Olivet Discourse (Matt., chap. 24 and 25) assumes its existence in the end time. The Apostle Paul, in II Thessalonians, chapter 2, likewise assumes the same thing. John, in Revelation, chapter 11, spoke about the Temple in Jerusalem. Thus we may be certain that the Jews will rebuild it in the end time, and that it will be profaned and treated as set forth in Psalm 74. Those who carry out the details mentioned here are indeed enemies of God. When we study this passage in the light of related ones, we are confident that the ones whom the psalmist saw in vision are none other than the cohorts of the Antichrist. Moreover, there are many synagogues of the Jews throughout the land of Israel at the present time. They are constantly being built.

When we read verse 9 concerning there being no more prophets in the land and compare it with Revelation, chapter 11, we come to the conclusion that the prophets that are mentioned here are the ones spoken of in the Revelation passage. According to most Bible interpreters these two witnesses are probably Moses and Elijah who will engage in their ministry during the first half of the Tribulation and who will be killed in the middle of that terrible day of wrath. But after three and half days their bodies will arise from the streets in Jerusalem and will ascend to heaven in the sight of men.

II. A backward glance at God's deliverance in the past (vss. 12-17)

It is strengthening indeed to one's faith, when one approaches God concerning the solution of some difficult problem, to rehearse before the Lord His actions in unraveling some difficult situation of the past. In my own personal experience I have found it strengthening to my faith thus to recount His wonderful dealings with me and with others--especially with biblical characters. A similar experience is involved in Psalm 74. By inspiration its author was enabled to take a backward glance at the devastation which was wrought when the earth was wrecked as is set forth in Genesis 1:2. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth but the latter became wrecked. After that catastrophe the Lord God Omnipotent began to work salvation as we shall presently see.

A. Exposition of the text

Notwithstanding the fact that Israel will be in the direst condition of all her history and will be aware of that fact, she will still hold on to God--that is, the faithful remnant--and will recount before Him His starting redemption from the very beginning. Thus in verse 12 we read:

Yet God is my King of old,
Working salvation in the midst of the earth.

God is supreme and always will continue to be. He is mounted upon His throne of omnipotence, righteousness, and justice. Although He is transcendent in glory and is supremely happy and contented apart from all of His creation, nevertheless He is vitally interested in everything that pertains to His creatures and creation. Hence, when the destruction mentioned above became an actuality, He began working salvation in the midst of the earth. He put His forces in action, figuratively speaking, to remove the debris and to rebuild the fallen structure. Since Satan and all the angels whom God created were free moral agents and since certain ones of them had chosen to rebel against Him, He respected their own personalities, allowing them to continue to have their power of free choice. There was therefore a moral problem involved in His working salvation in the midst of the earth. Had it been simply a question of power or wisdom, He could have dealt with that special situation in a moment of time. Respecting therefore His creatures and the endowments which He has bestowed upon them, the Lord began the tedious--if I may be allowed to use this expression--task of slowly working out man's redemption and deliverance from the predicament into which Satan and his rebel cohorts had dashed him. That the psalmist in his thinking goes back to the time of which we read in Genesis, chapter 1, becomes evident by laying down Psalm 74:12-17 beside the Genesis account and scrutinizing them together. Such a comparison will lead the earnest truth seeker to the conclusion that the dividing of the sea mentioned in verse 13 of the psalm is a reference to the division of the waters of Genesis, chapter 1, which occurred on day two. When verse 15, which speaks of the cleaving of the flood and the drying up of the mighty rivers is compared with the historical record in the Genesis account, one instantly sees that this verse is speaking about the work of the third day. By the same type of investigation we see that verse 16 is an echo of the work of the fourth day. In this connection let us remember that the six days of labor mentioned in Genesis, chapter 1, are not "six days of creation," but are "six days of reconstruction," during which God was repairing, to a certain extent the damage which was wrought by the original catastrophe.

In verse 13 and 14 of Psalm 74 we see mention made of the sea monsters and of leviathan with whom Jehovah dealt drastically on the second day of reconstruction. Who are these monsters? When we study this passage in connection with Job, chapters 40, 41, we see that these can be none other than Satan and his cohorts--for in these chapters these evil, wicked, rebellious spirits are represented under the symbolism of great sea monsters.

After the removal of certain portions of the waters which enveloped the globe and their being placed above the firmament, there were still waters upon the surface of the earth. According to the Genesis account on the third day the Lord brought all these waters into one place, which He called the sea, and the dry land appeared. This very work is mentioned in verse 15 but in the psalm nothing is said about the beginning of the vegetable kingdom as is recorded in the Genesis account. Of course the ancient record supplements this one.

