

EVANGELICAL BIBLE COLLEGE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



PSALMS 73 - 89
(The Leviticus Psalms)

BY

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[BOOK 49-J]

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WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

Professor Simon Greenleaf was one of the most eminent lawyers of all time. His "Laws of Evidence" for many years were accepted by all States in the United States as the standard methodology for evaluating cases. He was teaching law at a university in the United States when one of his students asked Professor Greenleaf if he would apply his "Laws of Evidence" to evaluate an historical figure. When Greenleaf agreed to the project he asked the student who was to be the subject of the review. The student replied that the person to be examined would be Jesus Christ. Professor Greenleaf agreed to undertake the examination of Jesus Christ and as a result, when he had finished the review, Simon Greenleaf personally accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour.

Professor Greenleaf then sent an open letter to all jurists in the United States saying in part "I personally have investigated one called Jesus Christ. I have found the evidence concerning him to be historically accurate. I have also discovered that Jesus Christ is more than a human being, he is either God or nothing and having examined the evidence it is impossible to conclude other than he is God. Having concluded that he is God I have accepted him as my personal Saviour. I urge all members of the legal profession to use the "Laws of Evidence" to investigate the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and if you find that he is wrong expose him as a faker but if not consider him as your Saviour and Lord"

HOW CAN I BE SAVED?

Salvation is available for all members of the human race.

Salvation is the most important undertaking in all of God's universe. The salvation of sinners is never on the basis of God's merely passing over or closing His eyes to sin. God saves sinners on a completely righteous basis consistent with the divine holiness of His character. This is called grace. It relies on God so man cannot work for salvation, neither can he deserve it. We need to realise that the creation of this vast unmeasured universe was far less an undertaking than the working out of God's plan to save sinners.

However the acceptance of God's salvation by the sinner is the most simple thing in all of life. One need not be rich, nor wise, nor educated. Age is no barrier nor the colour of one's skin. The reception of the enormous benefits of God's redemption is based upon the simplest of terms so that there is no one in all this wide universe who need be turned away.

How do I become a Christian?

There is but one simple step divided into three parts. First of all I have to recognise that I am a sinner (Romans 3:23; 6:23; Ezekiel 18:4; John 5:24).

Secondly, realising that if I want a relationship with Almighty God who is perfect, and recognising that I am not perfect, I need to look to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Saviour (1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:6; John 3:16).

Thirdly, by the exercise of my own free will I personally receive the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour, believing that He died personally for me and that He is what He claims to be in an individual, personal and living way (John 1:12; 3:36; Acts 16:31; 4:12).

The results of Salvation

The results of this are unbelievably wonderful:
My sins are taken away (John 1:29),
I possess eternal life now (1 John 5:11,12),
I become a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17),
The Holy Spirit takes up His residence in my life (1 Corinthians 6:19),
And I will never perish (John 10:28-30).

This truthfully is life's greatest transaction. This is the goal of all people; this is the ultimate of our existence. We invite and exhort any reader who has not become a Christian by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ to follow these simple instructions and be born again eternally into God's family (Matthew 11:28; John 1:12; Acts 4:12; 16:31).

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PSALMS SECTION THREE**THE LEVITICUS PSALMS – PSALMS 73 - 89****INTRODUCTION**

When we see troublesome events occurring in this world we get confused about what the Lord is doing and can ask the Lord “why?” concerning these events. This is human, and we are urged to cast all our cares upon the Lord, 1 Peter 5:5-9, even though some may think the “care” is a questioning of God’s righteousness. As we go through this life we see the wicked prospering in time, and we can often see the godly suffering. It is very normal to ask the Lord, “why is this occurring?” This book of the Psalms, with Psalms 37 and 49, ask this question of the Lord very directly in light of events the psalmist observes.

These psalms are great encouragements to us, for they illustrate the patience and love of God towards us and our questions relating to His holy character. God is not offended by our honesty; He is only upset by our sad and increasingly doubting silence. If we cast our cares upon the Lord we resolve our doubts in His Holy Character, but if we sit upon our doubts they will grow within us and overwhelm our faith over time.

FEAR finds its answer in FAITH, and we can OVERCOME BY FAITH all doubts if we cast them upon the Lord. Refer below to the BTB studies on these topics. David sings of his fears softly, but affirms his faith loudly. The song does not end with doubt, but with a reaffirmation of faith. David does not discuss his doubts in a way that might injure the faith of others, but airs his doubts in the context of the certainty of their being resolved through faith.

Let us be wary of discussions that end with doubts and fears being aired fully, but without the certainties of faith to heal the wounds that fear has opened up. Hebrews 11:1-3, 32-40. Refer to the BTB study REWARDS AND CROWNS. There is some suffering that will only make sense in eternity when we see that believer with the Crowns of Victory upon their head, and we understand that their sorrowful and painful path was God’s way to bring them greatest possible glory forever.

PSALM 73**INTRODUCTION**

This Psalm begins the psalms of Asaph, the son of Berachiah, the son of Shimea, of the sons of Kohath. He was a Levite and was one of the singers of the Temple of Solomon, and was there at the opening of that wonder of the ancient world. 1 Chronicles 6:39, 15:16-24. Asaph leads the singing when the Ark is brought into the new Temple. 1 Chronicles 16:7-37. He was a key worship leader for the nation, who honoured the Lord in the Temple and praised the name of the Lord continually. 1 Chronicles 25:1-7. His psalms were songs of praise and worship, but also of prophetic truth. In the latter days of King Hezekiah around the time of the revival led by Isaiah, the songs of David and “Asaph the Seer” form a major part of the worship of the revived Temple in the city under Assyrian siege. 2 Chronicles 29:27-31.

PSALMS 73:1-28

1 Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. 2 But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. 3 For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. 5 They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. 6 Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. 7 Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. 8 They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. 9 They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. 10 Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. 11 And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? 12 Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. 13 Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. 14 For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. 15 If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. 16 When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; 17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. 18 Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. 19 How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. 20 As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. 21 Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. 22 So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. 23 Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. 24 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. 26 My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. 27 For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. 28 But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.

REFLECTION

**1 Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.
2 But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.**

Truly God is good to the nation Israel. Israel is God's chosen people through whom the Messiah came and the nation Israel, even though presently in disobedience, is blessed by the Lord and protected by Him. Nazi Germany discovered just how bad an idea it is to attack the Jewish people when they were soundly defeated in World War II and the Arab nations have never fared well in any attack upon Israel that they have launched since that time. To attack the Jewish people is stupid, for they are God's protected people until Messiah's return. Even in their rebellion against His purposes, God protects these people. Deuteronomy 32:9-12, 39-41, 33:27-29. Psalms 17:8, Zechariah 2:8.

The promise of national protection is there until the Lord returns, for none will be allowed to wipe out Israel. Hitler tried and failed and none will ever succeed, for the Lord returns for them. Zechariah 12:10-14. The promise of individual deliverance is however quite different to the nation's deliverance. Individual Jewish people can claim the promises of God regarding deliverance only if they are obedient to the Lord's Words.

Moses made it very clear to his people, that unless they obeyed the revelation they had received they could expect judgement. He describes FIVE CYCLES OF NATIONAL DIVINE DISCIPLINE in Leviticus 26, and Deuteronomy 27-29. A clean heart is required to claim the promises of God, and that means that sin is dealt with before prayer is able to be answered. Psalms 51:10, 66:18, Isaiah 1:10-20, Jeremiah 4:14, James 4:7-8.

Asaph expresses the feeling of most of us when we contemplate our sin and our distress before the Lord's holiness. We have been sinful, stupid, and/or distracted from the path of life that we ought to have walked. This image of the path to be walked is a common one amongst the writers of scripture. We are on a path and we need to stay on God's path or we will fall off into the thorns and briars that line the route we are to take.

Asaph feels that he has been slipping and backsliding away from God for too long and that his feet have nearly been swept away underneath him. Refer to the BTB study on BACKSLIDING, and CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS. Sin destabilises our walk with God; we either grieve or quench the Holy Spirit's work within us and we drift from the path of blessing into the rough places of discipline. Refer to the BTB studies, DISCIPLINE OF BELIEVERS, SINS AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT.

**3 For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
4 For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.**

It is easy to fall into the mistake that Asaph confesses here. It is easy to see a wealthy evil man drive by you in a beautiful car as you are fixing your old car by the side of the road. It is easy to feel resentful at the hard road you have to walk and the apparently easy road that the corrupt businessman has to walk. Evil men will be arrogant and insulting to you as a poorer person also, and this can make the temptation to be resentful of them worse. These evil people are "fools" in Solomon's terminology in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, for they do not factor into their thinking the fact that they will die and face their Maker. They are not worth envying, for their end is terrible; they die without hope and in great terror.

Why do we envy them? Because they are rich and we are poor through life! They have no fears for their death before it actually occurs, for they have their wealth to cushion any concerns or worries. They are consistent in their paganism and may even be absolutely stable in their philosophy. Many believers find this disconcerting, because they think that all unbelievers ought to be under conviction, and ready to hear the Gospel message, but these people are arrogant in their rejection of the biblical truths they hear. Their strength is firm, and it is set against anything that is biblical. Their deaths may be awful and fear filled, but right up until they see the devil come for them they are arrogant and sarcastic towards believers. Psalms 17:10.

**5 They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.
6 Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.**

These evil men and women do not appear to have the problems of the poor, and they may not have them. Wealthy people can afford the best food, shelter, clothing and medical care, and if they do not over eat or abuse themselves in any way they may live long and healthy lives, whereas the poor cannot afford good food, drink, clothing and medical care and may have chronic illness and an early death. The rich can pay to avoid many of the troubles that come to the poor.

The sad truth about many of these people is that they then use their wealth to insult and abuse others and they do not hesitate to use violence to protect their wealth, to control others, and so stop them from hindering them making more wealth. This is ultimate self centeredness or Narcissism. They live and breathe only to build their empires and yet all their wealth is left behind in death! Ecclesiastes 6:2ff. Let us not envy such fools, for they have lived their short lives centred around things that they cannot take with them. Let us focus upon the spiritually powerful things that can be built here, for they will be taken with us into eternity. 1 Corinthians 3:1-15.

7 Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.

8 They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.

When you see a wealthy person who looks after themselves what you see is a person who is bright eyed and satisfied. They have clear eyes and healthy complexion, and everything they need is in their lives and hearts. They are satisfied with themselves and their lives, and in this self satisfied place they become arrogant and sarcastic towards the spiritual people who they consider are beneath them. They have more than enough to enjoy their lives, and yet they lack the one thing that they need for eternity; a living relationship with God. Their wealth makes them consider themselves experts on everything, and they speak in "high and lofty" tones about subjects they know nothing of.

I am always surprised when politicians take movie stars and wealthy business people seriously in political matters, for their success in one field does not necessarily make them experts in another. Their arrogance means they will encourage oppression to achieve their ends and they will have no care or concern for the poor and vulnerable. Asaph recognises the truth here very clearly, and he reflects upon the wisdom of envying such evil men and women. These are people who are under God's judgement, so why would we allow ourselves to envy them?

9 They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.

10 Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.

The arrogance of self important people will always surprise you. Even though I have studied psychology for years I am still surprised by people who claim great things in areas they know little of. They speak arrogantly of theology and yet they have not reflected even on the fact of space and time, and eternity and infinity; they have not even thought about their limits as people to even discuss God. Their tongue walks all over the place, opening up subjects that they cannot even hope to understand and yet they have an opinion on them. I am most staggered by the evolutionists who speak of evolutionary processes as if there is a mind behind them and yet they get angry when you point this contradiction to them. They speak of a process as if it is the mind of God and yet they deny God.

The foolishness of the arrogant and godless is beyond all comprehension. Godless people love this sort of arrogance however and so they have no shortage of followers. Their followers are keen to enjoy all they can that is on offer from the arrogant ones; they drain their cup of wine and will take anything that is free from them. Fame and fortune are there for the devil's servants, but they are very temporary. They have friends in excess while they have their fame and fortune, but they also are temporary. Everything they have evaporates with the reality of divine judgement or death.

11 And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?

12 Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.

These evil people do not stop to think about their perilous state before their Maker; they insult God and abuse His Holy character. They arrogantly argue that God does not see their sins and evil plans, and that God, if He exists at all, does not care for such minor things. They believe that they can get away with anything they choose. They may be "blessed" by Satan and they may increase in wealth and power for many years.

Jesus himself tells a story of such a man in Luke 12. Jesus warns all of us to think about wealth, for it does not make our life happy or long. Jesus warns, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses". He then tells the story of the man who lived only for wealth and built bigger and bigger storehouses to store away his wealth, but the day he finished them he died, and all he had passed to others. Luke 12:16-21.

The evil people of this world may prosper, but their prosperity does not last. What lasts believer? The only thing that lasts forever is the blessed soul and spirit of the person who knows God and serves Him with all their heart. The great danger of our day is the same as the great danger of Jesus own day; the so called "prosperity gospel", which teaches that earthly prosperity is the sign of God's blessing. Remember that many of the choicest of God's servants suffered and died without wealth of any physical sort, but with a peace of heart that passed all of pagan man's understanding. "The peace of God which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:7.

Jesus invites us to follow Him, not the desires for wealth in this temporary world. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his Cross and follow me. For whosoever shall save his life will lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and lose his eternal soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matthew 16:24-26, Mark 8:36-37.

13 Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

14 For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.

As a believer we can get discouraged by our lack of wealth and the abundance of pressures we face in the Lord's work. The sheer grind of the Lord's work can at times wear us out, and Asaph meditates here upon the very normal despair that can be felt by those who are struggling to serve the Lord under the burden of bills that cannot be paid, relationships that are stressful, and administrative routines and activities that are onerous.

Asaph thinks of the number of times he has solemnly cleansed himself from sin through confession, and brought the required sacrifices obediently, and washed his hands reverently before serving in the Temple each and every time. He

feels chastened by the Holy Spirit every morning as he faces his sinful state and he feels plagued by the pressures of this world.

He then looks at the carefree life of the wealthy who thoughtlessly live and relax and enjoy themselves. He wonders whether all his spiritual turmoil is worth the effort it takes. Many tired and burned out believers have looked upwards at some time or other and wondered this. It is not a sin to think this at times, it is normal, but it becomes a sin if it is harboured rather than passed over to the Lord for assurance. When we despair we feel our mortality, but if we sit with our despair and dwell on it and moan about it, we become carnal. Let us pass our despair over to the Lord with all our other cares! 1 Peter 5:5-9.

**15 If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.
16 When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me;**

Asaph is honest before the Lord but careful in sharing his despair and concerns with his children and others who might have their faith challenged by such thoughts. It is a reminder to us not to share the deep things of maturity with younger believers before they have the maturity themselves to understand and cope with them. The Lord ensures that baby believers do not experience anything they cannot handle as baby believers. 1 Corinthians 10:13.

As mature believers we will come under much greater pressures than we did as babies, but we can claim the same promise of God. In God's power we can handle anything that comes; but only in God's power. Even though we can handle the pressures that come, the greatness of them may bring extreme sadness and pain to our soul at times.

Asaph feels this great sadness and pain under the terrible pressures that are upon him at this time, although he does not give details. Paul does give us some details of his suffering as he served. Paul recounts the events that have happened to him as he has served the Lord. Examine the events described in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33. He is beaten with rods three times by the Roman Lictors, five times he has received 39 lashes from the Jewish authorities, once he has been stoned to death (and raised supernaturally – Acts 14:19), and three times he has been shipwrecked by this point in his life, with the greatest shipwreck still to occur! Acts 27.

Most of these terrible things Paul records are not even included in the Acts account! Now believer, try to find the "prosperity gospel" here! This man suffered greatly, but he was kept in the midst of it, and he was brought through all these things in the power that God gave him. God's promises stand secure; we are kept in the midst of pressure and "a way of escape" is always there to be found through the FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. What was Paul's encouragement as he faced these things? It is in the grace and power of God.

Asaph feels the pain of all the things he faces, just as Paul did, and Asaph will find a similar encouragement to Paul through the presence of the Lord within his soul. Asaph is the worship leader of the temple of Solomon and as such he is a lightning conductor for attacks by the devil, just as Paul's leadership of the early church made him the prime target for the enemy. The pressures that come to great servants of the Lord are opportunities for them to win the CROWNS of rewards that the Lord gives to His choicest servants; they are not punishments.

Hear Paul's words of encouragement under pressure, for we will all need to cling to these things at some time in our life, if we are serving the Lord in power in a vital ministry. Great revelation and great service will mean that the enemy will launch great attacks against us. Our job is daily to put our spiritual armour on (Ephesians 6:10-20) and stand in the strength that the Holy Spirit gives through His filling of our spirit.

God's message to Paul is His message to us all in times of great pressure in the midst of great service. "My grace is sufficient unto you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9a. Paul's response is instructive. Paul says, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." 2 Corinthians 12:9b. Let us rest upon the ROCK that is Christ and upon the promises of the Word of God as these great men have done before us.

**17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.
18 Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.**

Asaph is in despair until he opens the door to the Temple and goes in and worships there. It is worship that lets us put off the spirit of heaviness for the garments of praise. Isaiah 61:3. Asaph goes to the right place with his despair and despondency; we must imitate him and go into the temple of our heart and worship the Lord there. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19, 2 Corinthians 6:16. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit today, and within our temple we are to worship the Lord and turn our sadness into joy. James 1:2, 4:9, 1 Peter 4:13.

Asaph understands the end of the unrighteous when he enters the Temple of Solomon and meditates upon the sacrificial system and thinks about the blood shed for sin and the terrible consequences of blaspheming that blood shed. Hebrews 2:1-3, 10:30-31, 12:25-29. There is no hope for those who despise their only hope. Asaph thinks upon the fate of the lost and he sees that no matter how great their position now, it is all irrelevant, for their end is so terrible, and all their wealth is just bitterness to them, for all is lost including their eternal soul. He sees their end and pities them.

**19 How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.
20 As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.**

“Call no man happy until he is dead”. This is how the Greeks summed up the feeling of Asaph here. They judged from the end and found the meaning for all that a man did by the way he ended, for if he ended with despair and terror, then his path to that point was clearly the wrong one! When the Lord moves to judge a man and remove him from this life it is done so quickly that the man has no chance to escape his fate. Psalms 58:9, Isaiah 30:12-14. If people will only repent and return to the Lord they can reverse their decline into hell. Isaiah 30:15-21.

The enemies of the Lord will be judged and they will be judged in an instant. The people who hate and despise God and insult His people will suddenly find themselves facing eternal judgement and they will be terrified of the reality they previously despised. Isaiah 21:3-4, Daniel 5:1-6, 25-30. They have lived their lives as if in a day dream; they have refused to face the reality of their nature as creatures and have ignored or insulted their God. Now, facing death itself, they awake to judgement and it is too late. Psalms 90:3-7. They despise God and so in judgement God despises their evil image, for they have become like Satan whom they have served through their evils.

**21 Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.
22 So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.**

Asaph was saddened and upset at the wealth and prosperity of the evil wealthy, and his own poverty, but he is more upset by the fate of these evil ones. Even when we are despised by satanically inspired people we will not hate them if we are walking in the filling of the Holy Spirit. We will see them for what they are and who they are, but we will pity them for their fate, and we will not rejoice over their death and eternal damnation.

Asaph grieves himself for several things; firstly for the fate of the lost, but secondly for his too speedy resentment towards them, and his failure to see their temporary prosperity from God’s viewpoint. He grieves that he did not have divine viewpoint guiding him, but saw as a foolish man. He recognises that his grief was human, but stupid for a believer, and his lack of faith and trust in the Lord had placed him temporarily in the same place of the dumb animals. We need to be ready to quickly hear the words of the Lord to encourage us forward. Psalms 32:8-9, Isaiah 1:2-4, 16-20.

**23 Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.
24 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.**

The constant presence of the Lord with the believer is our encouragement. We are kept, but we are accompanied through this life also. The promise of the Lord in this area is rock solid. “Lo I am with you always, even until the end of the world.” Matthew 28:20. We cannot be more secure than we are in Christ Jesus, and yet our worries will separate us from our assurance if we sit with them rather than feed upon the Word. Refer to the BTB studies POSITION IN CHRIST, GIFTS RECEIVED AT SALVATION.

We are as safe as we can be in the arms of the Lord. “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms, and He shall thrust out the enemy from before you.” Deuteronomy 33:27. God will walk with us and guide us continually through each and every day on our pilgrimage through this life and He will bring us through to glory to receive our eternal reward. Numbers 6:26, Isaiah 40:31, Romans 16:25-27, Ephesians 3:20-21, 1 Timothy 1:17, Jude 24-25.

**25 Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.
26 My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.**

The Lord is our all in all. Have you felt this fact in the depths of your soul believer? Have you prayed to the Lord this day, “Thy will alone be done Oh Lord”? There is no hope apart from the Lord, nor any safe path other than His path for our life. There is none to provide for us on our road through life, nor reward us for the completion of our journey. Paul sums up this thought wonderfully in Philippians 3:7-11. For the sake of spiritual growth and service any price is worth paying in this life. Nothing compares to the blessing of the Lord and to the eternal rewards He has prepared for us. Isaiah 64:4, 1 Corinthians 2:9.

Our body will fail at times and grow weary and sick. Our heart may fail us, and our flesh may develop blotches and cancers, but the Lord will never fail us. All that is fleshly will fail eventually. We are sons and daughters of Adam and as such we share in the legacy of the Fall of Man and that means we suffer from disease and eventually we wear out and die. Even though we will all die we can cry aloud the song of victory over disease and death in Christ Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:54-57. Refer to the BTB study ETERNAL LIFE, RESURRECTION.

**27 For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.
28 But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.**

The truth of divine judgement is an awful truth but it needs to be embraced and taken so seriously it drives us to give the Gospel message to all who will hear it. Romans 1:13-17. All those who are far away from the Lord shall perish in their sins, because they choose to stay under that curse of sin and death that the Lord lifted. There is remedy provided for all, but if people reject the remedy they remain under the curse that has been lifted.

This is the ultimate stupidity of unbelief; the unbeliever has rejected the only hope when there is an open door before them to be saved. The Lord has died for them, and yet they reject the perfect provision of the Lord and select their own path to hell! Refer to the BTB study UNLIMITED ATONEMENT.

It is important to see unbelief as the Lord sees it. The unbelievers are ultimate adulterers in the eyes of the Lord. They have ignored, rejected, insulted, and abused the One who died for them and gone off to serve gods which are false and immoral. They have rejected the truth and are embracing a lie. To reject such "great salvation" is a terrible thing indeed and for such people there is no hope.

To walk away from the Cross of Christ is to walk away from life and hope, and select death, hell and despair. It is as awful as to reject the partner who loves you and go after whores! Asaph then affirms his choice, over against the choices of the evil fools who insult their Saviour. Asaph's choice is to draw nearer to the Lord under pressure rather than move further away. He has put his trust in the Lord and he affirms that trust aloud and sings the Lord's praise. He reminds us all that worship is the key way to build confidence and faith.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. The "winner" in this life is not the person who dies with the most! The winner is the person who dies with eternal life and a sense of calmness in their soul and spirit that the world cannot destroy. Let us not envy those who put all their emphasis into the things that do not last into eternity; rather let us feel sorrow for them. Let us not envy the rich, nor value their opinions on anything other than what they know. Great wealth does not mean the person has great and true opinions. Let us judge people by their character, not their bank balance. Let us value people by their character and biblical wisdom, not their fame in some area of life.

2. Let us beware of the so called "prosperity gospel", for it is a lie. The devil promises and delivers temporary prosperity to his followers but that is not necessarily the path he calls others to walk through this life. Some of us are called to walk a wealthy path and pour our wealth out to prosper missions and churches. We give thanks for Christian millionaires who pour their money out to support the Lord's work, because they see their wealth in terms of STEWARDSHIP.

Others are called to walk the path of poverty and they will never have any wealth in financial terms, and yet they will achieve great things for the Lord, and possibly reap greater rewards in heaven than the man who gave millions to missions. Remember the "Widows Mite" story the Gospel writers told. Mark 12:42-45, Luke 21:1-5. Let us place all our assets in the Lord's hands and trust the Lord to bring us through with what we need to serve Him.

3. The Lord's grace is sufficient for us, but we must rest upon the promises of the Word of God. This means we trust God's Word because we trust God's Character. This is the concept that has been called "faith rest"; and it involves resting upon the promises of God's Word ahead of the evidence of our eyes! It means God's Word is more real to us than the pressures that we see all around us. Let us pray for the vision of the chariots of fire that Elisha saw; let us see that we are protected and kept by the power of God. 2 Kings 6:15-16.

4. Let us not be as the dumb animals, but take our worries, doubts, despair, and sadnesses directly and speedily to the Lord. Let us keep "short accounts" with God and not let our despair overwhelm us. The Lord seeks for us to walk in His power and heed the promises of His Word, that the promises of God may be more real to us than the troubles that will otherwise overwhelm our soul.

DOCTRINES

FEAR

CHRISTIAN LIFE – FAITH

CHRISTIAN LIFE – FAITH – OVERCOMING BY FAITH

CHRISTIAN LIFE – REWARDS AND CROWNS

ISRAEL – NATIONAL DIVINE DISCIPLINE

CHRISTIAN LIFE – BACK-SLIDING AND RECOVERY

CHRISTIAN LIFE – CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

CHRISTIAN LIFE – DISCIPLINE OF BELIEVERS

HOLY SPIRIT – SINS AGAINST THE SPIRIT

HOLY SPIRIT – FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

CHRIST – ROCK: CHRIST AS THE ROCK

CHRISTIAN LIFE – POSITION IN CHRIST

CHRISTIAN LIFE – GIFTS GIVEN AT SALVATION

CHRISTIAN LIFE – ETERNAL LIFE

RESURRECTION

SALVATION – ATONEMENT – UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

CHRISTIAN LIFE – GIVING – STEWARDSHIP

PSALM 74

INTRODUCTION

The title here is “of” or “for” Asaph again but the catastrophe described is far worse than anything that appears to have occurred in Solomon’s reign. Many commentators believe this to be a psalm of the Assyrian or Babylonian period, and some want to push it into the Maccabaeian period because of the reference to “synagogues” in verse eight. A reading of the history of Israel as it is recorded in Kings and Chronicles does give a clue to the things that may be behind this Psalm. The nation had great victories, but their armies were busy at many times with threats from the east, south, and north.

If we want to select an early date for this psalm it may be that the kingdoms of either Damascus or Edom are the ones inflicting the damage on the countryside here described but there are problems with this view. While specific campaigns are not described in the history of Solomon’s reign, the writer of the King’s account indicates there were many battles and skirmishes and some may have been fierce and the campaigns protracted, and possibly the outcome swung in the balance at times. 1 Kings 11:9-25.

