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Psalm 77

(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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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 77.

Topics.

- In my trouble I seek the LORD; my soul refuses to be comforted.
- Will the LORD spurn forever, has God forgotten to be gracious?
- I will appeal to the Most High his way, is holy what God is like our God?
- The clouds poured out water and thunder; your arrows flashed.
- The waters saw you, O God, they were afraid; the deep trembled.
- You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

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

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.

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BOOK THREE (PSALM 73-89)

PSALM 77:1-4

To the Choirmaster: According to Jeduthun. A Psalm of Asaph.

In My Trouble I Seek the Lord; My Soul Refuses to Be Comforted.

- **Psalm 77:1-4:** I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me. ²In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted. ³When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints. *Selah* ⁴You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

Selah: marks a musical pause.

Asaph is lying on his bed: tremendously weak, deeply depressed, and so worried and troubled that even though he cries to God he cannot find comfort or sleep. Notice Asaph credits God for his lack of sleep (i.e., God holds my eyelids open), by implication this would also mean he credit God for his troubled circumstances. This is the great faith those of the Old Testament had. They saw their lives in the hand of God and regardless of their circumstances good or bad it never dented their faith in God and they always end their writings with great exaltation of God even though they were greatly suffering as Asaph clearly is. Both Job and Habakkuk are examples of this great faith of the Old Testament faithful:

Even though Job suffered great affliction his attitude was:

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

- I know that my redeemer lives, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God (Job 19:25-26).

Habakkuk begins his prayer saying, "Even though his body trembles at the power of the LORD and he feels weak and feeble because of the enemies who are coming to invade his land, he will quietly wait for the day of trouble." He then ends his prayer with the following great words of faith.

- 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).

We make the Lord our fortress and refuge, in the same way that David, Job and Habakkuk did, which is by making him our greatest love, our best thought and the passion of our heart and mind and rest in the knowledge if everything fails in this life we will be raised to be with the Lord in eternal glory where happiness everlasting dwells and in this life rest in the confidence and faith that the Lord is with us by his Spirit, his love and his grace.

PSALM 77:5-9

Will the Lord Spurn Forever, Has God Forgotten to be Gracious?

- **Psalm 77:5-9:** I consider the days of old, the years long ago. ⁶I said, "Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart." Then my spirit made a diligent search: ⁷"Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? ⁸Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? ⁹Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" *Selah*

2

Asaph meditates upon the goodness of God in years gone by and upon the steadfast love of God and His peace he had dwelling within his heart prior to the anxiety, grief, troubles and worries he is suffering at this present time. It is interesting to notice even though Asaph feels as though the Lord has cast him aside and removed his favour it does not turn him bitter or resentful, but drives him to seek the steadfast love, peace and calm that he had in days gone by. Asaph while in prayer before God asks, either verbally or silently in his heart and his mind, will:

- The Lord, spurn him forever and never again be favourable?
- The Lord's steadfast love cease forever and his promises end?
- The Lord, forget to be gracious and in anger shut up his compassion?

How many of us would feel comfortable speaking to God so honestly? Asaph speaks from his heart exactly how he feels, he does not try to flatter God to win his favour, or be the nice guy. He comes to God broken, distressed, crushed, in deep sorrow, and expresses it all to God without any fear God will think any the less of him for doing so.

A personal story: I remember many years ago my twenty-year-old daughter said to me, "Dad it is no use you and I just saying things to be nice to each other, if we do that, we will only ever have a pretend or superficial relationship. For us to have a meaningful relationship we have to be honest with each other." I thought at the time how wonderful and perceptive is that, perceptive because of the truth it contained and wonderful to think that my daughter would want that kind of relationship with her father. This kind of communication and relationship comes through in all Asaph prayers to God, how God must delight in Asaph's honesty and His fellowship with Him especially when he was in such troubled circumstances.

I will Appeal to the Most High, what god is like Our God?

