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Psalm 74

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



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Bible
at Home

Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Psalm 74.

Topics.

- O God, why do you cast us off forever? Remember Mount Zion.
- The enemy roared in the sanctuary like all who swing axes in a forest.
- God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.
- You divided the sea by your might; you crushed the heads of leviathan.
- You established heavenly lights, the sun and the boundaries of earth.
- Yours is the day and the night and the heavenly lights and the sun.
- Do not deliver your dove to the wild beasts or forget your poor forever.
- Arise, O God, defend your cause; remember all who rise against you.
- The Commonwealth of Israel.
- The glory of the spiritual temple God is building in Christ.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

INTRODUCTION

1

Psalms are songs and prayers offered to God by the nation Israel, they cover the range of human emotion, expressing praise, faith, victory, sorrow, despair, depression, frustration and the troubled heart of a mourner. They contrast the righteous with the wicked, and include the wisdom and the treasure of God's word. Psalms were written at the beginning of the 15th century BC and probably collected in their final form in the 3rd century.

BOOK THREE (PSALM 73-89)

PSALM 74:1-2

A Maskil of Asaph.

O God, why Do You Cast Us off Forever? Remember Mount Zion.

- **Psalm 74:1-2:** O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture? ²Remember your congregation, which you have purchased of old, which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage! Remember Mount Zion, where you have dwelt.

The following verses show that Israel has always been God's special and unique nation unlike any other nation. God said of them:

- Israel was his son who he called out of Egypt and he loved them when they were a child (Hosea 11:1).
- He gave birth to Israel and carried them from the womb even to their old age. (Isaiah 46:3-4).

- Israel is his allotted heritage (Deut. 32:9) and the apple of his eye (Deuteronomy 32:10).
- Israel is a people holy to him (Deut. 7:6) and his treasured possession (Deuteronomy 14:2).

The LORD has not spoken this way with any other nation, but God has not only spoken of Israel differently, but always dealt with them differently to any other nation:

- To Israel God gave the Ten Commandments and showed his great power. (Exodus 20:1-17).
- To Israel God declared his word, statutes and his rules. (Rom. 9:4)
- To Israel God gave the prophets, the worship and the promises. (Romans 3:4)
- To Israel belonged the covenant, the adoption, the patriarchs and the glory. (Romans 3:5)
- To Israel the oracles of God were entrusted. (Rom. 3:2)
- The people of Israel are the offspring of Abraham the father of faith. (Romans 9:7)
- From Israel's race came the Christ the Saviour of the world. (Rom. 9:5)

Added to these God said:

- Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine (Exod. 19:5).
- The LORD has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments (Deut. 26:18).

The Psalmist wrote:

- God declared his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules. Praise the LORD! (Psalm 147:19-20).

The LORD has not given any other nations such great privileges. These are the many reasons the Jews (especially the religious leaders of Jesus generation) considered themselves to be the holy race with God and the Gentile nations to be the unclean race without God.

The thermometer of God's prophecy: it is true that Israel has been and still is a special nation to God, but since Christ death and resurrection salvation for both Jews and Gentiles is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Israel remains a clear sign of where we are in prophecy concerning Christ's return. It could be said that they are the thermometer of God's prophecy much like the mercury on a natural thermometer measures the heat of the day and moves up the vertical red line warning us of impending danger when the heat of the sun is reaching temperatures that are dangerous for the good health of the skin and our well-being. Likewise Israel can be seen as the mercury of Bible prophecy in the sense that world events that come upon the nation of Israel (especially Jerusalem) are signs that give us some insight as to how close we are to that glorious breathtaking and world changing day when the Lord Jesus Christ returns in glory. But God's focus during our present age for eternal salvation is upon creating a new nation in Christ made up of Jews and Gentiles. This new nation is also called a new creation in Christ, the body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the church and the Kingdom of God.

For further information concerning this new nation God is building in Christ, see the title:

- The Commonwealth of Israel (at the end of this chapter).