The punishment for immorality had been set by scripture as military defeat and disaster, and the writer of the King’s account hints that King Solomon brought the kingdom into this “Cycle of Divine Discipline” by his sexual immorality (Refer back to the BTB study on the ISRAEL – NATIONAL DIVINE DISCIPLINE). Leviticus 26:23-26, 27ff. We certainly don’t need to go to the Maccabaeian period to find a great military disaster, and we do not need to doubt either the authorship of either Asaph, or those who wrote to honour his name in the period of the kings, on historical grounds.

Solomon and the Israelite people faced military defeat as a result of their sins, and they needed to deal with their fears regarding the enemy, by fearing the Lord! The problematic reference is to the actions of the enemy in the very sanctuary of the Temple, indicating that they had entered the Temple itself, and this occurred first when the pharaoh of Egypt conquers Jerusalem five years after Solomon’s death. 1 Kings 14:22-26. Does this psalm reflect that action, or does it reflect some specific insult of a delegation of foreign rulers in the Temple? As we will see below, the indications from the text move the psalm to the period just after the Babylonian sack of the city of Jerusalem.

The reference to “casting fire into the sanctuary” in verse seven tells me that this Psalm can date from only one period, and that is the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the Temple in 586 BC, or after it as the author reflected upon what he saw that terrible day. Jeremiah 52:12-14. My reading of this psalm is that it was written in honour of Asaph and dates from the Babylonian captivity, but that is just an opinion.

If it is written to honour Asaph it is a Psalm of great poignancy, for the later writer thinks of that great worship leader leading worship in the Temple, and he looks to the burning of that great building and the end of worship for over seventy years. He sees the consequences of sin and the termination of worship as a consequence. We cannot know the actual date or author of this Psalm for sure. What we can know is that Judah and Israel sinned and that both suffered terribly as a result. This is a psalm about the cost of unconfessed sin. It is a psalm that reminds us that the Lord our God is a righteous God and does not tolerate sin in our hearts or lives.

PSALMS 74:1-23

1 O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture? 2 Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt. 3 Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary. 4 Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs. 5 A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees. 6 But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers. 7 They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground. 8 They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land. 9 We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long. 10 O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? 11 Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck it out of thy bosom. 12 For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. 13 Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. 14 Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness. 15 Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood: thou driedst up mighty rivers. 16 The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun. 17 Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter. 18 Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O LORD, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name. 19 O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever. 20 Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. 21 O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name. 22 Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. 23 Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually.

REFLECTION

1 O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?
2 Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt.

The feeling of these people is that they have been abandoned by the Lord, and that their distress is so great that it will overwhelm them and their nationhood will be lost. It is a severe testing of faith that they face here. The "smoke of the Lord's anger" may be a reference to the burning villages and towns that the enemy have captured and already put to the sword.

They appeal to the Lord's ownership of them as the reason for their prayer. They base their appeal firmly upon the foundation of their relationship with the Lord, for that is the only basis for any appeal to the Lord. They recognise that the Lord is angry with them, and so they appeal to the Lord's gracious mercy, and they do not question the Lord's righteousness in His anger, but they seek the end of it. They are sheep of His pasture, the rod of His inheritance, they are the redeemed of the Lord, and they stand upon the hill of Zion that the Lord had chosen to dwell upon.

Their appeal is based on their past relationship, but so far this Psalm lacks the present repentance that we would recognise in the psalms of David. Have they yet dealt with the terrible sins that have brought them to this place of divine discipline? There is nothing so far to indicate they have faced their sins and dealt with them. God demands CONFESSION of sin and rejection of the paths that led to the discipline. The Word of God is clear; that if we "regard iniquity in our heart the Lord will not hear us". Psalms 66:18, Isaiah 1:15, 59:1-2, Jeremiah 5:25, Joel 2:2-3, Habakkuk 1:13.

The people of Jeremiah's day who saw such things as this Psalm indicates are happening depended on their ancestor's relationship with God but would not deal with their sins and establish a holy relationship with God themselves. They kept depending on the presence of the Temple to save them, but God had already departed from that Temple as a result of the great sins that had been committed therein. Jeremiah 7:4.

God does not answer prayers on the basis of the faith of our forefathers, but upon the living relationship that He has with us. REPENTANCE was required by the Lord. The people had to see what they had done and turn from their wicked ways. Jeremiah delivered this message again and again, and it remains the Lord's appeal to His people who find themselves under divine discipline. "Return thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God." Jeremiah 3:12-14, 4:1-3. "Oh Jerusalem wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" Jeremiah 4:14.

3 Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary.
4 Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs.

The severity of the enemy's attacks is now seen, with many places being "perpetually destroyed". This indicates that the Psalm does indeed come from the days of the Babylonian captivity period where the entire land is devastated and the Temple entered by the enemy three times (605, 597, and finally 586 to be destroyed). These are not the only times that

the city is opened up to the enemy however, for during the evil reign of Manasseh he had to open up the Temple to the Assyrians, and even placed their gods in the very sanctuary itself.

The enemy has indeed “done wickedly” but the only reason for that is that Israel had first been wicked themselves and opened themselves to such disasters. The enemy had set up their banners of victory all over the land, because they had gained victory over the people of the Lord, but they had gained that victory because of the persistent sin of the Lord’s people. There is no point in the Lord’s people weeping and wailing about the cost of their sins to them if they persist in their sins! Until we repent and reject our sinful paths the enemy will triumph over us. Isaiah 1:10-20.

5 A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees.

6 But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers.

Fame is an interesting thing amongst men. In days of prosperity and culture men are famous because they build, but in violent times men are famous for tearing down. When destroyers of cities are famous we are living in times of discipline and disaster. The delight that evil people have in destroying what others have built up is the evidence of their evil hearts. Many beautiful things were destroyed when the Temple of Solomon was destroyed. The entire beautiful city of Jerusalem was burned to the ground and the ruins were so monumental that Nehemiah could not ride a donkey around them 140 years later, such was the devastation. Nehemiah 2:11-15.

It is only over the last two years that remnants of the Temple of Solomon have been discovered. They have not been unearthed in any legitimate excavation, but in the spoil from illegal digging on the Temple Mount to expand an underground mosque on the site. The spoil from that illegal excavation was dumped in a valley outside Jerusalem and archaeologists have sifted through the remnants and found the Scythian arrowheads that indicate it was spoil from the years 605-586 BC and they have found some beautiful pieces of pink marble and other fragments that show us just how beautiful that Temple was. Its description and that of the palace built alongside it are marvellous, and all the panel work, the ivories and the wood work was smashed by evil men. Refer to the BTB study OLD SIN NATURE – FRUIT OF THE OSN.

7 They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground.

8 They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land.

This verse here dates the Psalm clearly from after 586 BC when the Babylonian Army did this very thing and burned the great buildings of Solomon and later kings to totally eliminate their roof and flooring. Jeremiah becomes the most likely candidate for the author of this Psalm as he is the one writing outside the walls of the city after its capture and looting. He is the one who writes the Lamentation over the city and Temple. He sees and feels the great defilement of the destruction of the city, but also understands why it was destroyed.

The writer of the books we call “The Chronicles” also tell us bluntly the reasons for the destruction of the city and temple. 2 Chronicles 36:14-16. The people sinned so persistently that there was in the end “no remedy” for God other than their destruction. It is a sombre warning to us all, for we are too casual in our faith and practise at times, and we too readily think that God winks at sin and lets us get away with it. God is offended by our sins and does not ignore them. God punishes the carnality of His people, and because of their persistent evils they enter the final cycle of divine discipline and go into captivity.

God deals with the sins of his people, but he also deals with the pagan nations who go too far in their punishment of Israel. God does not ignore the evils of those who attack carnal believers. They may have divine permission to be the agents of judgement, but if they go too far, then they will suffer even greater punishment. Hosea 10:12-15, 13:16, Nahum 3:1ff.

The very people who disciplined the Israelites would themselves be judged for the excesses of their own evils. Jeremiah 13:8-14, 50:31-37, 41-46. The determination of the Babylonians and their allies to punish and destroy Israel would come back to bite them, for anyone that attacks Israel does not prosper as a people until they repent of that evil. Refer to the BTB study ANTI-SEMITISM.

The reference to the “synagogues” in the land is seen by many to be an anachronism, as the synagogue as an institution was only formally established in the form we recognise it after the return of the Exiles after the Babylonian Captivity. I take the reference here to be an accurate reminder to us that we don’t know everything! For while the synagogue reaches its full functional form in the 5th and 4th centuries before Christ, there are two pre-exilic candidates for the reference here to “synagogues”. We must expect that the usage of a term may have changed through the centuries.

Firstly there were the cultic centres, the false “high places” where semi pagan rituals and teaching occurred, and secondly there were the city/village teaching centres for the Law at which local boys were trained and the local people gathered to hear the Law read. These teaching and sacrificial centres had existed since the legitimate tribal “high places” of Samuel’s day and even earlier days. Throughout Israelite history the Hebrew people gathered in their local centres and worshipped, as well as travelling to the Temple in Jerusalem for the great feasts. It is the burning of all the cultic centres and teaching centres (both good and evil) that is referred to here.

**9 We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long.
10 O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?**

These verses date this Psalm from the years just after the destruction of the city and nation, with Jeremiah in exile in Egypt, and with Ezekiel not fully accepted by the people at this point. These verses may potentially help scholars to date the Psalm very accurately to the days just before Ezekiel's revival begins, and Daniel receives Jeremiah's book by the hands of Baruch, and is then led to understand his prophetic reference to the seventy weeks.

Jeremiah himself appears not to have fully understood the significance of the prophetic words he received and it was the work of Ezekiel and Daniel that brought his words to fruition; the Lord weaving the work of his men together in the power and teaching of the Holy Spirit. Jeremiah may therefore still be our author of the Psalm. Before Daniel receives the Lord's revelation as to the meaning of Jeremiah's words no-one understood the length of the Babylonian Captivity, or the significance of the seventy weeks for the future history of Israel either. 2 Chronicles 36:21ff, Jeremiah 25:11-14, 29:10-14, Daniel 9:1-27.

The psalmist speaks of confusion within his spirit as to what is going on, and this in itself is a surprise to many. A prophet may receive the word of the Lord but not fully understand it, and it may be that the work of several prophets is woven together by the Holy Spirit. God often uses a combination of people to achieve His purposes, so that no individual can take the credit. 1 Corinthians 3:5-9.

**11 Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck it out of thy bosom.
12 For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.**

The psalmist wonders why the Lord has not moved to judge at this point, for surely the people of the Lord have suffered enough. He has had revealed to him the seventy weeks but does not yet understand that the people of Israel have seventy years without a Temple and seventy years without their independence as a people/nation. It will be 70 years from the first fall of the city to the return of the first exiles (605 – 535 BC), and it will also be 70 years from the burning of the Temple of Solomon to the completion of the rebuilding/dedication of the Temple of Zerubbabel (586 – 516 BC).

The Psalmist pictures the Lord standing like a great king with his hands tucked into the long sleeves of his robe. He asks the Lord to bring His right hand (standing for his ruling power) out from his sleeve and bring judgement, but the Lord will not do this. He asks for the Lord's deliverance from the evils they are facing, but the Lord is apparently silent. It is only apparent silence, for the Lord has already answered the prayer of the psalmist through the prophetic word given to Jeremiah, that will be understood and taught by Daniel and Ezekiel. God has answered his prayer and it is with a strong "YES – AMEN", but the timing for the answer is, "not yet; it is going to occur in accordance with the plan of God". Refer to the BTB studies PLAN OF GOD, PRAYER.

**13 Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters.
14 Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness.
15 Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood: thou driedst up mighty rivers.
16 The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun.**

The psalmist thinks back to the creative power of God as the world was made and then reformed after the Flood of Noah. The creation itself is so amazing that we stand in awe of the majesty of the Creator God, and yet we can panic when facing a minor problem in our own life. The Creator of the sun, the moon, and the stars is not short of the ability to dry up the rivers and waters, and deliver His people by the strangest of means if required. Psalms 19:1-6, 136:7-9. If the Lord was able to make the universe with the word of His power, then will He have any trouble with our problems? 2 Peter 3:5-9.

The reference to Leviathan is a strange one and commentators speculate only on this; there is no firm opinion that adds anything of significance to the basic principle that God provides for His people, even if from the strangest of sources. It is a reference that occurs a number of times in the scripture to indicate the power of God and the provision of the Lord in the very presence of the enemy of mankind. Psalms 104:24-25, Isaiah 27:1-6.

As the great Leviathan is a reference to Satan at times, I suspect that the point the psalmist makes here is that, even if the servants of Satan are used to discipline the people of God, the Lord will ensure that they are brought to a place where God is honoured by them, and they actually provide for God's people. This would actually occur under the reign of Cyrus the Great, when the Jewish people were returned with presents from the very Babylonians who took them captive 70 years before. Ezra 1:1-11.

**17 Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter.
18 Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O LORD, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name.**

It is the Lord who has established the nations and their boundaries. Acts 17:26-31. It is the Lord who is indeed the Lord of history. God established the seasons, and the Lord is the One who rules the earth's cycles, not the "prince of this world" who has usurped rulership through the sin of mankind. John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11. The fall of mankind has opened the door to Satan's temporary rulership of this world, but it is temporary, and the return of the Lord will end it and bring in

the Millennial Kingdom. Refer to the BTB studies on SATAN – ADVERSARY, BLASPHEMY, and MILLENNIAL KINGDOM.

God remembers the evils of those who oppose and insult His people. Psalms 89:50-51, 137:7, Isaiah 62:6-7. There is no danger of justice not being done; it is just a matter of timing. The enemy will continue to blaspheme the name of the Lord until they are all judged by the Lord, and we are not to get distracted by the fact of opposition to the truth, for that is going to be the norm until the Lord's return. We need to claim the promise of 1 John 4:4, that, "Greater is He that is with us than he that is in the world", but also remember that at times the enemy will vastly outnumber us on the ground.

19 O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever.

20 Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty.

21 O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name.

The turtledove was the bird of love and a lovely symbol of a loved one. Song of Solomon 2:14, 4:1, 6:9. The psalmist pictures himself as a person beloved of the Lord and seeks assurance that as a loved one he will not be handed over to the enemy as the carnal and unbelievers have been. The believer has this assurance and we see this working out in the life of Jeremiah after the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah 39-43.

The wicked will always tend to outnumber the good through until the end of this present age, with only the return of the Lord turning that state of affairs around. God will not forget the congregation of His people, but will work in accordance with His wonderful plan to bring deliverance to them all in the perfect time within the plan of God. The Lord is mindful of His promises (His covenant) and even in the darkest places He is to be found by those who seek His face. Jonah 2:1-9, Ephesians 2:1-10, 4:17-19.

22 Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily.

23 Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually.

The Lord will move and men will indeed know that they are "just men". Psalms 9:19-20, 75:4-7, 79:9-10. Foolish men will one day realise the extent of their foolishness and they will see the truth, but too late for repentance to save them. The Lord will certainly not forget the voice of those who accused Him of unrighteousness, and the Lord will not forgive the evils done in that day, but judge them fully. There is a day when grace and mercy are over and judgement begins, and man must face these facts either willingly or unwillingly!

The noise of the enemy may rise to a crescendo by the last days, but all their noise is just that; it is pointless noise and tumult to no benefit to anyone. Satan loves drama, but that is all he has to offer, for he is doomed right here and now. We are urged to resist him in the power of the risen Lord, for he has no power over us now through our POSITION IN CHRIST JESUS.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Let us forsake our sins, repent of the evil ways we have followed after, and walk in godly paths. Only then can we pray for deliverance and expect the Lord's answer to our prayers. Let us do business with God and forsake the things that bring divine discipline upon us.

2. God will judge evil, but in accordance with His plan and in His perfect timing. God is in no hurry to judge evil, for the Plan of God is being fulfilled by every action of angels and man. There is no detail outside the Plan of God and we are safe within it. Let us relax within it and be the people the Lord has called us to be.

DOCTRINES

ISRAEL – NATIONAL DIVINE DISCIPLINE

CHRISTIAN LIFE – CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

CHRISTIAN LIFE – REPENTANCE

SIN – OLD SIN NATURE, FRUIT OF THE

ANTI-SEMITISM

GOD – PLAN OF GOD

CHRISTIAN LIFE – PRAYER

ANGELS – SATAN – ADVERSARY

BLASPHEMY

KINGDOM – MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

CHRISTIAN LIFE – POSITION IN CHRIST

PSALM 75**INTRODUCTION**

This is another psalm either by or in honour of Asaph. Psalm 74 was written in honour of that great worship leader after the collapse of the corrupt nation of Judah and entry into the Babylonian captivity. This psalm appears to be another one written in honour of Asaph, but this one dates possibly from one hundred years earlier than the Babylonian crisis; it appears to date from the Assyrian Crisis of around 700BC when Jerusalem was delivered from the attacks of Sennacherib through the revival brought about by the ministry of Isaiah. Read through Psalms 46, 47, 48, 76, and Isaiah 10:32-33.

In Psalm 74 we read of the time when the deliverance of the Lord did not save the nation from destruction due to their persistent sin, but will after repentance. In this psalm we read of the result of such repentance one hundred years before the fall of Jerusalem. Both psalms honour the great worship leader of Solomon's day, for each one reminds us that the true spirit of worship purifies the heart and mind of the believer. Each time period speaks of grace and judgement, for many died and were enslaved in each great invasion of the land, but all who turned to the Lord were saved, just as God promised. Isaiah 1:10-20.

PSALMS 75 1-10

1 Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks, unto thee do we give thanks: for that thy name is near thy wondrous works declare. 2 When I shall receive the congregation I will judge uprightly. 3 The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved: I bear up the pillars of it. Selah. 4 I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly: and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn: 5 Lift not up your horn on high: speak not with a stiff neck. 6 For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. 7 But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another. 8 For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them. 9 But I will declare for ever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. 10 All the horns of the wicked also will I cut off; but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.

REFLECTION

1 Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks, unto thee do we give thanks: for that thy name is near thy wondrous works declare.

2 When I shall receive the congregation I will judge uprightly.

A brief study of the events that lead up to the siege of Jerusalem in the years 704-700 BC is instructive. The people of Judah had persisted in their disobedience to the Word of God, paying only lip service to the words of Isaiah as he preached.

The Assyrian Empire launched its attack around 705 BC and Sennacherib captured all the 39 fenced cities of the land and had Hezekiah trapped in his capital city with the survivors of his army and people. The rest of the people were killed or deported as slaves. Isaiah 36 – 39. It was a catastrophe and Isaiah preached faithfully through this time frame and led the needed revival in the besieged city. The people had to learn not to trust in lying prophets and the false hope of Egyptian deliverance. Isaiah 30:8-21. They had to learn to trust the Lord alone. Hezekiah has learned that and takes the threatening letter of the king of Assyria and "spread it out before the Lord" and the Lord answered his prayers for deliverance. 2 Kings 19:6-19.

Finally the enemy is defeated, but not by the remnant of Hezekiah's army, but by a plague from God that decimated their army over one night. 85,000 men perish outside the walls of Jerusalem and the siege is lifted. There is rejoicing in the city as they see that the Lord has indeed delivered them, and yet sadly within twenty years they will return to their paganism, and the next king will not only worship Assyrian gods, but will murder the prophet Isaiah and many other servants of the Lord. 2 Kings 21:1-16.

That is still to come when this psalm is written to honour Asaph. Remember that genuine worship has again delivered the people of God from disaster. They praise the name of the Lord for His great deliverance of them from certain death or slavery. The Lord has received the prayers of His people and He has delivered them in His "upright judgement".

3 The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved: I bear up the pillars of it. Selah.

4 I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly: and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn:

We look around at what we mistakenly think is a solid and permanent earth, but it is not solid or permanent at all. The earth and the entire present universe is going to implode one day and be folded up and put away. 2 Peter 3:10-18. This world is not forever, but those who love the Lord are destined to move on into the eternal state with the Lord after this present universe is dissolved. It is a good starting point to begin to think about your problems by thinking about the end

of this universe and its replacement with an eternal one, for then your problems are seen in the right context. The one who made the universe and will remake it is the right power to address with your little problems.

One old saint was challenged by a smart youngster from the youth group one day with the question, "Pastor, why do you think that God is concerned with your little problems?" He replied, "Young man, what in God's sight is big or little in our life?" The psalmist has warned the stupid people who oppose God not to think so foolishly, or "blow the horn" of rebellion against the Lord. God "bears the pillars", or takes the weight of the entire universe. There is nothing too big for our God! Matthew 19:26, Luke 1:37, 18:27.

5 Lift not up your horn on high: speak not with a stiff neck.

6 For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south.

The term "stiff neck" refers to the determined posture of a person who does not want to believe, obey or respond to the Lord. Exodus 32:9, 33:3-5, 34:9, Deuteronomy 9:6-13, 10:16, 2 Chronicles 30:8. Sadly the people remained "stiff necked" more often than obedient through their history, and eventually went into Babylonian Exile and finally into the Roman destruction and dispersion. The sin that led to the destruction of the land in Isaiah and Hezekiah's day, led to the nation's exile in Jeremiah's day, and its destruction after the death of Jesus. Acts 7:51ff.

In the days of Isaiah however there was a brief fire of hope that led to there being grace shown by the Lord again to them. REPENTANCE led to REVIVAL and revival led to restoration of the nation and the people's life and hope. They saw that the Lord alone was their strength and that deliverance would not come from the peoples of the east, west, or the south, but they would be "lifted up" (promoted) by the Lord alone. Isaiah 2:10-18, 1 Peter 5:5-9.

7 But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.

8 For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them.

There is one Lord and one Judge of all mankind, and it is the Lord Almighty alone who judges. God promotes one and casts down another, and at times we wonder at the ups and downs of the evil politicians we see, but the Lord's hand is upon the entire process. Psalms 113:7-8, Jeremiah 27:1-15. The most powerful account of this is in Hannah's prayer, recorded in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. The PLAN OF GOD is perfect and we are a part of this plan. We are to drink the CUP of the Lord's preparing and enjoy all He has for us, and praise Him in the good and the bad times we go through, for in Christ Jesus all cursing is turned to blessing. Romans 8:28-34, Philippians 4:4-13.

9 But I will declare for ever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.

10 All the horns of the wicked also will I cut off; but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.

The word "but" can be an awful word, but here it is such a joy filled one. In spite of all the bitter and the sweet things that the cup of life has to offer, the psalmist will praise the Lord through them all. He will sing praises to the Lord; to the God of Jacob. Notice, it is not the God of Israel, but the God of Jacob. He uses the sinful name of the old trickster to remind us that the Lord loves the Jacobs, even before they become the "prince of God" (Israel). God loves us as we are, and we are to become the people we are meant to be by and through our worship of the Lord.

The horns of power of the wicked will be cut off and their power will be negated, but the power of the believer is unlimited because it is Holy Spirit power. We will be exulted because we are righteous, and we become righteous through accepting the power of the Holy Spirit into our life. God does the work to transform us and we get the benefits forever; it is a great arrangement and it is called GRACE! Let us praise the Lord with the psalmist.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Salvation comes from the Lord alone. Deliverance comes from the Lord alone, for there is no other power that can free us from the tyranny of Satan and his forces. Let us cast our cares upon the only One who can deliver us.
2. God will judge evil people in accordance with His righteousness; none will cry "unfair" in that day, for even the worst of men will see their hopelessness and sinfulness. We have the Lord's Word to depend upon in these things. We are to leave justice and vengeance to the Lord. Deuteronomy 32:35, Psalms 94:1, Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30. We will see and may experience personally great injustice, and we are to leave all things with God who will deal righteously with all. Our job is to give the Gospel, not exact vengeance for personal affronts. We are the Lord's servants and are to take all personal affronts and insults to the Lord. Matthew 5:10-12.
3. Praise the Lord for His great grace towards us. We are the recipients of grace, and let us daily give thanks for the wonder that we have received in Christ Jesus.

DOCTRINES

CHRISTIAN LIFE – REPENTANCE

REVIVAL

GOD – PLAN OF GOD

GOD – CHARACTER OF GOD

CUP

GRACE

PSALM 76**INTRODUCTION**

This is another in the sequence of victory psalms probably written in the days of Isaiah after the Lord has delivered the people from the Assyrian Crisis and the people leave the besieged city of Jerusalem to spoil the camp of their enemies. It is a psalm that brings them to their feet in praise of the God who has lifted them up from the pit of despair to the pinnacle of exultation. All the power and might of the enemy army is lying in the dust of death and the people who they despised have victory in and through their God. Victory is in the Lord's hands alone. Psalms 98:1, 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, 1 John 5:4.

PSALMS 76:1-12

1 In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel. 2 In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion. 3 There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Selah. 4 Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey. 5 The stout hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands. 6 At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep. 7 Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry? 8 Thou didst cause judgement to be heard from heaven; the earth feared, and was still, 9 When God arose to judgement, to save all the meek of the earth. Selah. 10 Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain. 11 Vow, and pay unto the LORD your God: let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared. 12 He shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth.

REFLECTION

**1 In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel.
2 In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion.**

The fall of Samaria and the northern kingdom of Israel occurred in 721 BC, and by 720 there were no Israelites to the north of the tribal areas of Benjamin and Judah. 2 Kings 17:1-41. The few survivors of the Assyrian invasion fled to the south and found their refuge within the two southern tribes and became part of those tribes through intermarriage. As the godly REMNANT of Israel they found their identity within Judah (becoming simply "Jews" = "of Judah"). The captured Israelites were taken into slavery and dispersed around the Assyrian Empire to be worked to death. 2 Kings 17:6.

From some traditional sources it appears many of these slave families from old Israel did miraculously survive intact in the Mesopotamian area. The descendents of their survivors were allowed to return to the newly established Persian Province of Judah in 535 BC with all the other later captives from Babylon, and others later joined the Jewish community in Babylon, but found their identity by becoming members of the tribe of Judah also. Few were able to keep their identity, like Anna, of the tribe of Asher. Luke 2:36.

The survivors of the old ten northern tribes became absorbed into Judah and found their identity in the revival of Ezra and later scribes. They were all bound together again as "Jews" who centred their lives round the scriptures through the work of the scribes of Babylon and Jerusalem. The new "Jewish" identity will become established through the writings of these scribes and be summed up in what is known as the Babylonian Talmud, and the Jerusalem Talmud.

