

Israel's Place in the Plan of God
 The Songs of Ascent, Psalms 120-134
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Psalm 129

The Age-Long Suffering of Israel

1. Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth up, Let Israel now say,
2. Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth up:
 Yet they have not prevailed against me.
3. The plowers plowed upon my back; They made long their furrows.
4. Jehovah is righteous: He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.
5. Let them be put to shame and turned backward, All they that hate Zion.
6. Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, Which withereth before it groweth up;
7. Wherewith the reaper filleth not his hand, Nor he that bindeth sheaves, his bosom:
8. Neither do they that go by say, The blessing of Jehovah be upon you;
 We bless you in the name of Jehovah.

As has been repeatedly said in this series, God assured Israel that the Land of Promise would be a modern Utopia or a "Paradise Regained" if only Israel [the people] would be faithful and loyal to Him. They would have no sickness, no disease, no crop failures; nor be harassed by the horrors of war. In fact, the Lord promised to stand as a sentinel at their borders and keep back any hostile aggressors. Such were the promises that the Lord made to Israel when He brought him out of Egyptian bondage and finally, after forty years of wilderness wanderings, the Lord brought him into the Land of Promise.

But an examination of Israel's history shows that it has been written in "blood, sweat, and tears." Thus there is enshrined in Psalm 129 the testimony, inspired of God, concerning the persecutions of the Jewish people.

Israel's Continuous Persecutions

The people of Israel are urged to sing, "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth up. Let Israel now say, Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth up ..." Let us look at the history of Israel, glance at its meandering course through the centuries.

When Jacob was in the land of Palestine, there was a great famine. He had to go down, with his family, into Egypt for sustenance. They lived there until they grew into a nation of something like three million souls. The Egyptians were favorable to the nation because of what Joseph had done for their country. But at last there arose a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph. God, then, doubtless because of their idolatry in Egypt, turned their (the Egyptians') heart to hate His people and to deal subtly with His servant (Ps. 105:5). These persecutions were designed to wean Israel from the "leeks and the onions and the garlic" of Egypt. They brought about the desired result. Israel cried unto God for deliverance. Then the Lord sent Moses to bring the people forth. On account of disobedience they had to wander through the wilderness for forty years. During this time there were wars and difficulties, but the pilgrim nation survived and finally, under Joshua forty years later, entered the Land of Canaan.

The Lord would have conquered all the Canaanites and expelled them from the land, had Israel only been faithful to Him. But upon entering the land, sin broke out in the camp of Israel—there was Achan in the camp, which caused the Lord to forsake the nation. This episode was a great calamity to the people. For a period of about four hundred and fifty years, known as the age of the Judges, Israel's history was indeed checkered. The people would plunge into idolatry, then God would bring persecution against them from the Canaanites or from the surrounding nations. When their lot would become intolerable, they would cry unto the Lord, who would raise up a judge that would deliver them. They would be faithful during the lifetime of said judge; upon his death the people again would plunge into idolatry and depart from God. Thus, Israel's history ran in cycles during the period of the Judges.

After the establishment of the monarchy under David, they still had wars periodically. In the eighth century of the pre-Christian era, Assyria had grown into a world power that began to persecute Israel.

Following the Assyrians were the Babylonians, who finally invaded the country, overthrew the nation, and took the leaders into Babylonian captivity. At the end of the Exile, a comparatively small number of Hebrews wanted to return to their land and did so. They rebuilt their city and sanctuary "in troublous times." Next among the persecutors of Israel were the Medes and Persians, who were followed by the Greeks. In the first century of the Christian Era, the Romans came, overran the country, destroyed Jerusalem, and sold the remnant of the Jews as slaves in the slave markets of the world. During the Christian Era, the European nations have launched pogrom, after pogrom against the Jews. Finally, Hitler launched the greatest persecution against the Jews of all the ages. In World War II he liquidated six million of them for the high crime of their having been born of Jewish parentage. But Israel's troubles are not all over. In the Tribulation, the Antichrist will continue to persecute them. According to Zechariah, chapter 13, two-thirds of the people of Israel that enter the Tribulation will be liquidated by the judgments of that period. Such, in brief, is an outline of the persecution against God's Chosen People. Israel is urged in Psalm 129 to say that they have been persecuted many times; "yet they have not prevailed against me [the people of Israel]." The nation of Israel is indestructible. No weapon that is formed against Israel can ever prosper. He who touches the Jew touches the apple of God's eye. God promised to bless those who bless Abraham and his seed and to curse those who curse them.

Just as Israel is exhorted to sing out that, notwithstanding his having been persecuted continuously, yet his enemies have not prevailed against him, so we Christians can shout and praise God for the fact that no one and nothing can be against us. Why? Because this is written in God's Holy Word. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:31,32). We can declare with Paul: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37).

God, the righteous Judge of the world, will destroy all Israel's enemies. "Jehovah is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked" (Ps. 129:4). God is the very embodiment of truth, holiness, and love. His love is a check upon His holiness; and His holiness, upon His love. His holiness insures a square deal to everyone on all occasions. He is absolutely righteous in all His dealing. He is the very embodiment of righteousness, justice, and equity. This fact is the source of great comfort and hope to Israel when he thinks about all of his suffering through the ages.

Since God is righteous, "he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked." In vision the psalmist sees the time when God will have cut off the last enemy of Israel, and he, Israel, will be free from all persecution and

suffering. When that is accomplished, no longer will Israel's history be written in blood as it has been through the centuries.

A Prayer That God Will Deliver His Persecuted People

According to verse 5 the psalmist prays that all of those who hate Zion may be put to shame and turned backward, that is, may be defeated. There seems to be an inveterate hatred on the part of many people against the Jews. The only explanation of this animosity is that Satan knows the role that Israel has played in the past and will yet enact in the future. When he comes back into favor with God the nation of Israel is to be the channel of world blessing, as we learn in Romans, chapter 11. Satan knows this. Hence he hates him because of the future's marvelous role that the Jewish nation will play in bringing God's Word and salvation to all nations.

But the psalmist's prayer that the haters of Zion may be put to shame, disappointed, and turned backward, will certainly be answered at the time that the Lord Jesus Christ comes back in response to Israel's invitation and pleading for His return.

This the people of Israel will do when they see that they are guilty of the sin of having rejected their Messiah and having had Him executed. Then, in genuine repentance, Israel will repudiate the national sin and plead for the Messiah to return. He will do that; and then He will put all Israel's enemies to shame.

The last four verses of this psalm constitute the psalmist's prayer for deliverance of the Chosen People. His petition is not uttered in a vindictive spirit, but simply in a spirit of love, compassion, and mercy. Notice the throb of a loving heart as the psalmist prays concerning the enemies of Israel:

11 Quicken me, O Jehovah, for thy name's sake:
In thy righteousness bring my soul out of trouble.
12 And in thy lovingkindness cut off mine enemies,
And destroy all them that afflict my soul;
For I am thy servant" (Ps. 143:11,12).

May the Lord put in our hearts a forgiving spirit and enable us to pray for our enemies as Stephen did: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60).