The Enemy Roared like those who Swing Axes in a Forest.

- **Psalm 74:3-9:** Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins; the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary! ⁴Your foes have roared in the midst of your meeting place; they set up their own signs for signs. ⁵They were like those who swing axes in a forest of trees. ⁶And all its carved wood they broke down with hatchets and hammers. ⁷They set your sanctuary on fire; they profaned the dwelling place of your name, bringing it down to the ground. ⁸They said to themselves, "We will utterly subdue them"; they burned all the meeting places of God in the land. ⁹We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long.

Your foes have roared in the midst of your meeting place: (v4) this pictures Israel's enemies as powerful, fierce, hungry roaring lions who have devoured their prey.

The enemy was like those who swing axes in a forest of trees: (v5) this pictures the great and fierce armies that came against Israel as mighty axemen who not only destroy entire forests, but also destroy the most majestic of trees. God has poured out His wrath upon Israel a fierce and mighty enemy has pillaged the sacred items of the sanctuary and taken all the gold and silver and set the temple on fire and destroyed all Israel's meeting places in the land of Judah (the two tribes at Jerusalem) and the land of Israel (the ten tribes at Jerusalem) and set up their own idols and religious symbols. This Psalm was most likely written at the time of Israel's seventy-year captivity in Babylon. Israel had set their hearts diamond hard against the word of God's prophets they rebelled against the LORD they turned to other gods and entered into gross sin so the LORD used Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon (who He called His servant (Jer. 25:9) to bring the curses of the covenant upon them. The blessing of the Covenant is found in (Deut. 28:1-14) and the curses (Deut. 28:15-68). The fierce armies of Babylon invaded the land of Judah, laid their farm land waste, attacked Jerusalem (the two tribes of Judah) and pillaged the temple. Zedekiah was blinded and carried to Babylon, and the great bulk of the population was taken in chains there with him (around 587 B.C.).

Later Babylon conquered Assyria who had previously taken Israel (the ten tribes in the land of Samaria) captive. They went into captivity to Babylon as two rebellious nations who had turned from God to idols and who were even sacrificing their own children to pagan gods and were under Babylonian rule for the next seventy years. Archaeologists have found that all of the cities of Judah were completely destroyed at this time, thus ended the glorious kingdom of David and Solomon. Observers would have said that the Hebrew nation was annihilated, and indeed, the other nations conquered by the Assyrians and Babylonians did cease to exist. But the prophets proclaimed a better hope for the chosen people. "A remnant shall return" Isaiah had said, and in time this remnant, purged and returned, became the basis on which a new Israel would be built.

Now here is the good news: while in captivity God moulded them like a master potter moulds a beautiful clay jar, Israel and Judah went into Babylon as two unfaithful nations that had turned away from the LORD to idols and other gods. Seventy years later, Cyrus (King of Persia) who the LORD called His anointed shepherd (Isaiah 44:28) and took by His right hand (Isaiah 45:1) to conquer the Empire of Babylon gave written permission for Israel to return to Jerusalem. Under Ezra and Nehemiah God brought Israel and Judah back to their beloved city Jerusalem as one united nation faithful to only one God, the LORD their God, the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob (Israel never turned to idols or pagan gods again). Multitudes of Jewish families who had been scattered throughout the nations returned to Jerusalem and the land of Israel with triumphant joy and rejoicing. When the temple of God was completed their faith was

once again established and a time of prosperity and peace followed. Sadly Israel as a nation never recognised their Messiah the Christ when he came, but even this was in the LORD'S sovereign will. The prophet Zechariah tells us when, the Lord returns in glory:

- God will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn (Zech. 12:10-14).

PSALM 74:10-12

God my King from Old, Working Salvation in the Midst of the Earth.

- **Psalm 74:10-12:** How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever? ¹¹Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the fold of your garment and destroy them! ¹²Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.