There are no "lost ten tribes", for by the days of the Lord the people of the nation or province of Judea (the Jews) are referred to still as "the twelve tribes" indicating that enough of the northern tribes survived and returned to be identified within the new identity of Judea, and to be all known from that time on as Jews. Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:30, Acts 26:7, James 1:1, Revelation 7:5-8. The remnant of the ten northern tribes become identified with the southern tribe of Judah and known as "Jews" (people of Judah); even the tribes of Levi and Benjamin becomes "Jewish" through their identification with Judah.

Israel as a nation has disappeared and their land was given over to the mixed race people, the Samaritans. This group was the result of the Assyrian policy of mixing up their captive peoples through intermarriage and therefore losing their separate racial and cultural identity, and with that their ability to organise and resist the Empire. These people will become an enemy of the returning Jews, and their descendents survive down to our own day and live still around the old capital of the Northern kingdom, Samaria.

Even though the nation Israel had ceased to exist by the time this Psalm is written the author still refers to the national idea as existing. Israel will not exist as a united nation from the days of Solomon until 1948 of our own era, but the Psalmist recognises that no matter how long it is that they are not united in the entire land again, the identity of Israel as a people before God has not been lost. God has not cast off His people, even when they suffer the fifth cycle of divine discipline and are cast out of the land. Romans 11:1ff. Zion remains important to God and will be the throne of the returned Lord. Refer to the BTB studies, ISRAEL, NATIONAL DIVINE DISCIPLINE, PROPHECY – END TIMES.

3 There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Selah.

4 Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey.

God delivered the people of Jerusalem from the Assyrian armies by direct intervention. The people of the 39 cities that fell were not delivered due to their APOSTASY, but Jerusalem would be delivered due to the revival of Isaiah. God protected the Jewish people of Judah during the first major invasion when Samaria fell, but the second attack by Sennacherib was successful in every place except Jerusalem. 2 Kings 18:1-16.

The deliverance from the Assyrian armies was miraculous, and it occurs after several years of siege and many battles throughout the land. 2 Kings 19:29-37. The weapons of the enemy were broken by God, through the angel of the Lord slaying the enemy as they slept in their camps with a plague. Many years later the Greek historian and traveller Herodotus records that a plague of mice wiped out a vast Assyrian army at this time, and this is a probable reference to the pneumonic plague wiping them out, as it is carried by rodents. The swiftness of the deaths indicates something like the pneumonic plague, and with the entire army dead and their camp burned, with the infected rodents in it, the plague could be stopped without it affecting the people of the besieged city.

The Lord's deliverance is miraculous on several counts; firstly the timing of the deaths of the enemy, secondly the number of deaths and their suddenness, and thirdly the ability to extinguish the plague after it had decimated the enemy without the Jews being wiped out later. The Assyrians worshipped mountain deities (demons) and they were all proved powerless against the true God.

5 The stout hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands.

6 At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep.

The suddenness of the death of the enemy army is referred to here, with the army dying in the night, so that by morning most were dead men. Sennacherib is awoken in this terrible night, realises what is going on, and flees with his guard and any fit survivors he can gather around him, but few get away from the plague, and he himself is murdered by one of his own sons later. 2 Kings 19:36-37, 2 Chronicles 32:21, Isaiah 37:37-38. There is no escape from the Lord's justice; there is no place that a guilty man may flee to and escape the Lord. Those who oppose God will face His judgement on earth and in eternity, but those who serve the Lord in righteousness will be delivered even from the midst of the battles.

The "sleep of death" overwhelms the army of Assyria as it overwhelms every man at some point. Everything comes to a dead stop when God moves to judge. Even the horses of this vast army died apparently, and with their death, the awesome power of their heavy chariot forces was gone. Jeremiah 15:1-4, 24:4-10, 39:17-19, Amos 5:19. The Assyrian leadership had mocked the Jews inside the walls of the city and offered them horses to ride if they could find the riders, but those mocking words came back to haunt them. 2 Kings 18:23-24.

7 Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?

8 Thou didst cause judgement to be heard from heaven; the earth feared, and was still,

When the Lord moves to judge man there is awesomeness in His display of power and might. There is the very real recognition that none may stand against the Lord when they have angered the Lord by their unrighteousness. God is not mocked! Galatians 6:7. God is angered by persistent sin and evil. The Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched by these things, but persistence in these wicked paths brings the anger of God and His judgement upon the foolish person who has by their actions mocked God's holiness. This is what sin and evil does; it mocks the holiness of God, and treats the holy standards of God as if they are of no account.

When people worship things instead of the Creator-Saviour God there is great insult to the Lord. It is a disgraceful thing to fail to honour and worship your Maker, and when people persist in this terrible evil they will be judged. Zechariah 7:8-14. When the Lord moves, all people hear and understand that it is indeed God who has moved. There is no doubt about it when the Lord moves, and an awesome silence is the result amongst men. Habakkuk 2:18-20, Zechariah 2:13, 4:6, 14:4-14. The greatest judgement is yet to come upon this earth and it will come in the Person of the returning Lord Jesus Christ.

9 When God arose to judgement, to save all the meek of the earth. Selah.

10 Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

When God acts to judge, He is also acting to deliver; the two things occur together with surgical precision. The Lord Himself spoke of this precision when He identified that the judgement when He returns is so careful that two people asleep in bed together will be separated by this judgement, with one going to Hell and one remaining to enter the kingdom. Two will be working in the fields, two grinding grain together, and the one will be taken in judgement and the other left to enter the kingdom. God is precise, and no matter how close the unbeliever is to the believer they will be eliminated from the earth on that day. Matthew 24:40-41, Luke 17:34-36.

God will ensure that all the unbelievers are removed from the earth in that day and no matter how angry the evil people get they will have to acknowledge the truth of the Lord's actions towards them. The anger of man will be forced to praise God, and the full evil of unbelieving mankind will be restrained by God. Satan and his people are constrained, and are

allowed to work only the things God permits. Satan is unable to exercise his full malice, for he is a creature, not the Creator, and so he is judged with his people. Revelation 19:19-21, 20:1-15.

11 Vow, and pay unto the LORD your God: let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared.

12 He shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth.

All mankind is urged to "do business" with God and do it honestly. It is a foolish thing indeed to lie to the Creator of all things, yet people persist in doing so until the end. Man owes the Lord their life and soul and if it is not freely given in salvation then they will have the Lord demand of them their life back in judgement. We are to present ourselves as living sacrifices to the Lord who made us and saved us. Romans 12:1-2.

If we do not bring gifts to the One who gave us all things we are proved unjust and unrighteous and so we will be judged fully and finally and we have no redress for the verdict will be absolutely fair. The greatest of men will be judged; their royalty will not save them from the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. Isaiah 14:9-11. The mighty will all be fallen in that day. Amos 2:14-16, Revelation 18:2ff.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. God has a plan and it is working out in history. There are no accidents or surprises in God's Plan, for He is the Author of time, and all the details of time are in the plan. Israel is secure in the hands of the Lord and they will be delivered even from the worst time in the history of mankind during the Great Tribulation period. Zechariah 13:8-9. Just as there is a plan for the nation Israel, there is a plan for every believer in the Lord. Let us relax in the Lord's plan for us this week and serve the Lord this day in holiness and peace of mind.

2. The Lord will execute true justice. The Lord will return to judge evil men and establish His kingdom upon the earth. The judgements of the past and the deliverance they wrought are but the foretaste of the coming expression of power and majesty that mankind will all see when He returns. God will sort out the evil ones; let us relax on that score and simply focus our attention on doing what He has called us to do. Let us join with John in his prayer, "Even so, Come Lord Jesus". Revelation 22:20.

DOCTRINES

REMNANT

ISRAEL

ISRAEL – NATIONAL DIVINE DISCIPLINE

PROPHECY – SEQUENCE OF END TIME EVENTS

PROPHECY – DANIEL'S SEVENTY WEEKS

PROPHECY – DANIEL – NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

APOSTASY

CHRIST – RETURN OF OUR LORD

Notes

PSALM 77**INTRODUCTION**

We move from exultation in deliverance from Assyria in Psalm 76 to the abject humiliation of total defeat a century later by Babylonia. Israel is now a defeated power and an exiled nation under God's judgement, but still hoping in God's deliverance and grace in the midst of judgement. God is with His people, even in the midst of their judgement, for they have returned to Him. God's Word is true to its promises. Isaiah 1:10-20.

The great 20th century preacher W G Scroggie copies from a letter to illustrate the theme of this psalm. He quotes the letter of Lady Bunsen to her sister Lady Llanover, from the year 1767. Lady Llanover's husband is dying. Lady Bunsen writes as follows.

"Alas, the spirit of man will ever be asking why is this? Why must there be pain and misery? I find in everything, the seemingly easy, and the most complicated question, there is no peace but in saying, 'Lord, Thou knowest, and I know not and cannot comprehend; but I have held fast, and will hold fast, by the moral qualities of God, by the immensity of all His attributes, boundless power and wisdom, and I will say,
 'It is mine infirmity
 But I will remember the years
 Of the right hand of the Most High'."

When we face the imponderable we must cling to the immeasurable mercy, grace, and love of God, for in the CHARACTER OF GOD we find the answer to keep on hoping in time with the certainty that the full answer to all our questions will be found in heaven. Refer to the BTB study SUFFERING.

PSALMS 77:1-20

1 I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me. 2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. 3 I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. 4 Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. 5 I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. 6 I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search. 7 Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? 8 Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? 9 Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah. 10 And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. 11 I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. 12 I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. 13 Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God? 14 Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people. 15 Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. 16 The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. 17 The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. 18 The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. 19 Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. 20 Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

REFLECTION

**1 I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me.
 2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted.**

The psalmist writes of his passion and pain as he cries out to the Lord. Psalms 3:4, 34:6, 55:16-17. The repetition of the phrase "unto God" is the indication of the deep feelings behind the appeal to the Lord. He lifts his voice to be heard by the Lord and he is heard by the Lord. It is vital for the believer to know that they are heard by the Lord when they pray, for often we can wait for what may feel a long time before the answer is seen. Prayer is heard every time, with the exception only when there is unconfessed sin in the life of the believer. Psalm 66:18.

Prayer may be offered from the place of fear, despair, pain and distress. Great physical discomfort and distress is not a sign of God's judgement, but is an opportunity for faith to grow. 1 Corinthians 10:13. It is not sinful to feel debilitated by worry and distress, it is only sinful if we stay there and embrace despair. God wants us to cast our cares upon Him, for He delights in answering our prayers. God delights in blessing us as His children; He seeks only for us to take everything to Him in prayer. Psalms 55:22, Matthew 6:25, 34, Philippians 4:7, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5-9.

**3 I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah.
 4 Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak.**

Once again we are reminded that being overwhelmed by emotion is not a sign of sin or evil in the soul, but a sign of humanity. We will be saddened and overwhelmed at times and we need to take all our emotions to the Lord in prayer. Jeremiah 17:7-18.

The Lord seeks for us to go through all the emotions we feel with Him and pour our heart out to the Lord. The Lord wants to walk with us through all the dark places that we are called to traverse on our journey to glory. Remember believer it is a journey in His presence to glory! Matthew 28:18-20. The Lord is with us to the end!

The psalms of David have many places within them when we feel his pain as he expresses it in raw and blunt words before the Lord. Psalms 55:4-5, 61:1-2, 142:1-3. David was regularly facing distress that overwhelmed him and he laid his pain before the Lord who loved him. Remember the words of Dr Viktor Frankl, the Jewish psychiatrist who went through Auschwitz. "There are certain things, that when they happen to us, if we do not lose our minds it is only because we didn't have one to lose!"

Being overwhelmed at times is most likely a sign that we are serving the Lord in hard places, it is not a sign that we are out of His will. Pain is the lot of man as a result of the Fall of Man. The Lord has taken our distress on the Cross and so we are urged to hand it over to Him in prayer, for He has taken the burden from us. The Lord and the Apostles warn us that distress is the norm, not the exception in this present world. Matthew 5:10-12, Luke 21:23-25, Romans 8:28-36, 1 Corinthians 6:3-10, 12:8-10, 1 Thessalonians 3:4-13.

Notice that Paul rejoices and glories in adversity and suffering for it gives him the opportunity to prove the power of God is superior to all that the world, the flesh and the devil can throw at him. This is the MENTAL ATTITUDE of the mature believer. At times we can even be silenced by our pain and soul distress, where words fail us to speak anything at all. We are at times struck dumb in deep sorrow, but even then the Holy Spirit works within us and we are still able to communicate to the Lord from this place of great distress as the psalmist was also. Romans 8:26-27. Let us rejoice in the Lord in all He has done, is doing, and will do for us.

5 I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.

6 I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.

In distress it is a good thing to reflect back and consider all that the Lord has done in past times for you and His people in the past. We can draw a great deal of strength from the past; both our own and the past as recorded in scripture. In the next psalm the entire content is devoted to this sort of reflection. It is a good thing to have learned songs that reflect Biblical doctrines and situations and then sing them to ourselves in the night when the darkness can be oppressive.

We need to store away the Word of God for the times when the pressures are very great upon our soul. When our spirit makes diligent search there needs to be something within for it to find! Many believers do not store away the promises of God from the Word and so when trouble comes there is nothing in their doctrinal bank to draw upon. 1 Timothy 4:1-11, 6:17-19, 2 Timothy 2:2-10, 3:12-17.

7 Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more?

8 Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore?

The question is well asked here. Will the Lord discipline forever? The answer is a resounding "NO!" We see this illustrated many times in scripture, but no-where better than the Corinthian sexual deviant who was living in an adulterous relationship with his step mother. He is placed under extreme divine discipline, even to the SIN UNTO DEATH. It isn't "love that crossed the age barrier", as our modern media would write it up, it is sin. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.

He repents, and is forgiven, and Paul urges the church to forgive him as God has and return him to fellowship. 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. Even such terrible sin can be forgiven and the person involved is not "cast off forever". If this man can be restored, so can anyone who repents, but they must face sin and evil and come before their Saviour and King.

If we are alive still, there is hope for grace, mercy and love to be restored to us in full. Isaiah 1:10-20, Jeremiah 26:12-15, Joel 2:12-13. What God has said He does not take back, and He has promised forgiveness to all who come to Him and seek Him with all their heart. Deuteronomy 6:5, Isaiah 55:6, Matthew 6:32-33, 7:7-12. The Lord's mercy is never "clean gone" for while we live He seeks to bless us. Only death stops the Lord's appeal to man to be blessed through reception of the truth. 2 Peter 3:9.

9 Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.

10 And I said, 'This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High'.

God cannot forget to be gracious for it is the heart of His nature; it is part of His character to be gracious towards us. We need to submerge ourselves in the truths of the CHARACTER OF GOD again and again, for then we will renew our strength and be lifted up again. Isaiah 40:25-31, 49:13-17. The psalmist accepts that the affliction he feels is truly "his affliction" and he must bear it before the Lord as part of his walk through this life. He takes it from the Lord and passes it back to the Lord.

The Lord seeks for us to take responsibility for our own pain on the path through the “narrow paths” of this life (Matthew 7:13-14) and pass them over to Him for the strength to keep on walking steadily forward. The Lord will uphold us on the path He has called us to walk, for we are His, bought with the price of the precious blood of the Saviour. 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23, 1 Peter 1:18-25. As He has called us, so He will provide for us to achieve the plan He has had for us from before time was made. Refer to the BTB study ETERNITY PAST.

**11 I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old.
12 I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.**

To strengthen ourselves as we focus our lives forward we look back and draw the strength from the Lord our God. As the Lord has acted in the past so He will act in the future, for all of the Lord’s actions rest upon His holy character and He is the Lord who changes not! Malachi 3:6. As the Lord has done in the past so He will do in the present and in the future; as He has delivered so He will deliver! Let us meditate upon the works of the Lord for then we will build strength as we face the challenges of today. Luke 24:41-49. Let us talk often of the Lord and His doings for by so doing we encourage each other and other people. Malachi 3:16-17.

**13 Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?
14 Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people.**

God’s way is in the sanctuary. Meditate upon this phrase and see what it means. It means that the way to understand God is to spend time in worship in the place of worship with others. There is no power that is as great as the power of our God. Let us rejoice in the Lord and praise His majesty. Time in worship is time recharging spiritual batteries. Isaiah 61:3. The Lord is not the absent “watch maker” of the universe; He is the God who is active in time and space. God is the Lord of all and the One who rules and intervenes in history. He is the God who does wonders and whose strength is available for His people. Isaiah 51:7-11, 52:9-10. He is the Lord who delivers His people. Psalms 40:1-2.

**15 Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.
16 The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled.**

The people of Israel could look back and see the redemption of the Lord. They could also look back and see judgement when they had sinned, but they could see grace every time they repented. They were sons of Jacob the sinner and Joseph the arrogant young man, but as God transformed each of those men, just so He had transformed all those who learned obedience to Him through Israel’s history. Refer to the BTB study OBEDIENCE, SUBMISSION.

As the waters parted at the Yam Suf (Sea of Reeds) to allow the Exodus Generation to cross the sea and the Egyptians to be buried by the returning flood, just so all nature is obedient to the Lord, and it always will be. The Lord is king over the earth and He will return one day to rule. Exodus 14:13 – 15:21. We need to sing as Moses and Miriam did that wonderful day. Satan is simply the usurping temporary “prince of this world” and he will be defeated totally by the returning king. Revelation 19:16 – 20:16.

**17 The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad.
18 The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook.**

When the heavens pour forth water, fire, wind, and thunder man is reminded of his smallness and the greatness of the God who made the universe and all that is in it. All through history, in every year we live upon the earth the heavens put on a show for us to marvel at and stand in awe of the Creator. Do we look up enough and be fearful enough of the majesty of the power of God? The heavens are the work of God’s fingers! Salvation is His great work. Psalms 8:1-3.

The Lord will shake the earth yet once more in real power when the Lord is about to return. The earthquakes and electrical storms of the end of the Great Tribulation Period will be terrible indeed; more terrifying than anything before hand, and yet there is “glory in the midst”, for the Lord restores the earth. Revelation 16:17-21, 20:1-15. Refer to the EBCWA study of these passages from Revelation on the EBCWA CD or website.

**19 Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.
20 Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.**

The Lord’s way is hidden from most men, and is as deep as the oceans. The psalmist recognises that we see very little of the ways of the Lord, and we don’t need to see more, for we have limited capacity to understand them this side of eternity anyway.

Let us humbly accept our place as the creatures of the Creator and recognise that many of the Lord’s ways are hidden, but His perfect character is not hidden, and from the truth of His nature we may draw strength and courage, for we know the One who formed the waters, and so we may rest in His perfection and be confident that all He does is good and will be seen to have been righteous. We are to rest in the hands of the Lord as the Israelites rested in the leadership of Moses and Aaron. We are the people of the Lord and we will be kept as the sheep of His pasture, for we are His and none will pluck us out of His hands. John 6:36-40, 10:27-30.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. When we cannot work out what is going on in our world, we can always cling to the truth of the character and plan of God, for we can know in all situations that the truth will be seen eventually and we will glorify God as we see it. Whether in time or eternity we will see the Lord's plan and purpose, but let it be now so worship is full. Let us praise the Lord from the "wrong side" of our adversity and so realise the power and presence of the Lord in that situation.

2. We are in the hands of the One who made the universe. Is there anything that the Lord cannot do? We are His and we are in His hands. We are safe and we are secure in the powerful hands of the One who made the worlds and who will remake them new. Let us look back with thanks, look around at our problems with confidence in the Lord's ability to deliver, and let us look forward with excitement at what He is yet to do.

3. The battle is always the same every day; it is will we see things God's way or man's way. The battlefield is the mind, and the challenge is to see the satanic viewpoint of what Paul calls "cosmos thinking" for the time limited error it is. We are called to see the issues of this life from the other side of death, where we are in eternity with God. We are called to see things this way because we are already, right this moment, positionally "in heavenly places" in and through our relationship with Christ Jesus. Ephesians 1:3, 19-22, 2:4-10.

DOCTRINES

GOD – CHARACTER OF GOD

CHRISTIAN LIFE – SUFFERING

CHRISTIAN LIFE – MENTAL ATTITUDE

SIN – SIN UNTO DEATH

ETERNITY PAST

CHRISTIAN LIFE – OBEDIENCE

CHRISTIAN LIFE – SUBMISSION

PSALM 78

INTRODUCTION

There are four great passages in the scriptures that cover the things we have referred to here. The first is the original by Moses in Deuteronomy 1-12. In fact the whole book of Deuteronomy is a repetition of the Law and experiences of Israel which this Psalm picks up and repeats. The third passage that recaps the history of Israel is the work of Daniel in Daniel 9:3-23. In this passage Daniel confesses on behalf of his people for their national sin in not following the words of Moses.

The final passage that runs a close parallel to this psalm is the speech of Stephen to the Sanhedrin as recorded in Acts 7:2-53. That speech ends with Stephen's execution by stoning. God's people had received the Law, and its provisions were repeated to them in Moses' discourse as recorded in Deuteronomy and many other times. The people of Israel were without excuse for disobedience in all their generations, but so are we today!

This Psalm may come from any number of time periods. It may come after the days of Daniel or around the same time, as both writers record that the people have been disobedient. It may however also be from a much earlier date. The point made is a strong one; disobedience to the Mosaic Law brings serious judgement upon the rebellious people. When Stephen tries to make the same point as Moses, Daniel, and the Psalmist, he is murdered! In Moses' day there was hope for the generation after the Exodus to seize and hold the land through obedience, and even in Daniel and the psalmist's day there is hope for the people to repent and be restored, but by Stephen's day only the remnant will be saved, and it will be by walking away from their old paths into a new one.

This Psalm before us is the testimony of the believers from some early point in Israel's history (as it goes no further than David's day it may even be from the reign of Solomon and be an actual psalm of Asaph). It stands as a rebuke for past sins to all Israel, and as an encouragement to all believers of all ages, and a reminder that the Lord seeks obedience to His Word from all His people at all times. It has the title as a "maschil" of Asaph, and that means it is a Psalm of instruction/doctrine. It is the first and longest of the historical teaching Psalms which include also Psalms 105, 106, 135.

PSALMS 78:1-72

- 1 Give ear Oh my people to my Law, incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
- 2 I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:
- 3 Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.
- 4 We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.
- 5 For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children:
- 6 That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children:
- 7 That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments:
- 8 And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.
- 9 The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.
- 10 They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law;
- 11 And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them.
- 12 Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.
- 13 He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap.
- 14 In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire.
- 15 He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths.
- 16 He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers.
- 17 And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness.
- 18 And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust.
- 19 Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?
- 20 Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?
- 21 Therefore the LORD heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel;
- 22 Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation:
- 23 Though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven,
- 24 And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven.
- 25 Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full.
- 26 He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven: and by his power he brought in the south wind.
- 27 He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea:
- 28 And he let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations.
- 29 So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire;

30 They were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths,
 31 The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel.
 32 For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works.
 33 Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble.
 34 When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and enquired early after God.
 35 And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer.
 36 Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues.
 37 For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant.
 38 But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.
 39 For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.
 40 How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert!
 41 Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.
 42 They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy.
 43 How he had wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan.
 44 And had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink.
 45 He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them.
 46 He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust.
 47 He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost.
 48 He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts.
 49 He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them.
 50 He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence;
 51 And smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham:
 52 But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.
 53 And he led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.
 54 And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, even to this mountain, which his right hand had purchased.
 55 He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents.
 56 Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies:
 57 But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow.
 58 For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images.
 59 When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel:
 60 So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men;
 61 And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand.
 62 He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance.
 63 The fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage.
 64 Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation.
 65 Then the LORD awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine.
 66 And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach.
 67 Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim:
 68 But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved.
 69 And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established for ever.
 70 He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds:
 71 From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance.
 72 So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.

REFLECTION

- 1 Give ear Oh my people to my law, incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
- 2 I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:
- 3 Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.

Moses had said this to Israel and the preachers of all generations need to repeat this every time they speak, for the Lord seeks obedience from His people not hypocrisy. We must hear the Word, believe the Word, and apply the Word into the fabric of our daily lives. Psalms 49:1-3, Proverbs 2:1-5, 3:1-7, 8:1-6. The greatest danger for man is to be “wise in our own eyes” and reject the only wisdom that will deliver us from sin and death, and that is the wisdom that comes from God alone. It is a decision of will power on the part of each person to place them self in the place where they can hear the Word of God and then decide to believe it and apply it. The Holy Spirit works with our volition; He does not violate it or overwhelm it by divine power. Refer to the BTB study HOLY SPIRIT – OPERATION.

The only reason we do not fear the “dark times” is because we are redeemed by the Lord and are secure in God’s provision for our salvation and sanctification (spiritual growth in maturity). The psalmist will speak in parables, for that is the best way to communicate truth to people with limited spiritual comprehension, for the story element makes them see things that would otherwise go over their heads. The writer will speak of “dark sayings of old”. These are not evil or negative, but difficult to see and understand. He will teach them in parables so that the deep things might be understood as simply as possible.

The goal of all teaching is communication, not impressing people about how much the teacher knows. The teaching is based upon the facts of the past and the truths that have been battle tested in many lives that have served the Lord. It is this level of truth that we need; battle tested truth that great saints have taught, lived and suffered to communicate to us. We need to be able to depend upon the words we read and hear and they must be in accordance with earlier revelation.

The spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets. What is already received from great saints of the past corrects us; we do not correct them. 1 Corinthians 14:32. We stand on the faith "once delivered", not upon the ideas of people from the last few years or centuries. REVELATION is complete and our job is to preach the truth with passion and power, not seek novelty. Psalms 145:3-6, Jude 3.

4 We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.

5 For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children:

Our job is to proclaim truth clearly so that the children can understand all that they need to know to keep themselves safe as they walk through this world. We are to keep the children safe with truth, not baby sitting programs. Our churches are often a disgrace in this area, with weak activity based programs rather than systematic Bible teaching. Only God's Word will protect the young people; ten pin bowling and other activities will not help them at all. I am not being a "kill joy" here, but I am a pastor who doesn't want to see the little lambs killed for lack of knowledge! Proverbs 29:18, Hosea 4:6.

We are to proclaim the truth about the holy and dependable character of God, so that the young believers can know that the Lord can be trusted. When young believers know that the Lord is truly good from the evidence we teach them their praise and worship will be powerful. Worship builds in power with the strength of the certainty of the knowledge behind it. All generations of Israel were told to teach their children and so are we! Deuteronomy 4:1-10, 11:19, 2 Samuel 1:18, Ephesians 6:4.