- **Psalm 77:10-15:** Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High." ¹¹I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. ¹²I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. ¹³Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? ¹⁴You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples. ¹⁵You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*

The right hand of the Most High: (V10) refers to the almighty power of God, but also echoes the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, Asaph reflects back upon the wonders of God's mighty deeds to encourage himself in the awesomeness and greatness of God while he is in deep anxiety, grief, trouble and worry. It should be highlighted here that when the faithful of the Old Testament meditated upon the past deeds and goodness of God it was not just their own personal experiences they meditated upon, but the greatness of God in creation, in faithfulness to their nation, in the wondrous miracles, He had performed for the people of Israel and the great victories and triumphs over their enemies. Should Christians today be in similar circumstances to Asaph all they have to do to encourage themselves is look back to the bloodstained cross of Calvary.

Sadly, some today do not perceive the love of God and because of this lack of perception of God's love and grace tend to determine whether God loves them by their good or bad circumstances. They feel if life is charmed and blessed God loves them, but if it suddenly takes a turn for the worse and trouble comes they feel God has withdrawn his love, but this is superstition and judging God according to the fickle circumstances of this world and certainly not how the faithful of the Old Testament viewed God. When anyone today who believes in Christ doubts God's love all we have to do is look back to the bloodstained cross and see what it cost the heart of the Father to save us and how much his Son suffered to redeem us and spiritually crown and cloth us with his royal and majestic robe of righteousness so that we could be justified and granted eternal life in everlasting glory apart from self-effort and strictly adhering to ceremonial rites and holy days or keeping religious customs and traditions. This truth should comfort every faithful brother and sister in Christ since it is certain if God was prepared to sacrifice his Son for us, while we were indifferent and apathetic toward Him and uninterested and unconcerned about what honoured Him and what didn't He will with great joy do everything to keep us for eternal life now we love His Son. (He does this by daily lavishing us with grace)

Your way, O God, is holy: (v13) this is a common expression used throughout the Bible concerning the invisible, immortal, Almighty God of creation and source of all life so what does it mean? To find the answer to this the following words of the apostle John in the following verses shines a brilliant spotlight upon the foundation of all that flows out from God:

- God is love. (1 John 4:8).
- God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (1 John 4:16).

This means God's Holiness is founded upon love, compassion, kindness, mercy and grace. It also embraces the Ten Commandments which are also underpinned by love since each commandment protects the innocent from harm and hurt. Paul in his letter to the Romans wrote: -

- Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:10).

- Micah wrote: “What the LORD requires of mankind is to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with their God” (Micah 6:5-10).
- Isaiah says: “The LORD loves justice, hates robbery and wrong doing” (Isaiah 61:8).
- Jeremiah said: “Those who know God practise steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, because it is in these things that God delights” (Jer. 9:24).

Clearly showing that the foundation of God’s Holiness is love.

Jesus commanded his followers:

- You shall love your neighbour as yourself. (Mark 12:31).

Which means do not deliberately do harm to other humans. No sane person deliberately does things to inflict pain on themselves, loving others as you love yourself is not about feeling some warm and fuzzy emotion towards others, it is about not hurting others as you would not hurt yourself.

James the brother of Jesus said:

- If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing well. (James 2:8).

James calls Jesus command, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” the royal law and says if we are keeping this one law we are doing well. Added to all these the constant theme throughout Jesus famous Sermon on the Mount is doing what is right before God by seeking the way of peace in all situations. Jesus calls Christians to treat people fairly and with respect, dignity, decency grace compassion, kindness, mercy and to be quick to forgive. This means that God’s Holiness is about living a life that honours God and the Lord Jesus Christ and doing right to those in the church and those outside of it. All of these truths shine a brilliant spotlight that the thing that is most against God’s Holiness is when we deliberately do harm to another person, physically, verbally, financially sexually, emotionally or spiritually and that the thing that most harmonises with God’s Holiness is when we do-good to others. It is interesting to notice that the major crime that God points out in Noah’s time and one of the main reasons for the flood was because of all the violence in the land. For further information on Jesus Famous Sermon see:

- Matthew 5 in, Commentary NT (ON WEBSITE MENU).