Here the great faith of Asaph is manifested, everything he as a faithful Israelite would have loved is in ruin Jerusalem and the temple is destroyed and his people are in captivity and yet he proclaims, "God his King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth" (v12) this is tremendous faith. It could be likened to a Christian today seeing all churches in the world destroyed by a worshipper of pagan gods and taking every member of the congregations' captive and while looking upon such horror proclaiming to all the world, "God is their King who is working salvation in the midst of the earth" (v12). That is great faith to trust God when everything the eye sees is contrary to what we would expect. It is the same faith Job and Habakkuk had toward God. Job suffered great affliction, but during it all his attitude was:

- Though he slays me, yet will I trust in him (Job 13:15).

Habakkuk felt weak and feeble because of the enemies who were coming to invade his land, but though he trembled at the thought of this his attitude was:

- Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. (Hab. 3:17-19).

PSALM 74:13-14

You Divided the Sea; You Crushed the Heads of Leviathan.

- **Psalm 74:13-14:** You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. ¹⁴You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

These verses clearly refer to the escape of the Hebrews over dry ground through the Red Sea from the powerful Egyptian armies.

The heads of the sea monsters: the monsters in this context, is Egypt (called the house of bondage) and the heads of the monster refers to Pharaoh and the generals of his armies being destroyed in the Red Sea.

You crushed the heads of Leviathan: (v14) some think this refers to a hippopotamus or crocodile, but God has no interest in crushing animals or fish of the sea. Leviathan is a symbolic name that embraces the enormous pride of all mankind that raises its head above God and even

thinks they are greater than God. In this context it refers to the enormous pride of Pharaoh King of Egypt who stood against Moses. For further information concerning Leviathan, see the title:

- Leviathan in, Satan and his Family (ON WEBSITE MENU).

PSALM 74:15

You Established Heavenly Lights, and Fixed Boundaries of Earth.

- **Psalm 74:15:** You split open springs and brooks; you dried up ever-flowing streams.

You split open springs and brooks: refers to the times God made rivers of water flow out from the rock.

You dried up ever-flowing streams: refers to the River Jordan being dried up for the tribes of Israel to march through and over on dry ground into the Promised Land. Since much of today's modern Christianity is focused upon, "what God can do for me," and teaches a prosperity Gospel, contrasted to, "what I can do for God," it is interesting to notice Asaph's faith in these verses of awesome praise. His entire world has fallen apart, yet he exalts God, because He is working salvation in the earth, meaning he cares more about the salvation of others than he does about his own well-being. Some think great faith is manifested in miracles, but truly great faith is manifested in self-sacrifice. The faith God considers great is when we put the interest of others before our own as His Son the Lord Jesus Christ displayed on the bloodstained cross of Calvary.

PSALM 74:16-17

Yours is the Day, the Night, the Heavenly Lights and the Sun.

- **Psalm 74:16-17:** Yours is the day, yours also the night; you have established the heavenly lights and the sun. ¹⁷You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth; you have made summer and winter.

Asaph continues to praise God for his awesome creative power. As one reads through the Psalms it becomes clear that the faithful of the Old Testament had a mindset that transcended their circumstances (good or bad). They did not limit God's goodness to their daily circumstances but had a most exalted view of Him that not only transcended anything existing in our corrupted fallen world, but also transcended anything our scientist can see of our endless universe with their eyes through the world's most powerful telescopes.

PSALM 74:18-21

Do not Deliver Your Dove to Wild Beasts or Forget your Poor.

- **Psalm 74:18-21:** Remember this, O LORD, how the enemy scoffs, and a foolish people reviles your name. ¹⁹Do not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild beasts; do not forget the life of your poor forever. ²⁰Have regard for the covenant, for the dark places of the land (the earth in KJV) are full of the habitations of violence (cruelty in KJV). ²¹Let not the downtrodden turn back in shame; let the poor and needy praise your name.

Dark: comes from the Hebrew word (*machshak*) and means a dark place or to be dark as withholding light.