6 That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children:

7 That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments:

8 And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.

If we pass on the truth each and every generation will grow up hearing it and being able to apply it into the fabric of their lives. This way a society remains strong and stable. It is this transmission of the truth that keeps believers of the new generation safe from danger and disaster. Stability in a nation depends upon the next generation hearing the wisdom of the one before, for in that way they can stand on their shoulders and achieve more. If each new generation must learn the same lessons of the one before there is no progress and development in a society. It is only when the new generation learns from the last one that there is a chance of real progress and when you see this happen, then you will see great things.

To teach the young people great truths that you have learned is to give them a lift up to a higher starting point than you had, and they can achieve better things than you have if they persist in their spiritual growth. It is persistence in spiritual growth that brings strength, just as it is persistently eating good food every day that keeps you physically strong. We must keep taking in God's Word and hearing of God's great deeds to be encouraged to stand in the truth against all the lies of the enemy.

The challenge is to learn the truth and apply it without the "hard knocks" that the previous generation needed to learn them, and if the new generation gets this clearly in their hearts they are able to advance faster than their parents in the faith. The challenge is not to forget the works of God in the past, and so start to doubt God's ability to do great works today. We learn what God has already done to encourage us regarding what God will do with us now. The past gives us the clue to the future, and it gives us a clear picture of how God works and what is needed to ensure He works with ourselves as clean vessels for Him to work through.

Our spirit is to be steadfast with the Lord. That means we are to be securely settled in our minds that God's Word can be trusted, and we are to be 100% sure that His words are to be followed in daily life. We are to read of the rebellious generations of the past, know their sins, and reject their mental attitudes, their behaviours and their beliefs. Psalms 130:6-7, 146:5, Jeremiah 17:5-10. We are to challenge ourselves daily to be obedient to what the Lord says and we are to remember the cost of disobedience in the life of Israel. They paid a terrible price for their sinful rejection of the truth.

9 The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.

10 They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law;

11 And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them.

Even in the earliest days there were those who did not keep their solemn word to the Lord and the tribe of Ephraim was one of those who did not come to the support of the other tribes when called at some key point. It is not known what was the specific time this rejection of their oath referred to, but this is an old reference and does not apply to the days of the

fall of Ephraim and Manasseh in 721 BC to the Assyrians, but perhaps it prefigures it, if they began by rejecting their oath made to the Lord to assist the others.

I suspect this incident is from the time of the Judges and was so well known in the days of David and Solomon that the writer didn't at that time need to be more specific, but it is not clear at all now with the other written histories of the time now lost. This incident is a reminder to us that it is not more miracles that we need to see to make us powerful, but more daily faithfulness in obedience to the Word of God.

Jesus made this point very clear when He told the parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus. Luke 16:18-31. In Hell the rich man asks Abraham to send a miracle to his brothers to warn them about the consequences of rejection of the truth of God, but Abraham's words are blunt. "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." The rich man complains and says, "No father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." Abraham speaks again. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." Luke 16:29-31. It is not the power of a miracle that saves men and changes them; it is the power of their determined obedience to the Lord's already received revelation.

**12 Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.
13 He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap.
14 In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire.**

God did marvellous things by way of the miraculous in Egypt in the sight of all the people of Israel. Every member of the nation, from youngest to oldest saw the Lord work to judge the Egyptians, and all could see the pillar of cloud or fire daily. Exodus 13:20-22. They had many miraculous signs of God's presence with them, but through lack of faith in God, and their rebellious spirit towards Moses they still rejected the words of the Lord again and again. Exodus 5 – 15. For a period of many months the Israelites watched Moses and Aaron bring judgement upon the rebellious Pharaoh who resisted God's clear directive will.

Having watched how God judged the rebellion of Pharaoh against the Plan of God the Israelites still resisted Moses in their pride, each thinking that they should be the leader or be able to vary the plan to suit themselves. They lusted after flesh, water, sex, and power at different times. They rebelled as a group or as individuals up to thirteen times in their wilderness journey over the first year!

From the account of the book of Numbers it appears there were constant challenges to Moses through all the years of wandering, the last ones being the ones that brought him to strike the rock in the Wilderness of Sin and so lose his own entry privilege into the land. Numbers 20. Refer to the BTB studies GUIDANCE – THE WILL OF GOD, MIRACLES – PURPOSE, SIGNS and LIGHT.

**15 He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths.
16 He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers.**

The major tests that the Israelites faced in the wilderness lands through which they were led were water tests. **Firstly** there was too much water at the Yam Suf. Exodus 14. The Lord opened up the sea for them to pass through the midst of it. **Secondly** there was the wrong sort of water at Marah. Exodus 15:22ff. The Lord provided a tree for them to cast into the waters to make the bitter and poisonous water sweet and safe to drink. **Thirdly** there was no water at all at Rephidim. Exodus 17:1ff. The Lord instructed Moses to strike the rock in the presence of the people and from it gushed out a river of water that flowed through the camp and satisfied the thirst of the people and their animals.

All of us face these three tests as we advance in our own spiritual life. We face problem areas at various times in our life work where there is too much of a thing, not enough of a thing, or the wrong sort of thing! In each situation we are challenged to seek the Lord's provision and way through. Refer to the EBCWA Commentaries on these passages and read them carefully. God's provision for His people was always ample; the water didn't just trickle out, it gushed out and was plenty for animals and humans. When God provides He does not do so with a mean spirit; there is always plenty. God does "abundantly" whenever He moves to deliver His people. Exodus 34:5-7, Numbers 20:11.

**17 And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness.
18 And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust.
19 Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?**

Even though God was abundant and timely in His provision for His people on their journey, they were rebellious and critical in their response to the Lord's provision for them. The Lord provided them with manna in the wilderness for all their wanderings there for forty years. Every day they had to rise before dawn and walk beyond their camp, but there it was to be gathered. Only the directly disobedient and lazy went without this daily food. Exodus 16:1-8, 27-36, Numbers 11:7-9, Deuteronomy 8:2-16.

The manna was perfect food and throughout their journeying they did not suffer from the vitamin deficiency diseases that are still common in the Middle East and Africa. As long as they ate this food they did well, but it was bland to the taste and many lusted after more exciting food like the rich and plump quail that they had enjoyed in Egypt. The Lord provided that early on for them as a special treat. Exodus 16:6-13.

They however continued to be dissatisfied with the Lord's provision of the manna and sought quail again. This second time they were without excuse and the quail came with terrible judgement for those lust filled people who gathered them by the hundred. Numbers 11:11-35. God's provision is the best provision, but the Old Sin Nature lusts after things to bring pleasure rather than enhance service and life. It is this lust that cost the people their lives at Kibroth-Hattaavah. Numbers 11:33-35. What do we seek? Do we seek the Lord's path and provision, or man's providing?

20 Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?

21 Therefore the LORD heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel;

22 Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation:

Moses got so angry with the people he was leading that he sinned against the Lord by taking their insults personally. In leadership of the Lord's people the anger of the people towards the pastor is not a personal insult to the pastor, but an insult to God. Early on the journey Moses understood this clearly and stated this principle to the people; they were not attacking him as their leader, but the Lord who had anointed him to lead. Exodus 16:8, 17:2. After forty years of receiving moaning from these rebellious people Moses "loses the plot" with them totally as he recorded in Numbers 11.

While we can understand Moses upset, he is wrong in his emotions, in his words, and in his resultant actions. He pays a terrible price for his hasty and self centred actions and is banned from entry into the land by the Lord. When we are the pastors of the Lord's flock we are His representatives and that means anything that happens to us is an insult to God. We are to leave our case with the Lord, just as an ambassador of a foreign country leaves his case with his government; he does not take actions himself to vindicate himself. Let us focus our gaze to heaven for reward and any vindication.

The principle of AMBASSADORSHIP means that the individual pastor is not representing himself but the Lord and nothing that happens to him is to be taken personally; all is to be taken to the Lord who he represents. Moses took the insults personally and that indicated narcissism on his part; he had become precious about himself and his own reputation. We have no business thinking about self centred things as pastors, for we are here to serve the Lord, not ourselves. Our reputation, good name, and wealth are all in the Lord's hands, and we are to leave all things in the Lord's hands.

Our task is to be obedient and not concern ourselves with the assaults upon us by the Lord's people, for they are the Lord's and He will deal with them. Moses was not to strike the rock a second time in the incident recorded in Numbers 11. What he was doing spoke of what Jesus Christ would later do. The rock had been struck once in the past, and this time he was to speak to the rock only. Jesus was "struck" once for our sins, and through the Holy Spirit speaks blessing now to us. Moses messes up the prophetic symbolism by his actions. The people had sinned and they would pay for that, but Moses' sin compounded the picture and brought further DISCIPLINE OF BELIEVERS.

23 Though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven,

24 And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven.

25 Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full.

Both the people and Moses erred in their lack of faith and obedience! Read carefully through Hebrews 3:7 – 4:12 and see the New Testament writer's points about the Exodus Generation for our own education. God's constant gracious provision was best illustrated daily by the provision of Manna. Through every season of the year the Lord provided Manna and it fed the people and kept them healthy.

MANNA was a supernatural food, and no attempt ought to be made to try to find it today on the plants of the Sinai or Arabian peninsulas other than as a possible example. It was supernatural provision which began on one day and ended on another 39 years later. It is an amazing picture of God's perfect provision for His people through all the variations and changes of life. The Word of God is like manna for us and the Lord's goodness to us is new every morning. Great is the Lord's faithfulness to us, and His Holy Spirit is with us to guide and protect us every day. Psalms 30:5, 59:16, Lamentations 2:23.

26 He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven: and by his power he brought in the south wind.

27 He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea:

28 And he let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations.

29 So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire;

Once the Lord used the winds of the heavens to bring the judgement of the locusts upon the land of Egypt. Exodus 10:12-15. Twice the Lord used the winds to bring quails to fall upon or outside the camp of Israel to feed the people. The first time it was a treat for the people, and an encouragement to them that they were under grace not judgement. They deserved to be judged the first time for their moaning and groaning, but the Lord delivered the quail and the people enjoyed them.

They were forgiven and blessed once, even though they had moaned, but when they did it a second time thirty nine years later they faced judgement. All who lusted after the quail and ate them greedily died with the flesh in their mouths. The people had to travel a long way to fulfil their lusts, and they did, so greedy for meat were they. Exodus 16:6-14, Numbers 11:4-6, 18-20, 31-35.

**30 They were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths,
 31 The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel.
 32 For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works.
 33 Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble.**

It was their uncontrolled lust that killed them, for after nearly forty years they should have learned to walk in the Spirit, not in the flesh, and this remains our daily challenge. The Lord judged them harshly, but none could argue that the Lord judged them without opportunity for them to walk away from lust and follow after the leading of the Holy Spirit. They had walked with Moses for nearly forty years and should by this time have known better, and it is only here that the Lord judges them. The people should have seen that this was a test for them.

When the Lord provided quail as a blessing they fell upon the camp, but this second time the quail fell a day's march across the wilderness from the camp. The people had to work really hard to disobey the Lord and follow their lusts; God made it hard for them to sin, and yet still they sinned. The sheer greed and lust that drove them, drove them deep into the wilderness, and then moved them to take far more birds than they could possibly eat. It was this lust filled behaviour that brought God's judgement upon them. All who stayed in camp and accepted the Lord's provision for them lived and prospered.

In spite of all their sins and rebellion, God's grace was triumphant over the peoples' stupidity and sinfulness. The people of Israel survived against the odds and were blessed as they entered the land through the prayers of their leader Moses for them. Numbers 14:18-24. Even in the last weeks of their march they rebelled, and the Lord sent snakes amongst them as punishment. Numbers 21:1-9. Even when they arrived on the East bank of Jordan and pitched their tents within sight of the Promised Land many of them religiously and then sexually sinned with the people of the land. Numbers 25:1ff.

Rather than having a pleasant time walking with God through the wilderness years the people had a tough time due to their persistent sinful life patterns. Their self centeredness (vanity = self centeredness) led to divine discipline. Rather than years of the Lord's great and many blessings being enjoyed, they had trouble in the midst of gracious provision. Instead of letting God's graciousness produce a joyful Christ centeredness within them they stayed self centred and their pride made their walk with God tough and hard.

**34 When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and enquired early after God.
 35 And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer.
 36 Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues.**

They repented enough times to be delivered, but there was not the consistent life change to bring lasting blessing to them. By the end of their forty years the Lord did not show the same tolerance towards the people and they were slain for their evils, but do not accuse the Lord of harshness, for grace had been offered for a generation. Finally the SIN UNTO DEATH operates upon believers who have persistently rejected the Lord's path for them.

The Lord is slow to judge but He does judge eventually, and the Israelites suffered the death penalty for their rebellion when they went too far in the last year of their wilderness time. Even in the last days of the march, when they were judged they could repent and be saved. They just needed to look at the bronze serpent and they were delivered from the snake bites; just by looking to the Lord's provision they found salvation. John 3:14-16, 6:40.

Just by turning from their sins back to the path of the Lord, He saved them. All they had to do was repent and turn from their sins to God's path, and this remains God's requirement for us all. The Lord is gracious and the Lord has provided all that we need to be delivered from sin and death, and all we have to do is accept His offer and live within it. REPENTANCE means to turn from sin and towards the LIGHT of God, and man is challenged daily to do this and be saved. Deuteronomy 7:6-11, John 3:16-36.

Israel had to remember from where they had come and treat others as they had been treated. Deuteronomy 15:12-15. They had to be obedient to the Lord and operate on the basis of grace, love and mercy, just as they had been dealt with by God. All that the Lord asked of them was integrity, honesty, and obedience to His Laws. Deuteronomy 5:23-33.

**37 For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.
 38 But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.**

The Lord seeks from us a consistent walk with Him. The Lord wants to depend upon our witness as we can depend upon His Power! We are called to STABILITY, so that we might stand in the truth consistently and serve persistently. It is "steadfastness" in the doctrines of the Word of God that the Lord values within us. This is a military trait of a soldier that has trained himself to stand firm against pressure and not budge from the position his commanding officer has ordered him to hold. This is something we learn over time by WALKING in the power of the Holy Spirit. As a SOLDIER learns by repeated drills to walk and march and fight, so we learn by repeated testing situations to trust the Lord under pressure and walk obediently in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The great thing about walking with the Lord is His love and compassion on us. We deserve to be dealt with a lot harsher than we are. We sin and fail the Lord many times, but through CONFESSION of sin we are restored each time and are able to work for the Lord again. God is good all the time and all the time God is good! God is truly "full of compassion" and this is the message that sinners need to hear. Young believers can get very desperate about their sinfulness and fear that the Lord will not forgive them, but we have the Lord's promises to depend upon. When we confess we are forgiven and it is permanent forgiveness. As far as the east is from the west, that far are our sins removed from us! Psalms 103:12, 107:3.

Many times the Lord forgives His people and they are not destroyed, and even the smallest REMNANT appears to be able to deliver them. When the Northern Kingdom falls it is only because there is no-one left there who worships truly, for the last genuine believers have fled south. Believers are referred to as SALT to their nation; and salt is the preservative. A few believers can save a nation, but if the salt loses its spiritual power to preserve, then judgement falls. 2 Chronicles 36:13-16.

**39 For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.
40 How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert!**

The Lord knows our weaknesses and He knows our very structure of thinking. The Lord made us and so there are no surprises for the Lord in our behaviours, nor any excuses we can make that are genuine. We are responsible to our Creator and Saviour, and we are responsible for our choices, and must bear the weight of the consequences of them without weak and false excuses. Psalms 103:14, John 3:3-8. We are fallen creatures and must be BORN AGAIN or we are indeed lost.

We are capable of grieving the heart of the Lord our God. We are warned against grieving the heart and quenching the power of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19. These actions are referred to as SINS AGAINST THE SPIRIT. The Israelites did this again and again and they were forgiven again and again, but finally they were judged when they went too far. We are to be warned by these events and not tempt the Lord. Deuteronomy 6:16, Matthew 4:7, Acts 5:9, 1 Corinthians 10:9.

**41 Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.
42 They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy.**

By our disobedience we actually "limit" the things the Lord can do with us. God isn't limited in any way in His power and majesty, but He is limited in what He may do with us by negative volition to His Holy Will. As we backslide from the path we are meant to walk we are limiting the blessing that we can receive, and we are multiplying the distress and trouble that we will experience on the road. It is extreme foolishness to walk away from God into divine discipline, but many do this persistently, and Israel was a nation that did this all the time! Refer to the BTB study BACKSLIDING.

How can people forget that the Lord delivered them from their enemies; actually delivering them from death? Just pause and reflect upon this in your own life and you will understand. Have you ever helped a person and then later they have "forgotten" your kindness and done a careless or thoughtless thing to you?

**43 How he had wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan.
44 And had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink.
45 He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them.
46 He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust.
47 He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost.
48 He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts.
49 He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them.
50 He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence;
51 And smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham:**

The psalmist returns to the mighty wonders of the months leading up to the departure of the people from Egypt. The Lord judged the gods of Egypt systematically and thoroughly by each and every plague that came. All the paganism of the Egyptians was exposed as fraudulent and weak against the power of the real God who made the heavens and the earth. The people of Egypt however still clung to their paganism and their pharaoh still refused to let the people of Israel go. He gambled again and again that his gods would have the power to overcome the God of Israel in the end, and it was only the death of his own son, the crown prince, that showed him he was terribly and awfully wrong. Exodus 9:13-16, 10:2-3, 12:30-34.

The things they worshipped were all defiled one by one; their river, their crops, their cattle, and even the insects they honoured. Everything in the land was defiled, because their religion was defiled and defiling. God is against RELIGION, for He seeks that man might have genuine relationship with Him through the BLOOD SACRIFICE that alone atones for the sin of man. Acts 4:12. Man's religions are SATAN'S COUNTERFEITS. God's way is genuine faith in the Creator and Saviour, but Satan always seeks pleasant lust filled paths for man, and religion is his opiate for the foolish.

God sent His angels to work evil amongst them, for they had chosen evil ahead of truth, and so the Lord's judgement was to give them exactly what they had chosen to the highest level. They wanted to worship a river, then let it be turned

to blood and stink. They wanted to serve and worship cattle and frogs and insects, then let them be sick or in plague proportions. The Egyptians got what they chose and were judged in their choices.

This is exactly what still occurs today when people reap the consequences of their evil choices. The angels ensure they get what they wanted, but in a way they didn't ask for! God is absolutely just and fair in this, for man may at any time bow his knee before the Maker and true Saviour, but he chooses to remain in rebellion and so he reaps what he has sowed. Galatians 6:7-8.

52 But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.

53 And he led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.

54 And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, even to this mountain, which his right hand had purchased.

God deals with mankind in accordance with our choices in relationship to Him. The Egyptians reaped what they had sowed and the Israelites in their obedience in leaving Egypt reaped the harvest of blessing as they left. God guided them as a shepherd guided his precious flock. They were attacked by enemies and they faced great tests, but the Lord was with them all the way. The Lord led them through to safety and to the land He had prepared for them. The Lord still leads us like the Good and Great Shepherd. Psalms 23-24, 77:20, 105:37, Isaiah 63:11-14, Jeremiah 23:1-8. The Lord seeks for all pastors to have His own pastor's heart towards His people and love them and care for them with all their heart as He does.

God brings His people to the mountain of God, to the One who is the great ROCK of Salvation for them. Jewish history will focus forward to the coming of the Messiah and all history centres in the Lord's Person and work, some now past, and some yet future. There is only one mountain to stand upon as a believer, and that mountain is the Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew 7:24-26, Romans 9:33, 1 Corinthians 10:4. The Lord alone is our rock and our salvation. Psalms 62:2-7.

The Lord went to heaven from the Mountain of Olives outside the city of Jerusalem and the angels told the disciples that He would return to this very place. Even though the land around Jerusalem has been fought over, and will be until He returns, it is His Mountain and the Lord shall reign from that place for the Millennial Kingdom. Acts 1:6-14, Zechariah 14:1-7, Revelation 20:1-10. Jerusalem will be fought over until the last day when the Lord returns to establish His kingdom upon the earth. The battles in the land of Israel will be terrible and only one third of the population will survive those days to welcome back the Lord. Zechariah 13:7-9.

The final battle will be in and around Jerusalem and the genuine believers amongst the Jewish people will have found their Messiah by that point. Zechariah 12:10-14. They will fight on in Jerusalem and hold onto at least a third of the city and will be delivered by the Lord's return to split the Mount of Olives in half creating a great new valley through which the survivors of the city flee on the last day. Zechariah 14:3-7. The Jewish defenders escape and the Lord will then strike dead all the attackers and abusers of His people with what looks like a Neutron bomb. Isaiah 29:5-6, Zechariah 14:12-13. Refer to the BTB study SEQUENCE OF END TIME EVENTS.

55 He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents.

56 Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies:

57 But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow.

58 For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images.

The Lord delivered the land to the people of Israel and cast out the heathen Canaanites from before them. The Israelites had to fight them, but as they were obedient and fought the evil enemy of God they obtained victory. The land was not fully conquered only because their faith failed and they refused to advance to the end in their victory. Joshua 1:1-11, chapters 6-21, Nehemiah 9:22-25. What was to keep the children of Israel safe was to be their dependence and their obedience to the Word of God. Deuteronomy 6:1-25.

The days of Joshua and later the days of the Judges were not days of total victory, because they were not days of obedience, but of compromise and rebellion. The Israelites embraced the very paganism they had left behind in Egypt and the practises of the despised and judged Canaanites whom they were ordered to destroy. They sinned in the same way as the Canaanites had, and so they lost the land as a result.

Moses was told to record all the things that had been done by God in the wilderness so that it would stand as a testimony against the Israelites when later generations fell away from the truth. Deuteronomy 31:9-22. Moses faithfully recorded the historic details and also the frighteningly accurate prophetic picture of what would happen when they rebelled. Moses prophesied the terrible destruction of 586 BC and also the events of 70 AD. Deuteronomy 28:30-68. He even foretells the deportation of the survivors of the final siege of Jerusalem in 67-70 AD down to Egypt in boats and that the slave market there would collapse and none would be able to buy them!

Israel's history as a blessed nation begins with forty years of wandering out of Egypt, and it ends with forty years of grace after they have "cut off" their Messiah, and then go back down to Egypt as slaves. Deuteronomy 28:68, Daniel 9:26. As Daniel notes, the story does not end there, for there is a "week" (seven years) to run of Israel's history and it involves

THE GREAT TRIBULATION period during which they accept their Messiah and at the end of that terrible time, on the last day, are rescued by His return. Isaiah 66:15-20, Daniel 9:27, Zechariah 12:10ff, Revelation 19:11-21.

59 When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel:

60 So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men;

61 And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand.

Paganism, Idolatry and immorality all go together as the satanic counterfeit to genuine faith. All forms of pagan religion bring judgement upon those who practise them. The disobedience of His people brought the anger of the righteous God upon His people to judge them and purify them of their evil practises. The purpose of divine discipline is not to destroy the people but destroy the evil from amongst them; the death and deportation of the people is a result of their persistent rebellion and disobedience only. Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 27-28. Even the very place where the Tabernacle stood became a place of immorality and evil practises and Shiloh was destroyed, and its priests and people who did not flee away were slain. 1 Samuel 2:12-25, 4:10-22.

Jeremiah will later refer to the terrible carnage around Shiloh as an example of the judgement of God that will fall upon his own generation for the same sins. Jeremiah 7:8-29, 26:6-9, 41:5. The people of Israel went from one of the great nations of the Middle East under David and Solomon to a small and beaten group of survivors; from several million people they were reduced to about 30,000 survivors. The reasons were clear; they had practised the same sins that the Canaanites had and so they lost the land, as the Canaanites had, but in God's grace, they would return. 2 Chronicles 36:13-16.

62 He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance.

63 The fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage.

The terrible events of the years of the Assyrian conquests, from 725 – 700 BC saw hundreds of thousands of people die or be taken into slavery to die in what is now Iraq and Iran. The battles of 606 – 586 BC saw even larger numbers die and be taken into captivity, with only around 30,000 survivors of an entire nation left alive as slaves in Babylon. Fire and sword would decimate the people because of their clinging to their false religions and immoral life styles. They trusted false prophets who told them that they would get away with their sins, but they were deceived by these satanic servants masquerading as genuine prophets, and they were deceived to their deaths. The Lord sends the sword after them until they either repent of their evil or die in it under judgement. Jeremiah 5:7-19, 9:9-16, 14:10-18, 15:1-9, 21:7-10.

As you look through these blunt and honest prophetic warnings, notice how many times the Lord provides the way of escape with the word of judgement. God seeks to save his people in the midst of judging them, and this is the grace of God that continues until this very day. There is no need for judgement/divine discipline to continue upon the people of God; all they need to do is repent and return to the Lord their God and they will be delivered. Isaiah 1:10-20.

64 Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation.

65 Then the LORD awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine.

The saddest things about ancient Israel and the modern church is just how many priests and prophets are false. These evil counterfeits do not believe the Word of God, nor worship the Lord of lords in truth. We are warned against false teachers and prophets from the days of Moses, until the final days of the Great Tribulation, where the "False Prophet" will control Satan's worship system. Deuteronomy 13:1ff, 18:1ff, Revelation 19:20-21, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12.

The men and women of God have always been outnumbered by fakes who serve the enemy. Satan has always had more false ministers deceiving the people of God than there are genuine ministers; this has been his major push against the Lord's people from the beginning. The Lord deals with these false preachers, priests and prophets by the SIN UNTO DEATH, and their widows make no mourning for them, for they all know that they have died under God's judgement.

We are used to hypocritical services for false Christians, but the early churches did not practise such nonsense. When Ananias and Sapphira died under the judgement of God there was no funeral, just a simple and quick burial accompanied by a brief prayer. Acts 5:1-12. No lament was ever raised for false or carnal believers. Let us learn from this and have no part with hypocrisy.

The psalmist uses an image that appears blasphemous at first sight to describe the Lord's rising up to judge these hypocrites and false teachers of His people. The image is of a sleeping drunk who rises up with destructive fury, and so it is not an image that is appropriate to use for the Lord, except as the psalmist uses it here. The people he speaks of in these verses are drunken fake believers who behave just like this, rising in drunken fury to assault all who waken them from their drugged slumber. The psalmist's use of this image makes the strong point; as they have lived so they will die. They think they are "mighty men", but they are just sad and bad drunks! God judges drunkards in their corrupt life style choice; it is not 'sickness' it is sin. Isaiah 28:1-3, Joel 1:5-20, Nahum 1:9-14, 1 Corinthians 5:11-13, 6:9-11.