In verse 16 and 17 of this psalm the writer is discussing the subject of the night and the day and the seasons of summer and winter. According to the record in Genesis the Lord made the sun, moon, and the stars to govern the night and day, beginning with the fourth day. Let us note the fact very carefully that the Genesis account does not say that God *created* the sun, moon, and stars on that day--as some have erroneously supposed. These heavenly bodies were created *in the beginning* as we are told in Genesis 1:1. When the catastrophe which hit the earth occurred, darkness enveloped the earth and continued until the fourth day. The light of the first three days was produced miraculously, but on the fourth day the light from the sun, moon, and stars penetrated the darkness and began the natural order which we call evening and morning, or the succession of day and night.

In the Lord's repairing the wreckage He was simply carrying out His prearranged plan which, humanly speaking, had been upset by the rebellion of Satan and his cohorts. Their insurrection, let it be remembered, was no surprise to the Lord; for He knew the end from the beginning and made His calculations accordingly. Thus in His labors of the six days of reconstruction the Lord began to work salvation or deliverance in the earth. On the sixth day He created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, and thus began the human family. Satan, the old rebel and adversary of God, seduced man into sinning and introduced an element foreign to the original creation into the world. This power we call sin, which is used by Satan in his fight against the Almighty. Throughout the centuries and millenniums God has been working salvation in the earth in that He has wrought out the plan of redemption and has been directing the course of history toward the great consummation of the era which is out before us--the great Millennial Age--when the glory of God shall encircle the earth as the waters cover the sea.

B. The reason for the special use of this message

As suggested at the beginning of this section, the Lord introduces this explanation into the psalm in order to show that He understands the situation in which the nation of Israel will find herself, and that He is overruling at that very time and will work out everything for the good of those who constitute the faithful remnant. By the introduction of this historical situation the Lord allows us to see that in the end time there will be not only the enemies of Israel--the Antichrist with all his cohorts, the Anti-Semites--but also a host of evil spirits (Satan and his legions) aligned against Himself and against Israel. In view of the tremendous forces and powers marshaled and in view of the further fact that the situation involves great moral issues as well as the Almighty's respecting the free agency of these forces of Satan, we see that this section of Psalm 74 throws light upon the entire situation of the end time period. Moreover, it is inserted here to give the remnant of Israel a sure basis of faith to trust God and to hold out heroically under such trying circumstances. These individuals will, having been taught the truth of God at that time, be able to understand and appreciate their situation and in faith will stand still to see the salvation of Jehovah--just as Moses exhorted the Hebrews when they came to the Red Sea. There God performed a miracle for them and wrought deliverance, at the same time destroying their enemies. In a manner similar--but on a far greater scale--will God give deliverance to His ancient people who trust Him.

III. Israel's prayer for deliverance (vss. 18-23)

A. Exposition of the text

In verse 18-23 we find one of the marvelous prayers which the remnant of Israel will present to the Lord when they find themselves in the situation described above. In various psalms we find petitions recorded which they will make at this future time. We also find the confession of their national sin which they will make before God. This petition begins in verse 18 by their calling the Lord's attention to the opposition, the reproaches, and the blasphemies of the enemy against God Himself. In verse 19 we see that they will pray that God will deliver the soul of His turtledove to the wild beast. The term beast, when used symbolically, signifies a civil government--the Antichrist and his organized opposition to Israel. That turtledove in this passage refers to Israel is evident from the second line of verse 19, since it is according to the principles of Hebrew poetry parallel to and is explanatory of the first line. Thus Israel is here represented as a turtledove.

In verse 20 they call the Lord's attention to the covenant into which He has entered with the nation. God is still respecting that covenant and will enter into a new one (Jer. 31:31) with the penitent portion of the nation. Again, in verse 21 the remnant will pray for deliverance and ask that the oppressed not return disappointed. This petition is followed in verse 22 by their pleading to the Lord to arise and plead His own cause. The Antichrist will not only be opposed to the Jews, but he will also rise up in opposition to the Almighty himself.

The petition closes with a fervent request that God forget not the voice of His own adversaries and the tumult of those that rise up against Him. The Lord takes cognizance of all attitudes, words, and actions of men and will deal with each according to the merits of his case.

When Israel thus comes before the Lord and pleads for, not only her own cause, but also for the glory and honor of God, He, the Lord Omnipotent will hear and answer her petition.

B. Corroborative testimony

In connection with the prayer found in the last section of our psalm the reader would do well to study especially Psalm 80, which is one of the petitions that the remnant will make at this future time. One should also study Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and Isaiah 63:7-64:12. These passages constitute the penitential national confession of the remnant.

All these scriptures presuppose that the truth concerning the martyrdom of the Lord Jesus Christ and Israel's national sin will have been given to her. The earnest souls of the nation will see the truthfulness of the message and will turn to God in penitential faith, imploring deliverance. When they thus take this attitude, God, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, will come and save them, making her the head of the nations instead of the tail as at the present time. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem--and also work to that end by giving the truth of the message to the Chosen People.