Earth: comes from the Hebrew word (*'erets*) and means to be firm; it can refer to the earth at large; particular parts of land; the country; a field; the ground; the wilderness; nations and the world.

Habitations: comes from the Hebrew word (*na'ah*) and can refer to a home, a house or pasture-lands it carries the idea of a pleasant or suitable place (i.e. a beautiful place or to become beautiful).

Cruelty: comes from the Hebrew word (*chamac*) and means violence; by implication: to deal wrongly by an act of injustice, or by an act of cruelty or by destructive damage or by oppressing and maltreating others.

Do not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild beasts: (v19) here the beautiful heart of Asaph is expressed he pictures the collective heart of the people of Israel as a dove before the LORD. The symbolism is one of helpless Israel being swallowed up by the mighty Empire of Babylon and her fierce armies.

Have respect unto the covenant: (20) refers to:

1. The Covenant God made with Abraham to give the land of Canaan to him and to his seed forever and His promise that if Israel was carried away captive into a strange land and while there humbled themselves and prayed, and turned to the Lord their God, He would mercifully restore them, to their pleasant land which He had given them. (1 Kings 8:46-50).
2. The covenant God made with Israel, promising to protect them, and to be their God. (Deut. 4:13) (Deut. 5:1-2) (Deut. 26:18-19).

Asaph's prayer is that God would remember in the day of Israel's national calamity the promise of the covenant that he would intervene to save His people.

(Gen. 9:15) (Lev. 26:38-45) (Ezek. 16:59-63) (Luke 1:67-75).

This would be common language of the faithful of Israel that the people would have used when such calamities came upon them.

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The dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence: (20) habitations in this context simply means, the place and land in which Israel was dwelling at the time of this Psalm which was Babylon (it was their home for seventy years). It is referred to as a, dark land because there was no light of God within it and it was full of violence, injustice, and oppression, under which God's people groaned in all the parts of the great empire of Babylon, where they had their abode. Though the Psalm does not mention any particular location when the history of Israel is taken into account Babylon is the most fitting. It is most likely Asaph speaks in general terms because the particular designation of the place was not important and it not only allows the message to apply to any pagan land Israel may dwell amongst, but also allows it to apply to the New Testament global body of Christ in that they also dwell in the dark places of the earth. A world devoid of the light of God and full of wickedness, oppression, injustice, corruption, greed etc., that has no hope of saving itself by human means or by any progress which society can make of itself and because of this it is right and proper to pray for and intervention from God and for Christ to come to rescue his people as Asaph did for Israel and for God's glory to cover the earth and be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

- Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD. (Num. 14:21).

PSALM 74:22-23

Arise, O God; Remember those who Rise Against You.

- **Psalm 74:22-23:** Arise, O God, defend your cause; remember how the foolish scoff at you all the day! ²³Do not forget the clamour of your foes, the uproar of those who rise against you, which goes up continually!

The words, "Do not forget the clamour of your foes, the uproar of those who rise against you, not only applies to those who deny God and worship idols and other gods, but also to those who scoff and mock the people of Israel and oppress them and treat them with violence. This is because inflicting injury and harm upon God's people is the same as inflicting injury and harm upon God Himself. This prayer of Asap is the heartfelt cry of all the faithful who belong to the global body of Christ.

THE COMMONWEALTH OF ISRAEL

It is important to understand that the promised seed of Abraham and David is Christ, all the promises to Israel are now fulfilled in Christ therefore they are not limited to Israel only, but extend and embrace all those who belong to Christ. This is because God is now creating one new nation in Christ made up of both Jew and Gentiles. (Gentiles are everyone who is not a Hebrew or Jew). This means that Jews and Gentiles become one new nation in Christ (also called a new man, a new creation, the church, the body of Christ and the Kingdom of God).