66 And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach.

67 Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim:

The enemy fled and they were struck and wounded in their backsides to their everlasting shame. To be wounded in the back proved forever that you were a coward and had run away from your enemies. The Lord put the enemy to flight and

He made His choices of who He would bless on the basis of grace and righteousness. The greatest and most military powerful tribes were not chosen as the ruler of Israel. Even though Joseph was great and his sons were noble, the tribes that descended from him became corrupt and turned away from the Lord their God. Genesis 48:1-16, 19-22. They were judged and eliminated from Israel, with their only survivors fleeing to the south before the Assyrian's extinguished them, and so the remnant found their survival only by becoming part of the tribe of Judah. 2 Kings 17:20-23.

68 But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved.

69 And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established for ever.

It was Judah that was chosen to rule from the very beginning. They were the choice of grace by God, for Judah sinned greatly but was restored by repentance, and was lifted up to rulership. Genesis 49:8-10. It was also the tribe that inherited the area of Jerusalem, that would be the capital and the site for the temple. The very site for the temple was chosen through a mark of grace and mercy by God, and the plague that stopped on the threshing floor or Araunah became the sign for the place of the altar of the new temple. 2 Samuel 24:1-25, Psalms 87:1-2, 132:11-14.

The temple of Solomon is no more, (although pieces of it have emerged from the spoil taken from the underground mosque excavations) and the temple of Herod is only seen in its surviving western (Wailing) wall, but the site remains the Lord's for as long as history lasts. The Mount of Zion will be the throne of God until the end of history and the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth, and even in it there will be a New Jerusalem, even more glorious than the earthly model. Revelation 21:1ff.

70 He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds:

71 From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance.

72 So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.

David was raised up from humility of station as a shepherd, but also against the odds, from a family that descended from two non-Israelite women of the land who were under a curse. Ruth 4:13-22, Matthew 1:2-6. The line that leads to David was a line of grace and mercy indeed, for neither the Canaanites nor the Moabites were to share in the worship or inheritance of Israel, and were to be under a ban for ten generations. Deuteronomy 23:1-6. The only explanation for David's lifting up to become king within this cursed time frame is that his faith and the faith of his fathers turned the curse into blessing, as God had said genuine faith would always do. Exodus 20:3-7, 34:7-8, Numbers 14:18-19, 32:13-14, Deuteronomy 5:5-10.

David served as a shepherd, just as Amos the prophet would later do. 1 Samuel 16:11-13, Amos 7:12-16. It is in the service to the sheep that David learned what it took to become a king, for courage, tenacity, and faithfulness to his charge were all the things that as a godly king he needed to practise. 1 Samuel 17:34-37, 45-49. From his days as a shepherd he united the tribes under his leadership and led the people of Israel as a united group to glory in the Lord's name. 2 Samuel 5:1ff.

David was a sinful man like us all, but when he walked in holiness before the Lord he did mighty things and achieved all that the Lord wished for him to achieve. He has integrity of heart, for he loved the Lord above all else, and he was skilful of hands. This is what the Lord wants from His servants today; a heart totally devoted to Him alone, and a body and mind trained to be skilful in all they do. Let us be this sort of person.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Our job is to preach received truth, not seek innovation and novelty. We are to preach and teach the truth that has been received by the great saints of the past, not add or subtract from it. Let us not do anything other than teach the truth to all who will hear it of all ages. It is the truth of God's Word alone that will keep the young people from sin and death. Let us teach the truth and nothing but the truth of God's Word.

2. Rebellion against the clearly revealed will of God is an ever present danger for all believers. Our own Old Sin Nature (OSN) patterns and weaknesses of lust will at all times in life produce temptations to deviate from the clear path the Lord has called us to walk.

The challenge to every believer every day is to "walk in the Spirit", and let the filling of the Holy Spirit overcome the self centred lusts of the old nature and so each and every decision to select the path God wants us to walk, not our own foolishness. Let us walk spiritually today, not in the carnality of our OSN! Let us seek the provision of the Lord for that is always perfect; let us not seek the lusts of our OSN, for they will lead to disaster and death.

3. We are kept by the power, provisions and plan of God for us. Our task in this world is to relax and serve the Lord in all things. Our task is to apply the truth about God and God's works from the past into our present situation and express our faith aloud to the Lord. We are to walk forward in faith, not by sight, but with the confidence that is born of the wonderful works of God. We can walk through this life with the joy of the Lord as our strength, or we can plod through the long days in carnality. Let us make Nehemiah's motto our own. "The joy of the Lord is your strength". Nehemiah 8:10.

4. Let us remember the SIN UNTO DEATH and not act in such a way as to persistently grieve or quench the presence of the Holy Spirit. There is a limit beyond which no believer may go without judgement falling upon them. Let us be obedient and not tempt the Lord to judge us by stupid actions and words. Let us warn our fellow believers of the dangers of tempting the Lord to judge us by persistent disobedience.

5. Let us warn our fellows who are playing with the deception of satanic religious and immoral evils, and let us urge them to repent, for the Lord will save them, even from the jaws of hell itself if they turn to Him. Let us preach the grace, mercy and love of God from the midst of His judgement/divine discipline upon the disobedient. Let us remember David and be people of integrity of heart and skilfulness of mind and body in the Lord's service; let us seek the will of the Lord alone, for it alone matters. Let us be able to pray as David prayed at the end of his life. 2 Samuel 23:1-7.

DOCTRINES

HOLY SPIRIT – OPERATION

HOLY SPIRIT – FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

REVELATION

GOD – DIVINE GUIDANCE: THE WILL OF GOD

MIRACLES – PURPOSE

SIGNS

LIGHT

CHRISTIAN LIFE – AMBASSADORSHIP

CHRISTIAN LIFE – DISCIPLINE OF BELIEVERS

MANNA

SIN – SIN UNTO DEATH

CHRISTIAN LIFE – REPENTANCE

CHRISTIAN LIFE – STABILITY

CHRISTIAN LIFE – WALKING

CHRISTIAN LIFE – SOLDIER: CHRISTIAN SOLDIER IN EPHESIANS 6

CHRISTIAN LIFE – CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

REMNANT

SALT

SALVATION – REGENERATION: BORN AGAIN

HOLY SPIRIT – SINS AGAINST THE SPIRIT

CHRISTIAN LIFE – BACK-SLIDING AND RECOVERY

RELIGION

BLOOD SACRIFICE

ANGELS – COUNTERFEITS OF SATAN

CHRIST – ROCK: CHRIST AS THE ROCK

PROPHECY – SEQUENCE OF END TIME EVENTS

DISPENSATIONS – THE TRIBULATION OR THE TIME OF JACOB'S TROUBLE

TRIBULATION IN MATTHEW 24

CHRIST – RETURN OF OUR LORD

PSALM 79**INTRODUCTION**

This is another psalm in honour of Asaph the great worship leader of Israel, sung from later days when the worship of the nation had been corrupted by satanic evil and the Temple of Solomon itself had been defiled by wicked religious rituals. Ezekiel 8:6-18. The people of God had become corrupted by religious practises that were pagan and there was but a remnant left who held to the Lord, and the genuine prophets were mocked more than believed. Ezekiel 2:3-8, 3:4-11, 6:8-14.

This psalm before us is the reminder however, that no matter how dark the day has become due to sin and evil, there is hope when God's people repent and bow before their Lord again. Even when surrounded by desolation and destruction there is hope if God's people bow before Him again. Their sins have brought them low, and their repentance will lift them up again. As one old saint notes, "we can never understand effects by ignoring causes". Praise will start the process of recovery and blessing. Isaiah 61:3.

"Though the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be on the vine, though the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields yield no food, though the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds feet. And he will make me to walk upon my high places." Habakkuk 3:17-19.

"Who is a God like unto thee that pardons iniquity? Who passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retains not his anger forever, for he delights in mercy. He will turn again. He will have compassion upon us. He will subdue our iniquities, and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob and the mercy to Abraham which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old." Micah 7:18-20.

"For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew, and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And it shall come to pass, that as you were a curse amongst the heathen, Oh house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing. Fear not, but let your hands be strong. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, As I thought to punish you when your fathers provoked me to wrath, and I repented not, so again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear ye not!" Zechariah 8:11-15.

PSALMS 79:1-13

1 O GOD, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps. 2 The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth. 3 Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them. 4 We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us. 5 How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire? 6 Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name. 7 For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place. 8 O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low. 9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake. 10 Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed. 11 Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die; 12 And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord. 13 So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations.

REFLECTION

1 O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps.

2 The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth.

The insulting behaviours described in these first verses only occurred in 586 BC when the Babylonian armies burst into the city and destroyed its houses and murdered its surviving people. Only 745 people survived the final capture of the city. Jeremiah 52:30. The terrible carnage of the capture of the city can only be guessed at, but there may have been 100,000 people inside the walls when it was first besieged! The bodies were thrown into the valleys around the city, and there were thousands of them, all food for the birds of prey and the dogs and hyenas that will have come to feed upon them. The pitiful few who lived were camped outside the city for a number of weeks to build their strength for the walk to Babylon. 2 Kings 24:8ff, 25:1-11, Jeremiah 52:1ff.

The terrible sight of the multitude of bodies rotting in the valleys would be on a par to the sights that greeted the liberators of the concentration camps in Nazi Germany when they confronted the piles of bodies rotting in the spring sunlight. When we face such sights the believer is grappling with the hardest questions that come to us in this present earth.

These people were living and breathing people with feelings, loves, families and desires for their life and all is gone. Sadly of the people in the valleys outside Jerusalem we cannot say that they were believers, but "saints" only in the sense of members of the family of Israel; they had never fully exercised their membership of the family of God through faith. Sadly they were there because of their rejection of the prophets. 2 Chronicles 36:11-16.

3 Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them.

4 We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us.

The most terrible thing for a Jewish person was to die and be left unburied, with no prayers said for your soul, and your body to be left to be eaten by wild and unclean animals. This was a horror too great to bear for these people. The blood shed around the city was great, and this reference here may even mean that many were brought out of the city and had their throats cut into the valleys all around the city as a ritualistic sacrifice by the pagan Scythians and Babylonians to desecrate the city completely for its rebellion against their king.

The nations around about were staggered at the stupidity of the Jewish people in their rebellions against Nebuchadnezzar. They had been treated well by him initially in 605 BC, and even after Jehoiakim's rebellion in 597 BC they were not destroyed as they could have been, but to rebel a third time was suicidal for any people. All they could hope for was total destruction and that is what they got.

All the neighbouring states mocked their fall but many shared their fate within a few years. Even the mighty power of Egypt would fall to the Babylonian armies within fourteen years of mocking Judah's fall. Psalms 26:1, 43:1. When Nehemiah returned to rebuild the walls of the city the neighbouring Satraps of the Persian Empire mocked and abused him and the people of Judea. Nehemiah took such abuse to the Lord and left it in the Lord's hands for remedy. Nehemiah 2:19-20, 4:1-5.

5 How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire?

6 Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name.

The psalmist still lives with the hot memory of that traumatic time of destruction and still feels that the nation is under greatest divine discipline. There is no accusation that the Lord was unfair in His judgement, just the appeal of grace and love to see an end of it now. The Lord is jealous for His people; He will not share their worship with any demons who masquerade as gods. Deuteronomy 32:17, Psalm 106:34-39. God is jealous over us still today, and He will not share us with demonic forces or evil/sinful activities. The Lord is angry at sin and evil and desires us to cleanse these things from our life. Refer to the BTB study JEALOUSY.

The Lord had good reason to feel jealous, but the psalmist now seeks the Lord's judgement of other nations, not upon Israel any more. These surrounding nations have dealt badly with Israel and been harsh and evil in their vicious attacks upon the people of God. Justice is called for upon their heads, as it fell upon the heads of unbelieving and rebellious Israel. Deuteronomy 29:19-21, 32:15-22.

7 For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place.

8 O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low.

It is the humility of a genuine believer who grapples with the loss of over ninety percent of their people that we read here. The entire inheritance of Jacob is nearly gone; all the land the Lord gave is lost, and over 99% of the people are gone. The calamity of the loss of nationhood in 721 and 586 cannot be understated. Few nations would have come back from this level of catastrophe and without God's grace, mercy and power it would have been impossible. The nation has been laid low and the believing survivors feel every blow that their foolish contemporaries experienced. The horror of thinking about the death of friends and family must have been too hard for many to bear.

It is only the work of Ezekiel in Babylon that keeps the people going and prepares them for the day when their children will return. The appeal to the Lord is for forgiveness of the distant past and the recent past, for the evidence against this people is overwhelmingly that they are corrupt to the core. It is tender mercy, not justice that the psalmist seeks from the Lord, for justice would condemn them totally and finally. The psalmist knows they cannot ask for justice, only mercy.

How much different is it for us believer? Are we so different in our sinful patterns? It is to the praise and honour and glory of God that He still deals with us according to His grace and mercy not our desserts. Genesis 33:11, Psalms 103:10, Joel 2:26, Romans 12:3.

9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake.

10 Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed.

We worship “the God of our salvation”, and we worship Him because of who He is and what He has done for us. It is the CHARACTER OF GOD and the PLAN OF GOD for mankind that gives us the confidence to boldly approach the throne of grace, for we know it is a “throne of grace”. Romans 8:28-39, Ephesians 3:12, Hebrews 4:16, 10:19, 13:6. There is confidence also regarding the Plan of God, that it will always bring glory to the Holy name of God. There is absolute dependability upon this fact, for all history will praise His Holy Name when it is seen from eternity. We don’t have all the facts before us in each situation we see, but when we do we will, with all angels, praise the Lord with loud Halleluiahs. Isaiah 45:23, Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:10, Revelation 19:1-10.

The need for all mankind is cleansing from sin; and so they ask for the purging away of sin from their lives for the sake of the Lord’s precious name, that He might be glorified through the removal of sin. Can you see the logic of grace here? Can you see the prophetic reference to what the Lord would do, and how His name would receive the greatest glory forever and ever? For the holy and perfect God to become man and go to the Cross and suffer like no man had ever suffered and take the penalty for the sin of mankind upon His own body, and by so doing provide cleansing for all of mankind!

This is a work that is so great, it will bring all the saints to their feet to shout “Halleluiah!”, and it will bring all the unbelievers before their judgement to their knees in sad, silent, and final recognition of the righteousness of their eternal damnation. To walk away and insult such “great salvation” leaves them without any hope indeed. Hebrews 2:3-10, Revelation 20:4-15. God is not mocked by the unbelievers that abuse His grace and insult His mercy offered to them; the day of the Lord’s judgement will fall upon them. Galatians 6:7-8, Hebrews 10:30-31, 12:28-29

**11 Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die;
12 And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord.**

The Lord hears our sighings, even the deep sighings that are too powerful and confusing to articulate in clearly thought out words. Isaiah 42:1-7, Romans 8:26, Hebrews 5:11. The psalmist asks that the groans of those who have become prisoners, who have now become believers, might be heard by the grace and mercy of the Lord. He asks for the greatness of the Lord’s power to be used in the deliverance of His people in prison. He prays for preservation on those who are about to die for their sins, that they might know the power of God in their distress.

Many Israelites did evil and were executed by the Babylonians for their sins and these people are prayed for by the believing psalmist. Some of these people may have done awful things to believers during the siege of Jerusalem, even murdered believers to preserve themselves. Some of the leaders actually imprisoned and tried to kill Jeremiah. They did kill other prophetic voices through this time. Yet even for those who have “despitefully used” the believers the psalmist prays! Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:28, 23:34, Acts 7:60, 1 Peter 2:18-23.

Those who have done evil are prayed for, but also they are handed over to the Lord to be judged harshly; seven times what they have given to good people is to be visited upon their heads. Is this vengeance? From the context of scripture the answer would have to be “no”. Vengeance is the Lord’s and He will repay any insult or injury, and the best way for that to be repaid is for the abuser to be saved! John 16:8-11. Even Paul hands over carnal believers to Satan for really serious discipline, but only that “they might learn not to blaspheme”. 1 Timothy 1:19-20.

13 So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations.

From their place of judgement, the saved survivors of Israel still remember that they are the sheep of the Lord’s pasture. This is a twofold recognition of important truths. **Firstly** it reminds them that the Lord is their SHEPHERD. They remember that even in jail or in captivity that the Lord is their Shepherd and will keep them safe and fed, and their only need is to focus upon the Lord’s Word and fellowship and thereby stay safe with Him.

Secondly they remember that the “pasture” of the Lord for us is His choice for us, and if we are walking on the Lord’s path, then it doesn’t matter where we are, we will be blessed in that tough and hard place. All paths the Lord leads us on are paths that will lead to blessing as we walk in the Holy Spirit’s power and guidance. Refer to the BTB study WALKING.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Great tragedies occur in this present world, and they occur for a number of reasons. Refer to the BTB study on SUFFERING again and refresh your memory regarding this important issue for man this side of eternity. Let us face the tragedies of life by seeing things through the Holy and perfect CHARACTER OF GOD and so let us feel the bed rock of God’s Holiness and stability beneath our shaking feet. Let us draw strength from the Character of God and so rest within the Plan of God for our life and serve the Lord as we are called to serve.

2. Let us take our concerns about the tragedies of life to the Lord in prayer. 1 Peter 5:5-9. If we keep our eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2) and focus our minds upon His person, power, and plan, then we can see our path through the sadnesses we may face. It is only in eternity that the truth is going to be seen fully and finally, and only then will loved ones who died "too early" for us be able to tell their story and we are assured we will all shout "Halleluiah" in that day.

3. We can feel great personal affront at the insults and abuse we may receive in the Lord's work. We are called to remember that we are AMBASSADORS for Christ and an ambassador never takes any insult personally, for he is representative of a foreign power, and so any insult received is received on behalf of his government, not himself. It is this mental attitude that protects the believer. We are the Lord's people and we need to pass over all our troubles to Him, and all the personal insults we receive are also His! Let us pass all things to the Lord and simply focus on showing His love, mercy and grace to those who insult us. Let us hear His words every morning! Matthew 5:7-14.

4. It is easy to pray for the persecuted, but we are urged by the Lord to pray for the persecutors. This goes one step further than anything we would think of doing in our natural lives. Let us follow the Lord's instructions and pray for those about to die for doing evil even if they did evil to believers; we may not know what that prayer may do.

DOCTRINES

SIN – JEALOUSY

GOD – CHARACTER OF GOD

GOD – PLAN OF GOD

CHRIST – THE SHEPHERD

CHRISTIAN LIFE – WALKING

CHRISTIAN LIFE – WALKING AND LIVING IN THE LIGHT

CHRISTIAN LIFE – SUFFERING

CHRISTIAN LIFE – AMBASSADORSHIP

PSALM 80**INTRODUCTION**

Nostalgia can be a debilitating thing, for we end up looking back at past victories, rather than forward to further battle winning opportunities. Looking back can be a waste of time, but only if we stay in the past and spend our present recollecting our past. Looking back can be positive; it can galvanise us into action for harder work and more focused and enthusiastic work in the Lord's path for us. If we look back to get inspired and to remember the past help of the Lord, we are encouraged, and therefore ready to renew our strength for even greater work into the future. Isaiah 40:28-31.

This psalm looks back and longs for the greatness of those days, but isn't negative and nostalgic; it is enthusiastic and passionate. The writer honours Asaph again and dedicates the psalm to him, and seeks a return to the glory days of the first temple, and then he places himself and the people of God in the place where the Holy Spirit can produce those glory days in obedient servants. Our "Providence Booklet" (Book 150 in the "Missions" file) reflects this truth.

Let us remember that the "glory days of the past" were days produced by obedient servants of the Lord. Let us walk in the Spirit and we will see greater things! John 5:20, 14:11-14. Let us look back and reflect at times, and let us remember the grace of God in the past, for His glory and grace is renewed every morning! Psalms 103:1-15, Lamentations 3:23.

PSALMS 80:1-19

1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. 2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us. 3 Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. 4 O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? 5 Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure. 6 Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves. 7 Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. 8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. 9 Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. 10 The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. 11 She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river. 12 Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? 13 The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it. 14 Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; 15 And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. 16 It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. 17 Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. 18 So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. 19 Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

REFLECTION

**1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.
2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us.**

This psalm may have been written before the Babylonian Captivity, but after the deportation of the Northern Tribes into Assyria. The appeal is to the Shepherd of Israel in recognition that the Lord is still the Shepherd of Israel even though the nation of Israel as such has ceased to exist. The believers knew that Moses had warned them that the fifth cycle of national discipline would involve deportation and dispersion, and that there was a promise of return if the people repented, even from the ends of the earth. Leviticus 26:27-46, Deuteronomy 28:30-68, 30:1-20.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel, comprising the ten tribes was completely obliterated by the Assyrians in 720 BC, and yet the ten tribes were reformed by their survivors over the next two hundred years as a part of Judah-Benjamin, but their individual identity was often lost as all the written genealogical records had been lost with the destruction of Samaria. Some Jewish people today still can cite their genealogies back to Abraham or the Davidic time frame and some are of the northern tribes, so some people wrote down their records again and again through the centuries and they have survived. Certainly there are no "lost ten tribes" as by James and Paul's day the "twelve tribes" are referred to again. Acts 26:7, James 1:1.

**3 Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.
4 O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?**

The psalmist recognises that the Lord must save them; that they do not have the power or plan to work to their own advantage, but God has both. The psalmist seeks for the blessing of the Lord upon them, that the Lord's "face might shine" with a smile upon them. This is a lovely way of referring to the close and loving fellowship of the believer with the Lord who is smiling upon them in blessing.

There is also the recognition however that the Lord's anger has been legitimate and that all that can be asked is "how long" it will last, not make any observation about its legitimacy. Remember the clear teaching of the earlier Psalm 66:18. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me". Unconfessed sins stop prayer being answered. The psalmist recognises that the people must do business with God and face their carnality before the scales of history will swing back to deliver blessing rather than divine discipline.

**5 Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure.
6 Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves.**

The people are seriously weeping and wailing for their state, but have they really broken through to understand that it is their sin that has brought them here? There is a need for people to "sit with" their pain for long enough to really learn enough from it for it to be useful. The bread and wine of tears may truly satisfy the soul and educate the person in truth faster than any teacher in a classroom. At times it is in our suffering that we learn more than any other place.

I was gassed in the Armed Forces by an idiot officer friend who let off two smoke bombs to "liven up" a training exercise. Three years later I got back to work!!!! The suffering of that time however led to me learning more about myself, the Lord, and suffering itself than I could ever have learned any other way.

It opened the door, after my recovery, for me to work with cancer patients who I discovered I was able to communicate with because the suffering I had experienced had opened doors in my understanding that my doctorate studies had never been close to achieving. The psalmist identifies that the Lord is feeding the people on the bread and wine of deep sorrow, and that the enemy nations round about laugh at them, but only time will tell if the suffering has achieved the most important lessons of life for these previously disobedient people. Refer back to the BTB study on SUFFERING.

7 Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

The psalmist appeals for the Lord to return them to prosperity and bless them with His presence again. His appeal is urgent and passionate, for the ancients sought peace, prosperity and health as the primary blessings of the Lord, and sought to escape suffering if they could. The psalmist is trying to make sense of the suffering of the Israelites, because it is so great, it is simply beyond anything they ever expected.

The prophets from Moses onwards had warned of calamity if they failed to obey the Lord but none expected the Lord to follow through on the threats made in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30. Like all too many today the carnal believers of this day thought they could "get by" with disobedience and escape from consequences of their sins. The truth caught up with them in 721 BC and again in 586 BC and hundreds of thousands paid for their false beliefs with their lives.

**8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.
9 Thou prepared room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.
10 The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars.**

The picture of the vine for Israel becomes a major motif of the nation, and in verse eight the psalmist introduces the thought that the Lord has so tenderly established Israel as a vine in tough and barren ground that it makes no sense to tear them from the ground. Israel had been established as a nation in a barren and pagan land. God had enabled them to clear the land of the pagans and establish themselves as a community in the room the Lord provided for them. They prospered in the land and grew to a mighty nation of several million people by Solomon's reign.

They were extremely prosperous in the land and truly the hills were covered with them and their fruit trees groaned under the weight of their produce. From great prosperity and high population numbers they suffer catastrophe after catastrophe until they are reduced severely by 586 BC. If Jeremiah accurately records the total numbers going into captivity, rather than just the numbers from Jerusalem (as is more likely – as he only accurately had those figures), it is a pitifully small group of captives at 4600. Jeremiah 52:28-30. I suspect all up around 30,000 probably went into captivity.

They were rebuilt by the end of the Babylonian captivity in 535 BC back to around the same number that came out of Egypt in the 15th century BC, one thousand years before. Total numbers of the Exodus appear to be around 30,000-40,000, (refer to the EBCWA Commentary on Exodus 15:15-16 where a discussion of this occurs) and around the same number is what goes into and then returns from exile in 535 BC; 42,360 people, plus 7,337 servants of non-Israelite origin, according to Ezra 2:64-65.

In effect their sin causes the Lord to start again with them, and for a second time they re-enter the land and rebuild shattered cities to live within them, but this time they are their ancestor's shattered cities, not the Canaanites. Sin moves them back to the beginning again, to the start line again, but the very fact that they get a second chance to rebuild is a testimony to God's grace. The fact that they have come back a third time in 1948 is amazing, and unique in human history. God is indeed a God of grace and ISRAEL is His people. John 15:1-14, Romans 11:1-27.

**11 She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river.
12 Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?**

The prosperity of the nation of Israel under the great kings David and Solomon stretched out beyond the great rivers, the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates, and beyond the seas. Solomon launched a Naval trading expedition that travelled to Africa and southern India, and possibly as far as modern Singapore. 1 Kings 9:26-28, 10:11-29. The vast riches of this kingdom were in excess of the neighbouring more ancient states, and they were jealous of Israel. Egypt would conquer Israel within five years of Solomon's death and seize all their gold. 2 Kings 14:25-28.

From the greatness of the days of Solomon the nation was reduced to a third rate power within five years, and although under later kings like Uzziah they prospered again and were strong, they never returned to the glory days of Solomon, and the surrounding nations would raid and pillage, and finally overwhelm and sack them totally. By this time after the Babylonian Captivity had begun the land was desolate and any traveller passing through could pick from the abandoned fruit trees as they went. There were few Jews left and they could not resist the raiders that came.

13 The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it.

14 Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine;

Wild animals had returned to raid the abandoned vineyards and orchards. The wild animals ruled the land, for man was banned from it by the Lord's judgement. Dominion was lost. Genesis 3-5. Only after 535 BC were the cities inhabited again. It was exactly as God said it would be if they disobeyed His Holy Word. Leviticus 26:22, Deuteronomy 28:15-51. The one thing about a vine is that you can cut it back to the ground and it can still re-shoot and become great again, and this is the prayer of the psalmist and the people for their nation and land.