What god is great like our God? (v13). The apostle Paul’s statement, “Although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth as indeed there are many gods” (1 Cor. 8:5) agrees with Asaph statement, “What god is great like our God?” In that there are many gods in the world, but there is no other god is like the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob Israel’s God. This is because all other gods are a figment of man’s imagination, established in the mind by the power of misguided belief and because of this they obviously have no power to do anything, these god’s could be likened to a child’s belief in Santa Claus, he is an imaginary figure yet many (very young) children believe he is real. This same power of belief and illusion is the reason Paul says, “Many so-called gods exist in heaven and on earth.” This is the power of deception men and women are able to create by the imagination of the mind and the power of belief a god to suit their own desires and lifestyle. There can only be one true God and that God is the invisible, immortal, Almighty God, the creator of all things and source of all life revealed in the Bible the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and heavenly Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You have made known your might among the peoples: (v14) again these words of Asaph show that he is not a self-centred narcissistic believer who only considers God as being good if He is good to him personally, He looks far beyond himself and sees God’s goodness working amongst His people and in creation and how He led His people like a flock

by the hand of Moses and Aaron through the Red Sea, the wonders of God at Mount Sinai, the dry path through the Jordan River and into the Promised Land and the many victories and triumphs over great enemies etc., and is fully confident that regardless of his own personal and difficult circumstances God is good.

PSALM 77:19-20

The Clouds Poured Out Water and Thunder; Your Arrows Flashed.

- **Psalm 77:16-20:** When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled. ¹⁷The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side. ¹⁸The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook. ¹⁹Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen. ²⁰You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

The waters saw you, O God, they were afraid; the deep trembled: (v16) can refer to both the waters of the Red Sea and the Jordan River, Asaph personifies the waters as being conscious of the presence of God and fleeing in alarm and dread from His presence. Habakkuk and John use similar language in the following two verses:

- The mountains saw you and writhed; the raging waters swept on; the deep gave forth its voice; it lifted its hands on high. ¹¹The sun and moon stood still in their place at the light of your arrows as they sped, at the flash of your glittering spear. (Hab. 3:10-11).
- Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. (Rev. 20:11).

Three other common views:

1. Since the sea in some contexts of Scripture is used to symbolise great masses of people the verse maybe alluding to the LORD in the pillar of fire and of the cloud looking down on the Egyptian forces and throwing them into a panic and the Egyptians seeing Moses stretching out his hand over the sea and the water returning to its normal course and covering the chariots of the Egyptians forces and their horsemen and all the host of Pharaoh that followed them into the sea. (Exodus 14:24-28).
2. It may be a poetical expression that carries the idea that the deep waters of the Red Sea felt the visible effects of the LORD's powerful presence as if they were conscious of God's presence and ready to flee from His face and that quiet caves of the sea, far down in the depths were moved with fear and the very bottom of the ocean was left bare as the water rushed away from its place, in terror of the God of Israel.
3. Some see it as the language of personification and interpret the verse in the following way: "they saw your majesty in the midst of the sea, O God; they saw your power upon the sea." The waters felt and perceived the power of God, in causing a strong east wind, which dried it up and made way for the children of Israel to pass through it on dry land. The psalmist of Psalm one-hundred and fourteen uses similar language, he wrote: "The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs. What ails you, O sea, that you flee?" (Psalm 114:3-5).

The clouds poured out water; skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side: (v17) since we are not told what particular event this refers to it may embrace all storms in general as the following verses do:

- Behold, he scatters his lightning about him and covers the roots of the sea. ³¹For by these he judges peoples; he gives food in abundance. ³²He covers his hands with the lightning and commands it to strike the mark. ³³Its crashing declares his presence. (Job 36:30-33).

- ²Keep listening to the thunder of his voice and the rumbling that comes from his mouth. ³Under the whole heaven he lets it go, and his lightning to the corners of the earth. ⁴After it his voice roars; he thunders with his majestic voice, and he does not restrain the lightnings when his voice is heard. ⁵God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend. (Job 37:2-5). (See also Psalm 29).