The Apostle Paul said:

- Remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision (Jews), which is made in the flesh by hands—¹²remember that you (Gentiles) were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the *COMMONWEALTH OF ISRAEL* and *STRANGERS* to the *COVENANTS* of *PROMISE*, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you (Gentiles) who once were far off (from God) have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our (Jews and Gentiles) peace, who has made us both *ONE* and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he (Jesus) might create in himself *ONE NEW MAN* (or Nation) in place of the two (Jews and Gentiles), so making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile us (Jews and Gentiles) both to God in *ONE BODY* through the cross, thereby killing the hostility (between the Jews and Gentiles). ¹⁷And he (Jesus) came and preached peace to you (Gentiles) who were far off (from God) and peace to those who were near (Jews). ¹⁸For through him (Jesus) we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access in *ONE SPIRIT* to the Father. ¹⁹So then you (Gentiles) are *NO LONGER* strangers and aliens, but you are *FELLOW CITIZENS* with the *SAINTS* (the Jews) and members of the *HOUSEHOLD* of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone ²¹in whom the *WHOLE STRUCTURE* being joined together (Jews and Gentiles) grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you (Jews and Gentiles) also are being built together into a *DWELLING PLACE* for *GOD* by the Spirit (Ephes. 2:11-22).

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Gentiles were separated from Christ, alienated from the, Commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus they have been brought to God by the blood of Christ. Jesus has made Jews and Gentiles both one by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances so that Jesus might create in himself one new man (nation) in place of the two (Jews and Gentiles).

In Jesus both Jews and Gentiles are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Christ is the head of this new nation and its Jewish and Gentile citizens are now equal in status before God since in Christ we are all brothers and sisters in the same eternal family that God is now establishing in the Lord Jesus Christ throughout all nations of the world. The practical application of what this means to those who belong to Christ is that all the future and eternal promises God made to Israel also apply to them. The book of Revelation states: -

- When Christ returns in glory every eye will see him, even those who pierced him and all the tribes of the earth (Rev. 1:7).

And in Revelation chapter five we are told that:

- Christ was slain, and by his blood he ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (i.e., Jews and Gentiles) and he has made them a kingdom and priests to God and they shall reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10).

THE GLORY OF THE SPIRITUAL TEMPLE GOD IS BUILDING IN CHRIST

Jews and Gentiles are being united together as one body in Christ to be a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Believing Jews and Gentiles are being prepared by the prophets and apostles' teachings and by the influence of Christ and the Holy Spirit to become a majestic and glorious sacred temple in which God dwells for all eternity. When this majestic building is completed there will be nothing so worthy of reverence since God dwells in it; so ancient since the patriarchs and prophets laboured in building it; so solid since love cements it together; so closely united and indivisible since Christ is the corner stone; so exalted since it reaches as high as heaven and to God himself; so full of wisdom since its specifications are the word of God; so full of light since the Holy Spirit dispels every dark corner; so spacious since it is spread over the whole earth; so invincible and indestructible since it is being built by God, by Christ, by the Holy Spirit and by the influence of God's eternal word; so divine since it is a living, vibrant, dynamic temple inhabited by the Holy Spirit, and so universal since all its unique stones though spread throughout the world are compacted together in Christ.

God is the master builder of this majestic and glorious temple; Christ is the corner stone; faithful believers are the proper materials; the prophets and apostles are its foundation and the Gospel and love its pillars. Christ is the door and faith is the entrance into it. It is a spiritual building and through, faith and grace this living building is growing into an eternal house fit for the most Holy God to dwell in. It's beauty and radiance will surpass all temples that have ever gone before it since it will be adorned with a vast variety of rich colour made up of Jews and Gentiles of every age, country, sex, and condition: the mightiest of kings, the most renowned lawgivers, the most profound philosophers, the most eminent scholars and all those of whom the world was not worthy have formed this building. (author unknown).

Peter wrote:

- Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame (1 Pet. 2:6).

Every faithful brother and sister in Christ are represented as living stones that God is using to build this spiritual, majestic temple of eternal glory which will be manifested in splendour for all to see when:

- The Lord himself descends from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ are raised then we who are alive are caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:15-18).

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.