This is Paul's prayer also, after he realises that the nation has been laid aside due to their rejection of Messiah. He realises, quite rightly, that the Lord has not "cast off His people", but that they are laid aside and the church has been grafted in to the old vine root and will grow for a time there, but that the Lord will bring regrowth to Israel one day as the prophets prophesied. Romans 11:1ff.

15 And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself.

16 It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance.

It is the rebuke of the Lord that is being experienced here by His people and the psalmist acknowledges it again. There is no accusation to the Lord of injustice, for each and every person knows that the Lord has been incredibly patient with His people and they ought to have been consumed by the fires of judgement earlier than this time. Their nation has been burned with fire. 2 Kings 25:8-10. There is nothing left except charred ruins and burnt trees and desolate weed and brush filled fields. Their persistent sins and steady course along an evil path have brought them to the place of judgement and they know that the Lord was left without any alternative except to judge them.

The survivor's hope now begins again, as they repent and ask for the Lord's favour once more. They are alive and so there is hope for them. This remains a truth that all carnal believers need to grasp tightly to; if they are still alive after the Lord's discipline has hit them, then there is hope for them. If we have not died the SIN UNTO DEATH, then we can be restored in grace, mercy and love; all that is required is genuine REPENTANCE. They will be able to rebuild and the trees and vines are there in enough numbers to replant and re-order the field systems within a generation.

17 Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.

The psalmist knows that there is a line that will lead to the Messiah and he expresses the Messianic hope of Israel here. The sceptre will not depart from Judah until Messiah comes. Genesis 49:10, Psalms 60:7, Isaiah 7:13-16, 9:1-7, 11:1-16, Ezekiel 21:25-27, Zechariah 10:12 – 14:21. Not only will Messiah come, but He will restore all the people of Israel to their land in peace in the end. Refer to the BTB study CHRIST – FIRST AND SECOND ADVENTS.

18 So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.

19 Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

The psalmist asks for the "quickenings" of the Holy Spirit to enable them to repent and be restored. In this he recognises that restoration is a work of God alone. Refer to the BTB study HOLY SPIRIT – EFFECTIVE CALLING, OPERATION. The psalmist rests solely upon the power and mercy of God, for then alone he knows the people will be saved. God alone can keep them and deliver them, and he prays that He will do so soon. This psalm's heart felt prayer was answered as the Lord lifted up Cyrus the Great to restore Israel as a nation again and a good number of the Exiles returned. Ezra 1:1ff.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. When suffering comes to us we need to sit with it and let the pain we feel teach us truths that we will not otherwise know. Suffering is not a thing to be avoided at all costs, for it may open the door to understanding of others that education and prosperity could never do. Let us take all our experiences to the Lord in prayer and learn from everything we experience.

2. The grace and mercy of God is seen in the history of the nation Israel written large! For a nation to come back from extinction three times is unparalleled in the history of man. They are presently in the land in unbelief, and the next events are those of "Jacob's Trouble". Isaiah 22:5, 37:3, Jeremiah 2:27-28, 30:7, 51:1-2, Zephaniah 1:7-18. During that

time the Lord takes up His people again when they turn to Him in repentance and are restored to nationhood in faith ready for the Lord's triumphant return to rule over this earth. Zechariah 10:12ff. Let us see the future as God has told us it will unfold and praise Him now for events that are about to unfold. Refer to the BTB studies on PROPHECY.

3. While we live there is hope for us. If we are looking face to face with the Lord, then we are in heaven and there is no further opportunity of service upon the earth, but if we live then there is more we can do here. If we have sinned, even most grievously, but we are still alive after our repentance there is hope for service again. Let us commit ourselves to the God who is gracious, merciful and loving towards His servants. We are saved by grace, kept by grace, and will be led by grace until we are called home in DYING GRACE. Let us praise the Lord who has the power and the will to keep us until we are brought home into His loving presence. Jude 24-25.

DOCTRINES

CHRISTIAN LIFE – SUFFERING

ISRAEL

SIN – SIN UNTO DEATH

CHRISTIAN LIFE – REPENTANCE

CHRIST – FIRST AND SECOND ADVENTS

HOLY SPIRIT – EFFECTIVE CALLING

HOLY SPIRIT – OPERATION

PROPHECY – DANIEL – NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

PROPHECY – SEQUENCE OF END TIME EVENTS

TRIBULATION IN MATTHEW 24

TRIBULATION – SIGNS

DYING GRACE

PSALM 81**INTRODUCTION**

This is another psalm in honour of Asaph, and written after the collapse of the nations of Israel and Judah. It is a psalm on what might have been, had the people heeded the words of the prophets and followed the Law of Moses properly. This is a psalm of the greatest regrets that any people could ever have; they had been the jewel upon the finger of God and they had despised their place and gone off after other gods that were nothing other than demons. 1 Chronicles 5:25-26, 2 Chronicles 21:12-15, Psalms 73:27, 106:39, Ezekiel 6:9, 23:30, Hosea 4:12, 9:1, 13:9-11. There was hope for them, but only in repentance and it didn't come in time for recovery. This Psalm is a warning to us all, that we must walk with the Lord or lose our place of blessing and face divine discipline. 1 Corinthians 9:27.

PSALMS 81:1-16

1 Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. 2 Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery. 3 Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day. 4 For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob. 5 This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not. 6 I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots. 7 Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah. 8 Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me; 9 There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god. 10 I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. 11 But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. 12 So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels. 13 Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! 14 I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. 15 The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever. 16 He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.

REFLECTION

**1 Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.
2 Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery.**

The psalm is written after the destruction of the temple and the nation, but the psalmist sings in these first verses as if there is only joy. He praises the Lord as the people ought to have praised the Lord their God. Isaiah 61:3. He takes their great pain and transforms it into the sort of praise that would have stopped the historic tragedy from unfolding around them. This psalm is a solemn recognition that praise transforms history and the lack of it settles the fate of carnal people.

We are urged to make a joyful noise to our God, and we are told that He is worthy of our praise. 2 Samuel 22:4, Psalms 18:3, 66:1, 81:1, 95:1-2, 98:4-8, Revelation 4:11. Worship is the right thing for us to do in recognition of our status as the children of God. The singing of the Psalms was an integral part of worship and the use of musical instruments also a sign of the joy of the Lord in the temple worship. The early church, following the synagogue routine had no musical instruments, but only the human voice. Refer to the BTB study WORSHIP AND PRAISE.

**3 Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day.
4 For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob.**

A silver trumpet or ram's horn shofar announced the worship services of Israel and the people would gather at the sound to worship the Lord. It was the same trumpet call to battle, and this was significant, for the worship services of God's people are their battle training for the ANGELIC CONFLICT and the believers who do not worship will not fight well against the demonic enemy. Worship and praise are our communication with our Commanding Officer, and those who do not delight in praising the Lord and talking to Him in prayer are suspect members of the Lord's Army! If we love the Lord we speak to Him and of Him often. Malachi 3:16-18.

**5 This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not.
6 I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots.**

Joseph was a testimony of grace. His life was a journey from arrogance and self importance through humility to the greatest role in the ancient world of his day. Genesis 38-48. Refer to the BTB study JOSEPH – PLAN OF GOD, GUIDANCE – THE WILL OF GOD. Joseph really illustrates the Plan of God in action, and in his life story we find encouragement for every difficult thing we face on our own journey. Joseph sought the Lord's path and did not lose hope that God would lift him up. Romans 8:28-39, 1 Peter 5:5-9.

This is our own challenge as we journey through difficult places and times in our life. We are to persevere in our path through hard times, walking patiently, waiting for the Lord to open the doors that need to be opened, and seeking His promotion, not our own advancement. It is the Lord's will only that matters, and Joseph illustrates the way the Lord "lifts burdens" from the shoulders of His people at the right time, and lifts them up from the prison to the palace when the job is to be done. It is not our timing but the Lord's that is to be followed in life and that is the challenge for each and every one of us. We are all at times working with "the pots" doing menial tasks, but it is our faithfulness and patience doing the humble and menial tasks that prepares us for the great roles the Lord may have for us. Philippians 4:4-14.

7 Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.

8 Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me;

There is a major comfort for us under pressure, in that we can know that the Lord hears us when we cry out to Him. We can know that He delivers us into the path He wants us to walk with Him. The psalmist reminds the people that at times the Lord will answer from the "secret place of the thunder" in a way that we will not see coming, nor know the time until it occurs, and cannot understand. He will also prove our faith and build it by means of testing situations. There are some things that are simply growing experiences of positive and energetic learning, but then, there are testing situations that may be very trying. The waters of Meribah were one such test for the Israelites. Hebrews 3:7 – 4:12.

The Israelites faced several serious water tests on their journey out of Egypt. The first was "too much water" at the Yam Suf. Exodus 14:1-31. God made a path through the midst of the sea, but before He did that He placed them in an impossible situation and held them there long enough to really feel the fear of it and see their enemies clearly. The Lord wanted them to see that He could open up a path through impossible situations, but they had to wait upon the Lord, and rest upon the certainty of His provision for them.

The next test they faced was the "wrong sort of water" at Marah, where the water was bitter and poisonous. Exodus 15:22-26. The people moan again and complain to Moses. Moses prays and the Lord answers, but the people have still not learned to pray first; they appear to prefer to moan! God shows Moses the way to solve the problem by casting the tree into the waters and they are made sweet.

The Lord then orders them to move onwards and after several days marching, provided a place of rest for the Israelites at Elim where there was plenty of water, but their food was running out. They moaned again there, as they wondered what they would eat as they advanced further into the wilderness and further away from the civilisation and markets of Egypt. Exodus 15:27 – 16:18. God in grace provided manna every day, and on one day as a special treat provided the quail to eat.

They still missed the learning experience, for the Lord sought for them to rest upon Him and pray about their problems, not moan about them and complain, as if they were being punished or were hard done by. God sought for their trust that they might see that the hard walk was the right path, and that each challenge they faced would be met by God's perfect provision, obtainable by prayer and faith.

They advanced further into the wilderness and even though they had seen the Lord's provisions so far they moaned at the "waters of Meribah" when they found nothing but a barren rock face. The Lord wanted them to draw on their past experiences and see that as the Lord had provided, so He would here, at this barren rock face and bring water from the very rock itself. He wanted them to see with eyes of faith; this means eyes that see the Lord's provision rather than the present problem. They didn't see it and moaned seriously to the Lord about the state they found themselves in. Exodus 17:1ff. The camp at Rephidim (reclining places) became the camp of Meribah (bitter moaning). Instead of resting in the Lord's plan and expecting His provision they bitterly complained.

They had seen the Lord's miraculous provision and yet they doubted that the Lord would continue as He had clearly indicated He would by previous dynamic actions. After this deliverance the Lord allowed them to be attacked by the Amalekites as a discipline, and forced them to trust Him through the prayers of Moses on the hill. Exodus 17:8-16. All the events of this period were designed to teach one central point; God can be trusted to consistently keep His people on the path He has called them to walk. God remains able to do this. Jude 24-25.

9 There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god.

10 I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.

God will always hearken to us when we pray, but if we do not come to the place of prayer we will not see the act of deliverance! God wants us to learn to trust Him, and He can only do that by allowing testing situations to occur that help us to apply the truths we have been taught. We apply bible doctrine through prayers of faith that claim the appropriate promises of God into our situations. We apply God's Word also by rejecting all alternative belief systems. We reject paganism and we reject materialism as solutions, and we rest upon the Lord only. Refer to the BTB studies, FAITH, OVERCOMING BY FAITH, RELIGION, and WORLDLINESS.

Our job is to turn away from all fake faiths and false hopes, and rest upon the one secure hope in our God, and in His ability to provide, and in His Plan that already has the provisions within it for every situation we will ever face. God's provision is perfect and complete and all we need to do is "open our mouth" and receive His food and drink.

The people of the Exodus Generation had to express their faith in the character and plan of the Lord but they kept thinking that the Lord would let them down, and yet their life experience was the opposite. How do we behave regarding the Lord's provisions for us? Do we act as if we expect the Lord to let us down, or do we express our faith in His goodness, grace and love for us? Psalms 103:1-17, 107:8, 9, 15, 21, 31.

11 But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.

12 So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.

A writer whose name I now forget said once, that the saddest word in the English language is "but". This "but" is a very sad one, for it sums up the destruction of a people under maximum divine discipline. The people of Israel and Judah would not listen to God and obey His Holy Word. This remains the saddest thing in churches today; that people are happy to "play church" and enjoy the social activities and pleasant meetings, even the worship songs, but will not hear the Word of God and obey it and so receive all that the Lord has for them.

Sadly the people of Judah disobeyed the Lord and opposed His prophets more than they obeyed them, but the ten northern tribes of Israel were even more negative and embraced their false cult and ignored the truth totally. The result was their destruction as a people within 200 years of decline. God is gracious and slow to judge but the Lord's patience is exhausted by persistent negative volition, and Israel tried the Lord's patience beyond human measure. Isaiah 28:1-3, 21, 2 Peter 3:9.

The judgement that the Lord decreed upon His people is the worst possible; He gave them what their lives demanded, and what they actually wanted. They just didn't see where their lusts would lead them. Lust never looks far enough out to see the full consequences of its lack of control. When people lose their self control, they lose perspective and idea of consequences, and the people of Israel were out of control and didn't realise that their behaviours would rot out their morality and their ability to stand against their enemies.

They were arrogant regarding the prophets and considered them boring and backward and that they could worship the pagan gods and it didn't matter. The most powerful expression of this is found in Jeremiah 44:16-28. They were therefore left with their own logic and the logic of paganism heads quickly down hill to destruction and despair. They had walked away from God, and were left with their false gods who had no power whatsoever to stand against the evils that they had unleashed. Jeremiah 44:29-30.

13 Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!

14 I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.

God's pain is seen in these verses. We can write over these verses, "what might have been". These words are incredibly sad, because they are true and identify just how pointless and empty their suffering was. They didn't have to suffer, nor did they need to see so many die and their cities burn to the ground. They had no need to face the terrible things they faced. It was all a terrible waste, and was directly due to their poor choices. 2 Kings 24:4, 18-20, 2 Chronicles 36:11-17.

15 The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever.

16 He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.

Had those who hated the Lord submitted themselves to Him they would have received eternal life and temporal blessing, but they chose another path and so they have reaped their reward with their suffering and death. Refer to the BTB study SUBMISSION. Had these people submitted to the Lord He would have fed them with the best and held nothing back from them; only repentance separated them from blessing. Jesus words over Jerusalem echo these verses. Matthew 23:37-38. Blessing is offered but rejected by their arrogance and they pay a terrible price for this.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Let us praise the Lord and worship His holy name at every opportunity we have. Praise and worship is our fellowship with the Lord, and our love for the Lord will always overflow into more worship. Let us worship the Lord our God. Halleluiah!

2. Let us be patient as Joseph learned to be, and work quietly away at the tasks we have in hand until they are completed. When the task at hand is done, then and only then will the next path be opened up for us. Let us see that the Lord's path and the Lord's timing for events is the best for us, and let us relax into the will of the Lord for our life as Joseph did. We may be lifted from prison to the palace over years, and as long as it is the Lord's will it is the right path.

3. Faith means seeing the problems we face in terms of the Lord's already provided solutions. Faith means appropriating the truth of God's solutions before we see them with our eyes. Faith is confidence in the character of God, not what we see with our eyes at the time. Faith is built up by applying God's Word into our experience and claiming its promises into the fabric of our daily life.

4. Poor choices lead to poor outcomes. It is so obvious and yet so ignored by modern man as it was by ancient Israel and Judah. Let us be urgent in our warnings to the foolish people we meet who cry for mercy when they would not have needed it had they made better choices earlier. Let us preach the truth pastors, for only the truth of God's Word will save the foolish from destruction. It is listening to the words of the Lord and doing something productive with them that keep us safe in this world.

DOCTRINES

CHURCH – WORSHIP AND PRAISE

ANGELS – ANGELIC CONFLICT

JOSEPH – PLAN OF GOD

GOD – DIVINE GUIDANCE: THE WILL OF GOD

CHRISTIAN LIFE – FAITH

CHRISTIAN LIFE – FAITH – OVERCOMING BY FAITH

RELIGION

WORLDLINESS

CHRISTIAN LIFE – SUBMISSION

PSALM 82**INTRODUCTION**

This is another later psalm, written to honour the memory of Asaph, either from the days of Hezekiah or Jehoshaphat; at a time of reform when godly men and women were looking to the Lord to deliver them, and to bring righteousness back to their judiciary, their government and Temple services. A refined sense of social justice is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. If we do not care for the poor we do not know the heart of the Lord, for He cares for those who are in difficulties. This does not mean that we support crooked people who are con artists, or just lazy people. The Bible is clear; "if a person will not work, then let them not eat". 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13.

I had a woman approach me today in a car park with a false story about losing her car keys and needing money, and I told her to "go away". She was a simple thief, using lies to extort money. I saw her later walking away with her fellow drug taking friend. We are under no obligation to assist those who choose a criminal or immoral lifestyle and then claim they are "poor", for they do not come under the definition of poor and needy from scripture, and the Lord's money is never to be given to Satan's people. Refer to the BTB studies on POVERTY, WELFARE. We are to be compassionate, but that does not mean foolish, or that we support people in their immoral life choices.

PSALMS 82:1-8

1 God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods. 2 How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah. 3 Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. 4 Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked. 5 They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course. 6 I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. 7 But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. 8 Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.

REFLECTION

**1 God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods.
2 How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah.**

The Lord is not backwards in coming forward to judge evil amongst men or the demonic forces. The gods of the nations are demons. Leviticus 17:7, Deuteronomy 32:17, Psalms 106:37. Behind every pagan ritual and idol is a demon from Satan himself. Religions are satanic and the Lord is opposed to all who think they have a secret way through to fellowship other than simple grace. John 18:20, Ephesians 2:1-10. Refer to the BTB study DEMONS, COUNTERFEITS OF SATAN, and RELIGION.

God judges the demons and brings judgement upon them in time, by restricting their actions, and eternally by condemning them to the lake of Fire forever. Job 1:6-12, 2:1-8. If the evil ones themselves are going to be eternally judged, then what should unrighteous people do about their evil plans. 2 Peter 3:10-18.

**3 Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.
4 Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.**

The right overflow of understanding the truth is to deal with people justly and righteously. If people claim they love and serve God but treat vulnerable people unjustly they are lying and do not know the Lord who shed His blood for all. Refer to the BTB study UNLIMITED ATONEMENT. Deuteronomy 10:17-22, Psalms 72:12-14, Proverbs 24:11-12, Isaiah 1:17-23, Jeremiah 5:25-29, 22:3-5, 15-17.

The fruit of the Holy Spirit in the life is the care for the vulnerable and the freeing of them from the hands of the evil ones who abuse them. To leave the innocent and vulnerable under the control of evil men is to leave them in a place that no believer can do. All who love the Lord love the vulnerable and will do all they can to assist them. To fail to assist the vulnerable is to fail to stand with the Lord. Mark 9:35-42, Luke 18:15-17, James 1:26-27, 2:14-17.

**5 They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course.
6 I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.**

The great falsehood of the days of Israel remains the great falsehood of today; Satan hasn't had an original thought for some considerable time! The falsehood is the belief that they have the truth from their own thought processes without reference to REVELATION. They think they know everything, but they know nothing. They twist the very truths about the structure and history of the earth itself.

Nothing could be so descriptive of the evolutionary theories that have bedevilled science for the last hundred years. These theories have elevated man above the level of God and made God disappear. They have made men think they

do not need their Creator, and speak of natural processes as if they are animated processes driven by a great mind, but they only worship their own minds! Romans 1:24-32, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-14, 1 Timothy 6:3-8.

7 But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.

8 Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.

They believe they are special and their theories are important advances in the truth, but they are playing with the truth, and do not know it. They believe they are invincible. One pagan university friend of mine used to speak arrogantly in cricketering terms about his expectation of a long, fit and strong life, and say that he would be "one hundred and ten not out". He died in his fifties of cancer; the smallest cells of his body destroying his arrogance.

The writer reminds us all that we "live and move and have our being" only in the grace and favour of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Acts 17:26-28. The psalmist ends his brief song by asking the Lord to arise and judge the nations and take over as their inheritor. He recognises the King of all kings and Lord of all lords as the ruler of the universe and longs for the day when the Lord will take His throne. Revelation 17:14.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. The Lord will judge all the demons and their human agents, and so we ought not to give them any credit here and now, but oppose all their works in the Holy Spirit's power. Let us claim 1 John 4:4, that "greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world", and let us apply it with power into our assaults upon the satanic strongholds we face in the battles the Lord has called us to face.

2. Let us stand for biblical welfare in our ministries. We do not support satanic people or their wicked works, but we support the weak and vulnerable. Let us be people who support the poor and needy and bring real comfort to those who need physical help, but also a real relationship with the Lord of all.

3. The Lord will one day rule this earth. Let us praise Him as the King now and recognise His lordship over our lives and celebrate His ruler ship in all we do and are.

DOCTRINES

POVERTY

WELFARE

ANGELS – DEMONS

ANGELS – COUNTERFEITS OF SATAN

HEATHENISM AND GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS

RELIGION

SALVATION – ATONEMENT – UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

REVELATION

PSALM 83**INTRODUCTION**

The dating of this psalm is problematic, but that does not affect its significance or relevance to us today, especially in light of the coming invasion of the land foretold by Ezekiel in chapters 38-39. The message is strong and clear; God's enemies will be dealt with thoroughly in accordance with the time frame and requirements of His eternal plan. The time that most commentators settle on as the best candidate to explain the background is the days of King Jehoshaphat of Judah, around 896BC, when they were attacked by a northern-eastern league confederation of other states. Read 2 Chronicles 20, below, as that chapter describes the revival that Jehoshaphat leads through his prayer. Note the actions and prayer of this king, as he places his total dependence upon the grace, mercy and power of God. Refer to the BTB studies on PRAYER, FASTING.

2 Chronicles 20:3ff.

"And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

4 And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.

5 And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, 6 And said, 'O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?

7 Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?

8 And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying,

9 If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgement, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help.

10 And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not;

11 Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit.

12 O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee'.

13 And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children."

Note firstly his response to the calamity of foreign invasion. He feared the consequences for his people and he immediately, with no delay of any sort, sought the Lord's help through powerful prayer. Notice that he also proclaimed a fast for the entire people, so that in every city and village the people stood bare headed before the Lord, fasted and prayed, and they stood there as their king prayed, with their wives and children with them.

There was a national recognition that all the population would share the death and destruction that was coming if the Lord did not answer their prayer, and so they all fasted and they all joined their king in prayer. Unity of prayer and purpose focuses the people upon their calamity and their Creator and Saviour, and the king takes the lead and places himself in the place of intercession for his people.

This is the pastoral role of all believing leadership. Notice the elements of the king's prayer also. He grounds his prayer firmly in the truth of who the Lord is; His plan, His person, and His power to save them. It is a prayer that positions the people in the right place to know God, hear God, and trust God.

The next event that occurs is the word of the Lord coming to a descendent of Asaph as he stands praying in the group. The Lord speaks directly through this man to the king and gives very specific directions to the Army of Judah as to what it is to do and what the mechanism for their deliverance will be. The instructions run a parallel course to those received by God's people at other times also when they were led by men of prayer; they have turned to the Lord in prayer, and so they are able to leave the problem in the Lord's hands, and He will deliver them. Exodus 14:13-18, 1 Samuel 17:47, Psalms 18:39, 24:8, 55:18, Proverbs 21:31, Ecclesiastes 9:11. Note the specific nature of the prophetic word that the son of Asaph hears from the Lord. Refer to the BTB study PROPHET.

2 Chronicles 20:14ff

" Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation;

15 And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.

16 To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel.

17 Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.

18 And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.

19 And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

20 And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

21 And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.

22 And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.”

The instructions are specific and they are followed, but even as they are heard, the people worship, led by their king. Worship begins the process that will lead to victory. Worship always begins recovery, and without worship there is no recovery from any calamity. The king leads the worship and then urges the people to do what is required for victory, which is to march with bible doctrine guiding and encouraging them. The Lord is with them and they are not going on a march for and by themselves, but for the honour of the Lord and the glory of the Lord.

Their challenge is to hear the words of the prophet, believe them, obey them, and worship as they advance to the battle and to the promised victory. This psalm before us appears to come from this situation, and reflect the faith and hopes of the people. It may be written by Jahaziel the descendent of Asaph, as it is dedicated to Asaph.

PSALM 83:1-18

“1 Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. 2 For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. 3 They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones. 4 They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. 5 For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee: 6 The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes; 7 Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre; 8 Assur also is joined with them: they have holpen the children of Lot. Selah. 9 Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison: 10 Which perished at Endor: they became as dung for the earth. 11 Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna: 12 Who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession. 13 O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind. 14 As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire; 15 So persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm. 16 Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD. 17 Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish: 18 That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth.”

REFLECTION

1 Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God.

2 For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head.

The prayer is not made because God has not spoken to His people, but because they need a specific word from the Lord into this situation. They want the Lord to act in history and they ask expectantly, for they know that the Lord is the God of history and will hear and answer definitely to deliver them.

They are urgent because the enemy are there in their land, but they seek the specific guidance that alone will bring safety and security to them. They recognise that the issue is the hatred of the enemy towards the Lord, and that the battle is truly the Lord’s battle, for the enemy have by their words and deeds made it clear that they hate and oppose the living God. Psalms 75:4-7, Isaiah 37:21-23.

3 They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones.

4 They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.

The attack has been treacherous, as all sudden assaults are. They have no reason other than malice and desire for plunder to launch this attack. They have plotted and schemed and made their evil plans with the arrogant belief that the people of God can be fooled, deceived, misled and then destroyed by military might. They have not estimated on the Person, power, and plan of the living God. The plan involves ANTI-SEMITISM, and they seek the destruction of Israel from amongst the nations. Those who try to destroy Israel will be destroyed. None succeed who oppose Israel unless the Lord is trying to discipline His people. It is a foolish thing to try to exterminate Israel.

Genocide has its origins in satanic policy and in demon possessed men and women, but they will never be allowed to succeed, for God has a future plan for Israel, and those who oppose God’s plans will be steamrollered by them. No man can fight God and win! Deuteronomy 32:10, 1 Chronicles 17:16-27, Psalms 17:8, Lamentations 2:17-18, Zechariah 2:8-13. God will rule over Zion and no man will stop Him, and any foolish man that gets in the way will be crushed like the worm he is.