But it is also possible when Asap was writing, "the clouds poured out water; skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side," he had three different events in mind and was alluding to them, should this be so the following three events would be the most likely three:

1. The clouds poured out water: may embrace the flood in Noah's generation and the hail that fell upon the Egyptians.

- The rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights --- NOW GO TO VERSE EIGHTEEN --- ¹⁸The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters. ¹⁹And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. (Genesis 7:12-19).
- Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. ²⁴There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. ²⁵The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field. ²⁶Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail. (Exodus 9:23-26).

2. Skies gave forth thunder: may refer to the extraordinary manifestation of God at Mount Sinai, amidst lightnings, thunders, and tempests.

- On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. ¹⁷Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. (Exodus 19:16-18).

3. Your arrows flashed on every side: since arrows were commonly used in ancient warfare and often bound with rags and dipped in some combustible substance and set alight then hundreds of these arrows were fired into houses, grain-fields, haystacks, or towns to set them on fire which naturally gave the appearance of flashing arrows falling on every side and God is pictured in Scripture as a mighty warrior riding upon a chariot with a bow firing arrows to destroy the enemies of His people.

- In my distress I (David) called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help --- NOW GO TO VERSE TEN --- ¹⁰He rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the wings of the wind --- NOW GO TO VERSE FOURTEEN --- ¹⁴And he sent out his arrows and scattered them (David's enemies); he flashed forth lightnings and routed them. (Psalm 18:6-14).
- Blessed be the LORD, my (David's) rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle --- NOW GO TO VERSE FIVE --- ⁵Bow your heavens, O LORD, and come down! Touch the mountains so that they smoke! ⁶Flash forth the lightning and scatter them; send out your arrows and rout them! ⁷Stretch out your hand from on high; rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners, ⁸who speak lies and falsehood. (Psalm 144:1-8).

With this in mind it is possible when Asap wrote the words, "Your arrows flashed on every side," he had all of the great victories and triumphs God had given Israel in mind.

The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook: (v18).

The King James Bible says:

- The voice of thy thunder *was* in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. (Psalm 77:18).

This maybe an allusion to the great victory Deborah and Barak had over Israel's enemies of which Deborah and Barak sang a song saying:

- Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the LORD I will sing; I will make melody to the LORD, the God of Israel. "LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. ⁵The mountains quaked before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel. (Judges 5:3-5)

Or it may be a reflection upon God's majestic and awesome power displayed in all that has been previously spoken concerning the flood during Noah's generation, the destructive hail upon the Egyptians, God descending upon Mount Sinai, the Red Sea parting and all the great victories and triumphs God gave to Israel especially since the entire Psalm is highlighting God's awesome power displayed throughout history.

- God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend. (Job 37:5).
- Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of holiness. ³The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters. ⁴The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. (Psalm 29:2-4).

Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen: (v19) carries the idea that without eyes of faith God is not seen performing the workings of His great wonders and miracles and in bringing about His plans and purposes upon earth. No one can follow God's tracks by foot or by the eye. The invisible, immortal, Holy, Almighty God the creator of all things and source of all life is alone in His glory, and His ways are hidden from mortal man. It is without doubt God will accomplish His purposes and plans, but the means are too vast and mysterious for human understanding.

7

The author of Ecclesiastes wrote:

- When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep, ¹⁷then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However, much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out. (Eccles. 8:16-17).

The expression God's footprints were unseen means that no-one can trace God's tracks there is nothing by which man is able to determine Gods works under the sun the Almighty is far beyond the understanding of man's mortal mind to be able to work His ways upon earth.

You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron: (v20) meaning God lead them through the sea, the wilderness and into the Promised Land with care and tenderness as a shepherd leads his sheep and never deserted them, but always remained faithful in his dealings with them.

Asaph looking back over Israel's history, saw that there was abundant reason for confiding in God, and that though His ways are mysterious we should trust and be encouraged by the past however incomprehensible His works and be confident that our salvation is secure and that all which seems dark and mysterious in the dealings of God will one day be made clear.

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.

Bible House of Grace