5 For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee:

6 The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes;

These rebels against the PLAN OF GOD have joined together with their plots to exterminate Israel, but they have taken counsel against God, not just the men and women of Israel. They have all agreed together and they feel very special and strong as a result of this agreement of evil men, but they will be destroyed because they have failed to consult with God. The battle here is between those who plot with the wisdom of men, and those who turn to the living God and seek supernatural assistance. The battle is the primal one between Human Viewpoint and Divine Viewpoint. Refer to the BTB study MENTAL ATTITUDE.

The children of the carnal people of Abraham's family are the people who attack the Israelites. How sad that the sins of Abraham and Isaac flow to the present day with the enmity of the people of Ishmael and Esau. Refer to the BTB study, ARABS IN PROPHECY. Do not think however that all is lost for the presently Moslem peoples of the Middle East, for their present enmity against Israel will be translated into worship of the One they call Isa (Jesus). Many from the Arab nations will welcome the Lord's return. Isaiah 60:1-10.

**7 Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre;
8 Assur also is joined with them: they have holpen the children of Lot. Selah.**

Those mentioned here are some of the traditional enemies of Israel from the days of Jehoshaphat. Many will cease to exist as a result of their continued hatred of God and His people. The Assyrians are no more, and nor are the old inhabitants of Tyre, and the other city-states mentioned here. These people become a testimony to the pointlessness and stupidity of opposing Israel. They set out to exterminate Israel, and within a few hundred years they are all no more themselves.

Lot's carnal children have produced two nations that are totally pagan and filled with hatred towards their relatives in Israel. By the end of the Babylonian period the peoples of this area will be no more and the Ishmaelite tribes of the Arabian wilderness will inherit their lands.

**9 Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison:
10 Which perished at Endor: they became as dung for the earth.**

God had judged these people before and the psalmist asks the Lord for a repeat performance against the same old evils. The ancient enemies were dealt with by the Lord's actions through the leaders of the Exodus and the great Judges. Numbers 31:7-8, Judges 4:15-24, 5:21, 7:22-25. When the Lord acted to save His people the action was dramatic and final; the enemy were destroyed in exactly the same manner as they had attempted to destroy Israel. As they acted against Israel, so God acted against them.

**11 Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna:
12 Who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession.**

The judgement of the evil attackers of Israel was severe and it was dramatically the Lord's. When the Lord moves against evil men all know it is the Lord indeed who has acted. Judges 7:25, 8:12-21. Those who believe they can attack God's people and violate God's clear plan are in for a surprise, and it will not be a pleasant one. God moves to judge thoroughly all who deliberately oppose His Plan and Purpose. These people wanted to capture the very temple of the Lord, but were thwarted in their plans by the definitive and obedient action of the king of Judah. Refer to the BTB studies OBEDIENCE, SUBMISSION.

**13 O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind.
14 As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire;**

The image here is a good one to picture the enemies of God. They are pictured as a wheel that is constantly turning without being able to stop itself. This is a good image for the powerlessness of man before the Lord as Creator. We are on the "wheel of life" and the turns of the wheel are completely beyond our control to influence. We are as stubble before the wind when we stand before the creative and judging power of God. We are easily blown away by the power of the presence of the Lord our God.

John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus use this image to describe the frailty of the material successes of men and their vulnerability before a Holy God who they have deliberately offended. Matthew 3:12, 7:24-28, Luke 3:17. The judgement of fire will come upon all the combustible works of the Old Sin Nature of man. God will have no works of man to bring glory to Him; only the works of the Holy Spirit bring glory to God. 1 Corinthians 3:12-17. God's Holy Fire will judge all works of foolish man. Isaiah 33:10-14, John 15:1-8, Hebrews 12:28-29.

**15 So persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm.
16 Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD.**

The psalmist wants them to be "persecuted" by the Lord. It is not wrong to pray for this upon the enemies of God, for if they suffer enough, they may just look upwards and be saved. John 16:8-11. Now be careful there, for the psalmist does not pray for the right to persecute them himself, but for the Lord to directly persecute these evil people. It is the Lord's work that changes people.

There is no room for revenge upon people within the believer's life. Vengeance is always the Lord's not ours! Psalms 94:1, Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30. The purpose of all divine discipline is that the people might be transformed by the Lord and brought to salvation. The writer still hopes that the enemies of God might be brought to the place where they glorify and magnify the name of the Lord. This is our goal also.

17 Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish:

18 That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth.

They need to be silenced. 2 Timothy 4:1-5, 1 Peter 2:15-16, 2 Peter 2:1-32. The enemies of truth need to be silenced by the truth, and put to shame for their falsehoods and evil actions. They will either, be convicted and changed, or they will be destroyed. There is no third option for those who support evil against good. The actions of God in dealing with evil will finally and completely prove who the Lord is and what His character is. The Lord will be proven good above all that man could ever imagine. The Lord's holy name will be vindicated. Refer to the BTB study GREAT WHITE THRONE.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Jehoshaphat sets the example for believing leadership in crisis. He calls a solemn fast, and calls the people everywhere to a prayer meeting. In every place they meet at the same time to pray for deliverance. He leads the total population of Jerusalem, old and young as they stand together and seek the grace and mercy of their God. As pastors let us set the example of prayer and fasting and seek the face of our God. Let us set the example of prayerfulness and our people will be mentored through this.

2. There is no counsel formed by men against the people of Israel without it incurring the wrath of God. No nation may attack Israel and prosper. God's hand is upon His people and they will be kept by the power of God. Even in the Great Tribulation period the nations that attack Israel will falter and lose their way. They will kill two thirds of the population of the land, but they will fail to take all of Jerusalem and the survivors there will be delivered by the coming of the Lord. Zechariah 12:10ff. Let us preach the glorious future of Israel and the future of Jerusalem. The land of God will be the focal point for all future history and the place from where the Lord will reign. There is no doubt in the scriptures about who will win, and so let us proclaim the victory now.

DOCTRINES

CHRISTIAN LIFE – PRAYER

CHRISTIAN LIFE – FASTING

REVIVAL

PROPHET

ANTI-SEMITISM

GOD – PLAN OF GOD

CHRISTIAN LIFE – MENTAL ATTITUDE

PROPHECY – ARABS IN PROPHECY

PROPHECY – SEQUENCE OF END TIME EVENTS

CHRISTIAN LIFE – OBEDIENCE

CHRISTIAN LIFE – SUBMISSION

CHRISTIAN LIFE – SPIRITUALITY-CARNALITY

JUDGEMENT – GREAT WHITE THRONE

PSALM 84**INTRODUCTION**

This is a “song of the sons of Korah”, the famous singers of the Temple courts, and is a song to reflect the worship of the Lord celebrating the glory of the Lord’s character and actions. The one who has a living fellowship with the Lord has all that he needs in this life, and the right peace of mind to journey into the next life. This has been the psalm sung for many saints down the years as they passed into eternity. In crucial moments in this life we need to meditate often upon the absolute stability of the CHARACTER OF GOD. It is our love for the Lord, and resting in His love for us that lays the foundation for heart felt worship, and it is heart felt, and whole hearted worship that is our strength. Nehemiah 8:10, Habakkuk 3:18, John 15:11.

PSALMS 84:1-12

“1 How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! 2 My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. 3 Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. 4 Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah. 5 Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. 6 Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. 7 They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God. 8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah. 9 Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. 10 For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. 11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. 12 O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.”

REFLECTION

1 How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!

2 My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.

The tabernacle of the Lord, and the worship of the Lord, is a lovely thing for the believer who is at peace with God and seeks to rejoice in the Lord. It is good to test ourselves against this psalm and ask; how lovely do we find the fellowship of the Lord? How lovely is it to worship with others in church? How needed is our fellowship with the Lord? Do we ache if we do not spend time with the Lord? Do we feel dead within if we do without worship?

The true believer is a lover of the Lord, and as the lover longs for the touch and voice of their loved one, so the genuine believer longs for the voice of the Lord through the Word, and feels recharged when reading of Him and singing praises to Him. Psalms 42:1-2, 63:1-4, Isaiah 26:7-9, 64:1-5. It is this passionate love for the Lord and desire for fellowship with the Lord that the Lord seeks from us as His children. God does not want polite and boring worship; He wants passionate and whole hearted worship. Every cell of our body ought to long for a closer walk with the Lord and a deeper fellowship with Him.

3 Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.

4 Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.

The psalmist mentions the Lord’s care for the birds and the Lord Jesus takes this thought up also to remind the disciples that if the Lord cares for sparrows, how much more does He care for them. He calls His followers to walk away from worry about day to day issues, and leave them in His Hands, and simply follow Him. Matthew 8:19-22, 10:26-31, 11:27-30. Refer to the BTB study FEAR, and FAITH.

The Lord will provide for us, in exactly the way a foreign government provides for its ambassadors in a strange land. We are here upon this earth as the AMBASSADORS OF CHRIST, for we are the Lord’s responsibility and He takes us more seriously than He takes the birds! We are truly under the “much more” care of the Lord. Romans 5:9-20, 2 Corinthians 5:20, Ephesians 6:20, 1 Peter 1:7-9, 18-19. We are blessed beyond measure in Christ Jesus and the right thing to do every day is praise Him continually. Philippians 4:4, 10-13.

5 Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.

6 Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.

At times we all are asked by the Lord to go through the “Valley of Baca (weeping)”, or as David referred to it as “The Valley of the Shadow of Death”. Psalms 23:4. The reasons we may “fear no evil” as we journey down these dark places in life is that, “Thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”. We have the presence of the Lord with us in the midst of distressing troubles and know His peace and comfort as we walk. We are not asked to stay in these places, but

to walk through them in the comfort of the Lord's presence, and with the armour of the Holy Spirit in our hands and upon our bodies.

The strength of the believer is having their heart and mind stabilised in bible doctrine; the promises of the Word of God strengthening us in all we do. If our strength is in the Lord, then we are indeed blessed and stable, for neither man nor angelic being may shift the Lord's stable and powerful love for us. Psalms 28:7-8, Habakkuk 3:17-19, Romans 8:28-39.

7 They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.

By walking in faith through dark places we grow in spiritual and physical strength and faith. The Lord's purpose in allowing us to go through testing situations is that we might learn more of Him and trust Him more powerfully. The eternal destiny of the believer who advances in their faith and service is that they share more and more in the close fellowship of the Lord.

When a noble served the king more and more nobly they were raised up to sit in closer and closer fellowship with the king in their court. This is the picture we have here with the Lord rewarding faithful service by more and more close fellowship.

The psalmist asks the Lord to hear his prayer, and he addresses the Lord with a title of the Lord that reminds us of the power, majesty and position of the Lord as Creator of all and Lord of all. The psalmist reminds himself that the Lord has the power to act. The title "God of Jacob" reminds us that the Lord meets us in our weakness and gives us the assurance that if He can love the trickster Jacob then we can rest assured of His love as His faithful servants.

9 Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.

10 For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

The Lord is our shield from trouble and our strong tower of refuge under the pressures that can come to us in this world. Genesis 15:1, Deuteronomy 33:29, 2 Samuel 22:3, Psalms 3:3, 28:7, 33:20, 84:9-11, 115:9-11, Ephesians 6:16. The psalmist has the assurance that the Plan of God involves the provision of the Messiah and that the face of the Father is towards the Son who is the anointed one to bring salvation to mankind. Acts 4:27-31. The psalmist may also be thinking of himself as the "anointed" of the Lord in and through his faith and God's grace. We are truly blessed and the Lord looks upon us all as His children. Refer to the BTB study FATHERHOOD OF GOD.

Verse ten is a wonderful shout of praise from a heart that loves the Lord and is just overwhelmed with the Love of the Lord for him. A day in the courts of the Lord is better than ten thousand in the courts of the greatest kings amongst man, and we will spend eternity in the court of heaven! How blessed are we believers? It is better to be the usher in the church on a Sunday morning than be the Prime Minister of evil in some wicked man's government. The choice for us all is where we choose to live our lives, and the believer who is smart, lives their life in the will of God and only seeks the roles and positions that the Lord directs them to. God's path for us through this life will always be safe and blessed. 1 Peter 5:5-9.

11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

12 O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

The Lord is our glorious Sun, shining blessing upon us. He protects us and shines glory upon us. Our job is to reflect the glory of the Lord to others, that they might see Jesus through us. The Lord gives grace and glory to His children. Note the promise of the end of verse eleven closely; "no good thing will He withhold from His children who walk uprightly before Him". The call upon us is to walk in morality and righteousness, and the Lord's response to our Spirit filled walk is to pour more blessing upon us. Psalms 34:9-11, 85:12, Matthew 6:25-34.

The Lord cares for us and will not stop caring for us until He takes us into glory to be with Him forever in eternal blessedness. The challenge is to walk in the filling of the Holy Spirit and so fulfil the righteousness of the Lord in our dealings. Proverbs 2:1-11, 3:1-10. We are called to be holy before the Lord; to walk worthy of our high calling as the children of the living God. Ephesians 4:1, Colossians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:12. We are blessed in the Lord, and let us praise the Lord with all our heart for His great blessings showered upon us every day. His blessings are renewed every morning; great is His faithfulness to us! Lamentations 3:23.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Fear is incompatible with walking after Jesus. The Lord provides the power of the Holy Spirit and He enters us into living fellowship with Him, and He has a plan for our life. How much more safe can we be? There is no reason for fear in this life in our fellowship with Him. We are recipients of the greatest gifts at the point of salvation that are imaginable. Let us celebrate our secure POSITION IN CHRIST, and gives thanks for THE GIFTS GIVEN AT SALVATION.

2. Let us not be measured in our worship, but passionate and whole hearted in our expressions of love towards the Lord, for He has loved us and given us gifts in Christ Jesus that are "beyond measure". Believers let us praise the Lord beyond measure every day of our saved and blessed lives. In all our ways let us acknowledge him for the Creator, Saviour and sustainer He is. Proverbs 3:6.

3. God has the power to assist us in all things, and so let us rest in His power and depend upon it in our prayers. Let us remember that we serve the Lord of all lords and the King of all kings. Let us depend upon the power of God to operate within the plan of God to keep the people of God in the place of power!

4. Let us ensure that we praise God in the words of Lamentations 3:23 every day, for great is His faithfulness, and His mercies are renewed every morning of our life. Praise the Lord those of you who are His saints.

DOCTRINES

GOD – CHARACTER OF GOD

FEAR

CHRISTIAN LIFE – FAITH

CHRISTIAN LIFE – AMBASSADORSHIP

GOD – FATHERHOOD OF GOD

CHRISTIAN LIFE – POSITION IN CHRIST

CHRISTIAN LIFE – GIFTS GIVEN AT SALVATION

PSALM 85**INTRODUCTION**

This psalm appears to date from the years just after the return of the Exiles from Babylonian captivity. There were serious challenges to be faced and a great deal of despondency amongst the people who became discouraged with the amount of work to be done. They were well led by Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest, and well ministered to by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

PSALMS 85:1-13

1 Lord, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. 2 Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah. 3 Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger. 4 Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. 5 Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? 6 Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? 7 Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation. 8 I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people. 9 Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land. 10 Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. 11 Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. 12 Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. 13 Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps."

REFLECTION

**1 Lord, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob.
2 Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah.**

The returned exiles look back at the graciousness of God in the way they have been dealt with. They have been brought back into the land by the Lord's supernatural power and guidance. Only God could have brought down Babylon, and He did so exactly as He brought down Assyria; from the point of their greatest power they were extinguished in a decade. God had opened the door for the return of the exiles in a way unheard of in the ancient world.

No previous conqueror had ever released the previous empire's captives as did Cyrus the Great. He allowed all the captive peoples to return and rebuild their shattered economies and become Persian Satrapies. He was a brilliant leader and none before or since has excelled his brilliance in his thinking about how to administer an empire and secure its subject people's obedience. His rule had been prophesied over 200 years previously to the prophet Isaiah and the words are haunting and absolutely correct; he became the servant of the Lord. Isaiah 44:28, 45:1ff.

The actions of Cyrus enabled the Jews to return to their land, and the spiritual leadership of their two pairs of leaders (Zerubbabel and Joshua, and 100 years later with Ezra and Nehemiah) re-established a vibrant nation again as a satrapy/province of the Persian Empire. Their re-establishment in the land was the physical evidence of the forgiveness of the Lord for their previous sins. They knew they were forgiven, because the Lord had blessed them and re-established them in the land.

The forgiveness and restoration of the nation had been prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah. He had even been told by the Lord that the captivity would last 70 years. Jeremiah 25:8 – 14, 29:10-14, 50:17-20. Daniel in Babylon would receive Jeremiah's book and be given the full interpretation of it by the Lord. Daniel 9:2-23. He would also be told about the significance of the number seventy through the revelation of the future of Israel in the "Seventy Weeks" prophecy. Daniel 9:24ff. Refer to the BTB study of this subject.

**3 Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger.
4 Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.**

It is clear that the nation has been forgiven and that the sins of their ancestors have been completely forgiven, for the people have multiplied in captivity, and they are expanding their population in Babylon and in Judah by this time. All the people had to do was look at the words of Moses from Deuteronomy 28:1-14, and Leviticus 26:1-13, and they could see the signs of national blessing, just as they could read on in each chapter and see the signs of national divine discipline and recognise them in the seventy years of captivity.

There are two periods of the 70 years of captivity; the first runs from the first fall of the city to the Babylonians in 605 BC and ended with the return of the first exiles in 535 BC. Daniel is deported as a young man of around eighteen in 605, and he lives and sees the Exiles leave for Jerusalem to begin the rebuild in 535 BC.

The second seventy year period runs from the destruction of the Temple in August of 586 BC to the rebuilding and final rededication of the rebuilt temple in 516 BC. The Lord has forgiven them and they can be sure of their forgiveness and

restoration and that the Lord isn't holding any grudges against them. When we are forgiven, we are forgiven! As far as the east is from the west, that far our sins are removed from us! Psalms 103:12, 107:3, Micah 7:18-20.

5 Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?

6 Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?

When all you have known is the judgement of God there is a tendency to feel that it may never cease. They are now blessed and back in the land, but the psalmist fears that the anger of the Lord may return to them. Even strong, doctrine filled believers, buckle at times and feel that they are about to be "hit" by the Lord. We can all err and think that the Lord is like the pagan gods of our ancestors; capricious, untrustworthy, and cruel. The true God is not like Thor the thunderer, Zeus, or any other demonic power; the Lord is a righteous Judge, but He is also a forgiving Saviour, and if we have confessed our sins we are forgiven and the forgiveness of the Lord has no regret in it. When we are forgiven, we stay forgiven!

The people are back in the land but they still fear a little at times that the Lord will "pull the rug from under their feet". Ezra 3:9-13. God does not operate this way, for He loves and forgives in truth. The Lord seeks to bless us and He will revive our spirit not crush our spirit! God seeks our blessing and all that stops that being received is sin in our life; with sin cleared away we are in the place of blessing. Refer to the BTB study CONFESSIO AND FORGIVENESS.

7 Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation.

8 I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, but let him not turn again to folly.

The psalmist asks for the very thing that we all need; we all stand in need of the mercy of God. The Lord asks that we approach the throne of grace and seek what we desire, and if we desire forgiveness it is always offered to us. God's throne is a "throne of grace". 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 3:12, Hebrews 4:14-16, 10:19ff. The Lord seeks our blessing not our judgement; judgement remains the "strange work of God" and is never His preferred option. Isaiah 28:21, Ezekiel 33:11, 2 Peter 3:9. Preachers who delight in telling people that they are going to be judged and go to Hell are a concern; the main concern is to whether they are saved themselves!

No believer who understands the grace, mercy and love of God will delight in telling people they are doomed. Anyone who delights in condemning men to hell is not a genuine follower of the Lord Jesus Christ who died to save men from hell! God speaks peace to His people and we are meant to bring peace also by all we do and say. The only thing that stops peace being experienced and lived in is the foolishness and sinfulness of men. Folly alone creates carnage; God does not, for He seeks our good. Matthew 5:9, John 14:27, Colossians 3:15, Jude 2. Refer to the BTB study on SALVATION – ATONEMENT, RECONCILIATION, and REDEMPTION.

9 Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land.

10 Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Folly alone brings judgement upon men. Salvation is as close as man's confession of his sins. All man is asked to do is be honest with his/her God. If we have the "fear of the Lord" within us we are safe from the dangers of APOSTASY or BACKSLIDING, and we are close to being blessed, for blessing flows from fellowship with God. Glory will abide with the believer if they abide with the Lord! John 15:4-11.

In the fellowship of the Lord mercy and truth meet together, just as they met together in the Person and work of the Lord for the souls of the lost. Righteousness and peace have kissed together in the person and work of the Lord for our salvation. These phrases are lovely ones to sum up the "beauty of holiness" of the work of the Cross. The Lord has opened the door to bless man. 1 Chronicles 16:29, 2 Chronicles 20:21, Psalms 96:9, Hebrews 12:14.

11 Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

12 Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase.

13 Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps.

When we seek to fellowship more and more deeply with the Lord we discover that truth springs from the earth, and righteousness pours down from heaven upon us; there is blessing in the path of the Lord. All we have to do is walk the path of the Lord and His blessings flow upon us. We are to be "set in the way of His steps", and then there is blessing abundantly upon us. This principle is strongly urged upon all believers of all the ages. Read the following passages in sequence. Psalms 119:33-35, Ephesians 5:1-2, Philippians 2:5-8, Hebrews 12:1-2, 1 Peter 2:18-24, 4:1-5, 1 John 2:1-6.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. God delights in the salvation of the lost, and so let us delight in the preaching of the Gospel of salvation to all who will hear it. Let us rejoice in grace, mercy and love, for these are the characteristics of the Lord Jesus. Judgement is certain to those who walk away from grace but let us be sure that they have done that, and while they still live let us pray for them, that they might be saved.

2. God seeks to bless us at all times and we need to celebrate the grace, mercy and love of God in this matter. God speaks peace into the hearts of mankind through His work for mankind on the Cross. Our role is to minister peace

also, and give people the “good news” of salvation through the completed work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us ensure we deliver the truth whenever we are able to do so.

3. Let us urge all we meet to live in the “fear of the Lord”; to live within the mental attitude of healthy respect for the Creator and Saviour of their soul. Let us live in righteousness, seeking the Lord’s will in all we do and say, and then we will receive His blessings beyond all we can think or imagine. Let us walk as He walked, and then we will reap as He intends us to reap, in this life and the next.

DOCTRINES

PROPHECY – DANIEL'S SEVENTY WEEKS

CHRISTIAN LIFE – CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

SALVATION – ATONEMENT – UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

SALVATION – RECONCILIATION

SALVATION – REDEMPTION

APOSTASY

CHRISTIAN LIFE – BACK-SLIDING AND RECOVERY

PSALM 86

INTRODUCTION

This prayer has all the hallmarks of a psalm of David as he seeks restoration of fellowship and power after facing great trials. Of all the Leviticus Psalms in Book Three of the Psalms this is the only one with David’s name attached historically to it. 2 Samuel 21 may describe the incident that provokes the psalm, but there are many others that could equally be relevant in David’s life. This psalm would also ring true as a psalm of Hezekiah from his days of sickness unto death. 2 Kings 20. It is a heart felt cry for mercy from the One, who alone gives mercy and grace, because His nature is gracious and merciful. This psalm rests securely and powerfully upon the certainties of the CHARACTER OF GOD. Under the greatest of pressures this is where we need to be settled.

PSALMS 86:1-17

1 Bow down thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I am poor and needy. 2 Preserve my soul; for I am holy: O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee. 3 Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily. 4 Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. 5 For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee. 6 Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. 7 In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me. 8 Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works. 9 All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name. 10 For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone. 11 Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name. 12 I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore. 13 For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell. 14 O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; and have not set thee before them. 15 But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. 16 O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid. 17 Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed: because thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me.

REFLECTION

**1 Bow down thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I am poor and needy.
2 Preserve my soul; for I am holy: O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee.**

The image is a powerful one from the ancient world. For a humble supplicant to come before a king they lay before him prostrate upon the ground, arms outstretched before them in total vulnerability. Kings would hear their subject’s requests but could kill them instantly as easily as they would hear and answer their questions. The psalmist pictures himself

outstretched before the Lord as his king and seeks for the Lord to bow His head to hear the humble petition he asks for the Lord.

It is a humble request and softly made and the king must bow low to hear the softly spoken words. In today's world we would simply say to such people, "Speak up, or stop wasting my time", but that is not the way things occurred at this time. The softly spoken request was seen as respectful. It is the humility of the psalmist that is being emphasised here. He is powerless and feels it, and yet he has hope that the most powerful One will hear him, preserve his soul, and deliver him from danger.

He can claim to be "holy". Remember the meaning of this word in ancient Jewish times. It meant suitable for religious/ritual service; it meant morally clean and ready for use by the priests. The psalmist is coming before the Lord with a clean heart, with any sin thoroughly dealt with before he speaks his request. All prayer ought to begin with confession of sin for this reason, for unconfessed sin means the Lord will not hear us! Psalms 66:18. If sin is confessed, then there is absolute assurance that we are heard by God. Psalms 66:19. The psalmist trusts in the Lord fully and completely. Isaiah 26:3-4, Romans 15:12-13, Ephesians 1:12-13.

**3 Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily.
4 Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.**

The appeal of the psalmist is to the mercy of God, not the justice of God. Pause and reflect upon this for a second believer. Can we appeal to the Lord's justice without coming under condemnation for something ourselves? We cannot appeal to justice even against our enemies, for if we are judged as we have judged others we may find ourselves thoroughly condemned. I thank God that I do not depend upon my own righteous standards in the past to ask for God's favour, but I do and can depend upon God's mercy towards me, for it will always lead to my blessing.

If any of us had any doubts about how often to pray for any matter the psalmist answers our question; we are to pray daily for the things that trouble us. The prayer of faith is left with the Lord for answer, but daily we are to bring the matter before the Lord again with the expectation expressed that we know He will answer our prayer. We can cry out daily in our ongoing distress and the Lord does not judge us for our pain expressed, for this does not show lack of faith, but simple humanity.

We are in pain and distress before some prayers are answered and this emotion is understandable and the Lord encourages us to bring our emotional pain and lay it before Him. We can express faith and also worry and pain over the issue we have brought before the Lord. The Lord knows that we are dust and He does not deal with us any other way than as the loving Saviour who made us and knows us. Psalms 103:14. The Lord will "rejoice our soul" and give us joy deep within as we bring all our cares and lay them before Him. Nehemiah 8:10, Habakkuk 3:18, Zephaniah 3:17, John 15:11.

**5 For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.
6 Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications.**

It is always a good thing in passionate prayers about real and pressing problems to ground them in the holy CHARACTER OF GOD and remember the characteristics of the Lord that bring comfort in the midst of the troubles we are facing. God is good and ready to forgive His people; He sits waiting to bless us and all He requires is our confession and obedience to His revealed Word. The Lord does not run short of mercy. There is no quantity limitation on the Lord's mercy as there is with men.

Once again we must remember the courts of ancient kings here. Kings would at times set a limitation to the mercy they would grant, and to keep their subjects always fearful of them would terminate some requests with execution, and say that "the days of mercy are over". It was words like these that the Roman General, and later Emperor, Titus used to the Jewish priests who were on the roof of the Temple when the city fell. As the people were butchered beneath them they cried for mercy, and the contemptuous Roman answered them bluntly and with fatal certainty regarding their fate.

Titus went on to finish the building of the Coliseum where so many Christians would later die. He would himself die of malaria, having been bitten by a mosquito in his palace in Rome! He showed no mercy and died without any being shown to him by his gods; the demons he served. God is not like Titus was; He is merciful and the believer can depend upon this fact. Refer to the BTB study MERCY.

**7 In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.
8 Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works.**

The assurance of the believer is boldly stated in verse seven. The psalmist is sure of the truth that he is heard by the Lord. Psalms 34:4-6. There is absolute assurance before the Lord that He hears us and answers our prayers. Remember the study of the doctrine of PRAYER, for answers to prayer may be positive, negative, or delayed, and either the petition or the desire behind the petition may be answered by the Lord. Refer back to that doctrine and study it again.

God answers prayers but not necessarily as we would wish the answer to be. We must listen to the Lord and hear His answer. The pagan gods are simply demons and so they have no power to stand against God, nor change answers to

prayer. Neither Satan nor his demons have the power to halt the Lord's answers to prayer. There is no power with the ability to do works like those of the Lord. Deuteronomy 3:22-24, 4:34-40, Psalms 136:1-4, Jeremiah 10:6-13.

9 All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.

10 For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone.

It is good to remind ourselves that the Lord will be victorious over all that Satan can do, and that the Lord will reign from Jerusalem. Zechariah 14:1-11, 16-21, Isaiah 2:2-5, 11:1ff, 43:1-13, 59:19-20, 60:1ff, 66:20-24. Psalm 22 records the agony of the Cross in verses 1-24, but it then records the triumph of the victory that the Cross obtained in the earthly rulership of the One who died for the sins of mankind. Psalms 22:25-31.

The One who died upon the mountain outside old Jerusalem will rule from the mountains of Jerusalem. He will be praised by all the believers, who will be the survivors of that time of history at the end of what is known as "The Great Tribulation". Praise is the right response to the amazing work of God through history. In the end, as the survivors of mankind gather and worship in Jerusalem they will look back at the centuries of man's time upon the earth and wonder at the PLAN OF GOD and praise God for who He is and what He has done.

Only at that time will worship be fully informed worship; for then all men will see clearly, from the end, all the amazing details of what the Lord has done through the millennia. Romans 15:8-13, Ephesians 1:9-12, 1 Peter 2:1-10. Truly then all mankind will praise the Lord and see that He has been "good" and that His plan has been marvellous beyond words can tell.

Truly He has done, is doing and will do deeds in history that are great and wondrous. Great men have been convinced of this in history and have praised the name of the Lord, but in that day all of mankind will praise God's holy name and honour His plan forever. Daniel 4:34-37, 9:25-27. Refer back to the studies on this subject; TRIBULATION, RETURN OF OUR LORD, SEQUENCE OF END TIME EVENTS.

11 Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.

12 I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore.

The right response of the transformed believer is to desire the truths of God's Word to purify and educate the heart and mind so that the plan might be celebrated in individual obedient actions. We are called to serve, and if we educate ourselves in the Word of God we can know the truths that will focus our service and guide our steps through this life.

Any believer who does not say the words of verse eleven with passion every day does not know the Lord as they ought to know Him, for to know the Lord is to desire His words and His will, and that is to desire the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Hear the words of godly men and women down the centuries, for they all desire the Lord to teach them more wonderful things from His Holy Word. Psalms 5:8, 25:4-5, 12-14, 143:8-11, Proverbs 1:7, 2:1-3, 3:1-8. Refer to the BTB study HOLY SPIRIT – OPERATION, TEACHER.

The "FEAR of the Lord" is the beginning of all wisdom, as we see repeated again and again in scripture. To fear the Lord means to really understand your role as a creature before the Creator, as a sinner before the Saviour, and as a servant before the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. The "fear of the Lord" is the true appreciation of who you are upon this created earth. When we bow before the Lord as our Creator and Saviour we truly begin our journey through His Created Universe as servants of the King, and we are lifted up to become members of His royal family through our position in Christ Jesus. Refer to the BTB studies, HEAVENLIES IN CHRIST, POSITION IN CHRIST, and ROYAL FAMILY OF GOD.

We are not called to be scholars of the truth, but walkers in the truth. God does not want academic study to be the goal of any person who seeks to please Him. We are to walk in the truth, not sit around talking about it. We are to stand upon the PROMISES of the Word of God, not spend too much time sitting on the premises! Praise and worship and Bible study must always overflow into godly action on the streets of our cities and in our homes and work places. We praise the Lord with our lips and the good works of our life, but we bring glory to the name of the Lord by our Holy Spirit filled work for the Lord. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 10:31 – 11:1.

13 For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.

14 O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; and have not set thee before them.

God's mercy is great towards His children, and He delivers us from the deepest grave (hell here refers to the grave). We are delivered from the power of death and will die only when the Lord is pleased to receive us into heaven; into His presence. Refer to the BTB studies DEATH, DYING GRACE. These are amazing truths from Gods' Word to encourage us in our walk through the troubles and fears of this life; the greatest fear for many being the fear of death. Jonah sings of this after his deliverance from the belly of the great fish. Jonah 2:1-10.

God's deliverance is often challenged by the attacks of evil men upon the believer, and these can be so great at times that we wonder whether we can be delivered from such powerful malice. These people have no fear of the Lord, but are violent men towards believers, and have great hatred towards God and despise God's Plan. John 15:18ff. Their hatred is foolishness, for they cannot fight God and yet they will try to by attacking the Lord's children! Pause and reflect upon

the judgement of the Lord for a moment; can you see why those who persist in their hatred of God and His Plan will be eternally judged?

15 But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.

The enemies of God are filled with hatred towards God and the children of God, but the Lord is filled with compassion for these evil people. God is a God of mercy and desires the salvation of those that hate Him, and keeps on wishing their good until there is no hope of their repentance. 2 Chronicles 36:12-16, Isaiah 28:21, Ezekiel 33:11, 2 Peter 3:9. There is no lack of mercy and truth, but note that it is mercy and truth together.

There is mercy, but it is only for those who accept the truth and serve the Lord in truth. Mercy has a limitation and those who walk away from the truth are walking away from mercy and will certainly receive judgement when the time of grace is over. Evil men are not judged because of God's hatred for them, but their hatred towards God, His Plan, and His Truth. When men fall into the Lake of Fire in final judgement it is because they have chosen to go there! Revelation 20:1-15. God is patient, not willing for any to perish, but for all to have maximum time to repent and be restored to their creator and their saviour. 2 Peter 3:9

16 O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid.

17 Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed: because thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me.

We need to turn to the Lord, for He will always turn to hear our prayers. He will have mercy upon us, and He will give strength to us as His servants to achieve all that He has called us to achieve. Jude 24-25. The psalmist honours his mother at the end of this psalm. He refers to himself as the "son of thy handmaid".

It is good when a believer honours their godly mother or father and recognises that they are believers because of the prayers and the good example of the faith of their godly parents. Paul recognises this in Timothy's life and gives credit to his mother and grand-mother who were mighty believers. 2 Timothy 1:3-7.

The psalmist asks for the Lord to just "show a token of good"; just the smallest blessing that might bring shame to those who have insulted and abused him. He wants these unbelievers to see that they have been wrong about him and about God and repent of their evil. He wants all people to see the grace of God towards him and so accept the Lord's grace for themselves.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. The fruit of the Spirit is in our life to draw unsaved people to their saviour. Let us show forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit and do our job as the Ambassadors of Christ.
2. We will be tried in testing situations in this life, but we can rejoice in the Lord and relax in His grace, His mercy and His love towards us. Let us celebrate and praise the Lord for His goodness towards us.
3. It is all right to be poor and needy in the Lord's service because that means we are being challenged to come to Him to be fully supplied. Whenever we are short of resources let us come to the Lord and have our barns filled with produce, but let us remember, that all we receive is for giving out in service again. We do not receive from the Lord anything to consume upon our own lusts, but to meet the needs of the saints.
4. There is no power in heaven or upon the earth that can withstand the power of God or thwart the plan of God. The Lord will be victorious and the will of the Lord will be done upon the earth. Let us remember that we serve the King and the King of kings will reign over all the earth one day. Let us praise His name as the King He is, and as the King He will be seen to be by all one day.

DOCTRINES

GOD – CHARACTER OF GOD

MERCY

CHRISTIAN LIFE – PRAYER

GOD – PLAN OF GOD

TRIBULATION IN MATTHEW 24

TRIBULATION – SIGNS

CHRIST – RETURN OF OUR LORD

PROPHECY – SEQUENCE OF END TIME EVENTS

HOLY SPIRIT – OPERATION

HOLY SPIRIT – TEACHER

HOLY SPIRIT – FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

FEAR

PSALM 87**INTRODUCTION**

The MILLENNIAL KINGDOM of the Lord's reign on the earth is well and truly described by the psalmist here and the prophets of Israel later. This psalm by the "Sons of Korah" may date from any period of Israel's history and it celebrates the final unity of all believers, even from the nations that abused and assaulted Israel for so many years. It looks forward to that day when all enmity is over and the nations of the earth pay their allegiance to the Lord as their King.

PSALMS 87:1-7

1 His foundation is in the holy mountains. 2 The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. 3 Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah. 4 I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there. 5 And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. 6 The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah. 7 As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there: all my springs are in thee.

REFLECTION

**1 His foundation is in the holy mountains.
2 The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.**

Note the words here in verse one the "holy mountains". There is not just one mountain of Jerusalem that is holy; there are holy mountains. All the places where the Lord walked, taught, and worshipped are holy mountains and all will come into their own as the foundations for the new city of Jerusalem in the Millennial Kingdom. The enemy armies will besiege the city for months and the siege will be lifted by the direct intervention of the Lord alone. Zechariah 14:1-15.

The holy mountains of Jerusalem will become holy again after the Lord has "plagued" His enemies there and wiped them from the city. What is described is a neutron bomb type device being used, that kills the people/animals and evaporates them, but leaves the buildings standing. The land is then decontaminated and the city rebuilt there. The Lord loves Jerusalem; it is the city that God loves above all the other cities of the land and the earth! Let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem! For when we pray for Jerusalem's peace we pray for the Messiah's rule there. Psalms 78:67-72, 122:6-8, 132:11-18.

**3 Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah.
4 I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there.**

The great English Hymn "Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion city of our God" is taken directly from this psalm and it reminds us that the Lord is going to reign upon this earth and no matter how evil the malice of Satan, and how wicked are his servants, they will all be judged with eternal damnation for their sinfulness. The evil ones will be swept away but the city of Jerusalem will be glorious and the things spoken of that city will be wonderful. In the Millennial Kingdom there will be no praise that will not be given to that city.

Today Jerusalem weeps, but tomorrow Jerusalem celebrates, and they will welcome in their King. The bricked up Eastern gate (The Golden Gate) will not stop the Lord riding triumphantly into the Temple Mount from the Mount of Olives, and He will rule over His city after He has totally destroyed His enemies. Psalms 48:9-14, Psalms 125:1ff. These psalms will be sung on that day when the Lord rides into His city and rules from there. The last great earthquake that the Apostle John describes in Revelation 16:17-21 will flatten all the walls anyway – no bricked up gate will stop the Lord riding in!

The passages of Isaiah that celebrate the Lord's coming remind us just how powerful and wonderful (for the believers) the Lord's Second Advent will be. Isaiah 2:1ff, 11:1ff, 12:1ff, 13:6ff, 24:1ff, 32:1ff, 35:1ff..... All the nations, even the previously foreign and hostile ones, will be there to celebrate the Lord's victories, for there will be saved people in every national group and they will rejoice over the Lord with singing as he enters the city of Jerusalem.

**5 And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her.
6 The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah.**

All will recognise Him then and be glad of His ruler ship over them and the entire earth. The city that has been the focal point of so much violence through the last days of the Great Tribulation will become the focal point of joy in that great day when the Lord returns. God Himself will establish the city that most would have thought could not be saved from destruction. The Lord Himself will rebuild the city and it will be restored to glory, as will the entire earth and sea after the horrific carnage of the Great Tribulation.

A very brief study of Revelation 14:8 – 20:1 covers extreme plagues upon the earth in which the sun, the moon and the stars are affected, and the oceans die, and over two thirds of mankind is wiped out. It is carnage like never before since the great flood of Noah's day. It ends with the Lord's return and rebuilding of the earth to make it paradise again. Refer to the BTB study on the MILLENNIAL KINGDOM. In that day the chosen ones will be able to be settled in the city of their God again, and they will be secure from then onwards. The Lord will reign for 1000 years. Revelation 20:4.

7 As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there: all my springs are in thee.

When people are recognised as citizens and allowed to live within the Millennial Jerusalem they will be overwhelmed by the privilege and they will praise the Lord like none have ever praised the Lord before. The orchestra will be organised very quickly and the choir will be practising, and they will be singing these psalms as the Lord enters the city. We don't need to guess at what the songs will be sung on that glorious day, for they will be the songs of the book of Psalms. For anyone who doesn't like music being played, get used to it, because the musical instruments will be out in force on that day and no-one will be complaining; all will be rejoicing to the Lord in songs of praise.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. When the Lord comes in power to Jerusalem on that glorious day there will be songs of praise sung and played at full volume. Let us get into our praise and worship far more ourselves today. Let us make a joyful noise to the Lord.

DOCTRINES

KINGDOM – MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

PSALM 88

INTRODUCTION

This is a sad poem by Heman the Ezrahite. It is a form of Hebrew verse called a Maschil, which means a song of instruction. As we go through it we will see the "instruction" that this man seeks to give. He is deeply afflicted by pressures and he pours his heart out to the Lord and tells his story. He is truly "honest with God" and the Lord loves that, for He seeks the closest fellowship with us as His children.

PSALMS 88:1-18

1 O lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee: 2 Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; 3 For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. 4 I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: 5 Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. 6 Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. 7 Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah. 8 Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. 9 Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee. 10 Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah. 11 Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? 12 Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? 13 But unto thee have I cried, O LORD; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee. 14 LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? 15 I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. 16 Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. 17 They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together. 18 Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.

REFLECTION

**1 O lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee:
2 Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry;**

At times we have incredible pressures upon us that may go on for years and years. The psalmist here certainly appears to have been agonising over the issues that have overwhelmed him for a long time. It is good to remember that the Lord is hearing our concerns and has answered our prayers, but we may not see the answers working out in time for a period of time. The situation I have found myself in has run now for over eleven years, and it has been unremitting pressure with no discernable end in sight as I write these words. I have been challenged throughout this time period to trust the Lord, express by faith in praise, and on the basis that the path ahead is certain to God, keep walking steadily forward serving the Lord.

This personal pressure time has produced more Christian work for the Bible College than any other time in my life. The time has now run for eleven years to date Christmas Day 2015, but I still see the Lord keeping me here and empowering me for more service in the midst of the humanly impossible pressures. I see this being a “learning” from the time of distress I have been suffering, and a by product of it has been a capacity to celebrate the good things in life even more in the dark days, and worship the Lord in a deeper and deeper way. Like Heman I know the Lord inclines His ears to my cries, and I know I am heard by the Lord who loved me and gave Himself for me. Galatians 1:4, 2:20, 1 Timothy 2:6, Titus 2:14.

**3 For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave.
4 I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength:**

This man is seriously depressed about the state of affairs he finds himself in. He is “full of troubles” and feels he is drawing nearer by the moment towards the grave and an early death. I work in the stress and trauma areas in my clinical practise and I see many people each week who express these very thoughts. They are not weak and pathetic, on the contrary, but they are people who have been pressed down by great grief and pressures and feel drawn down to the earth in sadness and despair.

Stress and trauma robs us of energy; the mind races all night and feet can’t “race” at all in the day. Various things debilitate us; viruses will lay us low at times, as will some treatments for cancer and other diseases. At times the treatments for cancer debilitate the person more than the cancer has to that point. We can be reduced to feeling that we have no strength at all. It is not wrong to be cast down; it is part of the human condition. It is what we do now that is spiritually significant, for a burden that casts us down needs to be cast upon the Lord. 1 Peter 5:5-10.

**5 Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand.
6 Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.**

Many have got to the point where they long for death, just to have their suffering end. Many men I have interviewed about their service in World War I and II identified this feeling after prolonged combat, some even noting that they went “looking for a bullet” just to “rest amongst the dead”! These men were not cowardly or suicidal as such; they are just worn out to the point where they are not thinking straight and want release from their suffering. The mistake these men make however is in believing that death means oblivion from the Lord, and that they are “remembered no more”. The dead are either in the presence of the Lord or in the presence of other unbelievers in hell itself, where they will await the last judgement. Isaiah 14:9-11, Luke 16:19-31, Revelation 20:1-15.

This psalmist is seriously depressed however and the emotions expressed in verses 5-6 are powerful indicators of serious and unremitting depression. It is not sinful to be depressed when there are things happening in your life that are depressing. We can be spiritual and depressed, just as we can be spiritual or carnal and be very happy in either place! Depression is the word used to describe a soul and body crushed by pressures, but the spirit may still be able to soar like an eagle within. Isaiah 40:29-31, Romans 7:14-25, Hebrews 12:12-15. Refer to the BTB study DEPRESSION AND HOW TO DEAL WITH IT.

**7 Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah.
8 Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.**

The psalmist feels that the wrath of the Lord is being experienced by him, and it may very well be, but we cannot jump to that conclusion regarding our own suffering unless the Holy Spirit gives us the evidence by way of specific conviction. Suffering has many causes and sin that makes God angry is only one. Refer again to the BTB study SUFFERING. He feels that the waves of pressure have been sweeping over him and that these waves of pressure are waves of discipline from the Lord for his sins. He seeks the Lord’s forgiveness and the end of the divine discipline.

He has been separated from friends and they feel that he is disgusting because of whatever has happened. He has received judgement from men and has felt their strong condemnation. He has locked himself away from social company and will not come out to fellowship with those who have despised and rejected him. This man has felt deep rejection by

his community and yet he is an author of scripture so we know that he is forgiven and acceptable to the Lord God. This is a reminder to us that, even if a person is criticized by his whole community, as this man was criticized and condemned, it doesn't mean he is guilty of anything at all.

9 Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee.

10 Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah.

This man cries a lot at this point. He is so afflicted that his tears flow freely and he feels the deep passion of mourning. The tears are the Lord's way of lowering the immune suppressant chemical cortisol from the blood stream; so tears are very helpful for the Immune System, but they are also exhausting. The psalmist has prostrated himself before the Lord in serious and repeated prayer for deliverance and he has heard nothing from the Lord. The Bible teaches that believing prayer is always answered but we may wait a long time to see the answer come through into our life and the wait may be very trying. This man has been exhausted by his prayers being sent up and hearing no answer.

Having waited nearly twelve years for an answer to the overwhelming situation that I face, I can understand this man's despair, and I can affirm it has been the Bible study and teaching, and the writing of the books for the Bible College work that has kept me going in a positive and energised way. I rejoice in the Lord through the writing of this chapter of the book of Psalms and I wonder what state I would be in without this serious Bible study and teaching ministry to do! 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Each of us must affirm that the Lord will never place us into a situation that we cannot handle, if we call on all the available spiritual resources that we have. For me the last five years has been enormous pressure, but even more enormous productivity in the spiritual realm. The best wine is produced from grapes that grow in the toughest ground and so it is in the spiritual realm. Let us take the promise of God's Word seriously and praise the Lord until the clouds about us lift. Isaiah 61:3.

The psalmist fears he is about to die, and reminds the Lord (who doesn't need reminding of course) that the dead cannot change their state, and are unable to praise the Lord if they are in hell, for their fate is settled. Luke 16:19-31. The concept of DYING GRACE that we saw in an earlier psalm in this section has been lost to the psalmist because of his depression and that is one of the learnings from this psalm; when we get overwhelmed we forget all the things that would otherwise help us relax into the Lord's arms. Deuteronomy 33:27-29.

11 Shall thy loving kindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction?

12 Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

The answer to the first question is clearly "NO!" God's loving kindness is available until death ends an individual's opportunity. It is this thought that haunts the psalmist and he grapples with his fear of death in light of the pressures he faces. At times we will "lose the plot" under pressure, and at times it is quite normal to "lose the plot". Dr V Frankl noted after his time in concentration camps in WWII – "There are certain things, that if they happen to you, and you don't lose your mind, it is only because you didn't have a mind to lose."

Even though he has lost his thinking ability and feels distraught to a maximum level he knows that the Lord still has power to break through the darkness he feels has enveloped him. He knows that God can break through into the dark places and transform them into lightness and grace. He longs for that experience.

13 But unto thee have I cried, O LORD; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee.

14 LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?

"But" can often be a very negative word but here it is a very positive word. In spite of all he has felt and feared this psalmist has kept crying out to the Lord and been totally focused upon hearing the Lord's words back to him. He feels cast over by the Lord, and he feels that the Lord may have hidden His face from him and that his prayers are not heard. Even in this desperate place he reaches out to the Lord and prays for help and comfort. We can feel this strongly at times and it is not wrong, so long as we keep on praying. Let us bring our prayers to the Lord in and through our despair and trust in the Lord to deliver us from all things that He has allowed to come into our life. It is God's Plan and it is God's timing, and the Lord wants us to pour our heart out before Him.

15 I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted.

16 Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off.

It is only under extreme traumatic levels of pressure that the emotions of verse fifteen make sense. There is a sense of affliction that leads a person to the place where they are ready for death and long for it like they once longed for their youth again. There are physical sufferings that actually distract us from our mental anguish and despair. Physical suffering will often focus the mind and make us forget our depression but this psalmist is feeling terror flow over him like great waves of the ocean. He feels cut off from reality, social life, and ordinary life itself. He is isolated and distraught beyond words.

17 They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together.

18 Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.

Enemies flow about him every day and abuse and insult him. This is a man who feels no escape from public criticism and the anguish that goes with false accusations. There are no friends left this man, and those who he thought loved him have run away as far as they can from him. His casual acquaintances have slipped away into the darkness of the night and left him alone to face his enemies. He is bereft and he is alone in the midst of pressure and despair. The psalm doesn't end hopefully, or with any open moral point, it ends here in total isolation and despair.

What is the "learning" here? There are things that can afflict good men and there is no answer to them this side of eternity. This man suffers, and does not end the psalm with an answer for he has no answer to this particular situation he faces when he finishes writing the psalm. There are some situations that we will not see the answer to this side of time, but we have the comfort that the Lord has heard our prayers and answered them, even though we may not live to see that answer. I have known of those who died without an answer to their prayers being seen, but shortly afterwards the answer came through in time and all saw that their prayers were indeed answered. They may have died feeling the despair of the psalmist here, but they have the assurance of God's Word that they are heard and answered.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. What has pressure taught us? What have times of great suffering done for our understanding? What learning has there been for you as you look back through your life? What suffering and pressures teach us is that in the midst of the worst places and time there is a triumph of the Holy Spirit that can be enjoyed; that triumph is the joy of the Lord that can be celebrated in the midst of the darkness, and the certainty of deliverance that can be shouted aloud to the winds of the crisis. Let us affirm our faith in the dark places and transform our depression into praise; the Joy of the Lord is our strength. Nehemiah 8:10.

2. Let us be slow to judge our peers. Let us remember this psalmist, condemned by all his community and yet innocent before the Lord. Let us support the depressed and encourage them, rather than pushing them further down by condemnation. Let us remember that we all face things we cannot understand at some point and let us support those facing things they cannot work their way through. Let us not be like Job's comforters, for they were no comfort whatsoever, and were all proved wrong by God. Let us be patient with the Lord and each other, for we are creatures of space and time and we do not see all the things we wish we could see.

DEPRESSION – PRINCIPLES FOR DEALING WITH IT

Proven Biblical techniques which you can use to successfully deal with depression in your life, REGARDLESS OF THE CAUSE:

1. CONFESSION OF PERSONAL SIN

Make it a spiritual habit to confess sins the moment that you become aware of them. This step toward recovery from depression is absolutely critical!! 1 John 1:9. Sin may not have caused anything here, but it certainly complicates your recovery.

2. THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit fills you and controls your life when you have no unconfessed sin in your life. You can trust the Holy Spirit to reveal sin to you when you commit it, or even before. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is given in Galatians 5:22-23 it is: Love, Joy, Peace, Longsuffering, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control. These 9 virtues replace depression

3. LIVING IN THE WORD OF GOD:

Make it a daily practice to read and study the Bible each and every day. By living in the Word of God you are constantly reminded of GOD'S viewpoint, of His Plan, of His provision, of His awareness of our spirit of heaviness; and we are reminded of what He wants to accomplish in us with the tests or trials that we are going through.

A Christian's response to the Word of God should be:

- [a] READ IT - Deuteronomy. 31:11; Isaiah. 34:16; Luke. 4:16; Ephesians. 3:4; Colossians. 3:16; 4:1; 1 Thessalonians. 5:27; 2 Timothy . 4:13; Revelation 1:3.
- [b] HEED IT - Psalm 119:9; 1 Timothy. 4:16.
- [c] SEED IT - Matthew. 28:19, 20.
- [d] DESIRE IT - 1 Peter. 2:2.
- [e] PREACH IT - 2 Timothy 4:2
- [f] RIGHTLY DIVIDE IT - 2 Timothy. 2:15.
- [g] LIVE BY IT - Matthew. 4:4
- [h] USE IT - Ephesians. 6:17.
- [i] SUFFER FOR IT, AND IF NEED BE, DIE FOR IT - Revelation 1:9; 6:9; 20:4.

THE CHILD OF GOD IS TO:-

KNOW IT in his HEAD
STOW IT in his HEART
SHOW IT in his LIFE
SOW IT in the WORLD:

Deuteronomy 4:1-10; 12:32; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 33:6; Proverbs 30:5, 6; Mark 4:24; Luke 8:12; John 12:48-50; Romans 8:7; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:1-4; Revelation 1:1-3; 20:12; 22:18; 19.

4. APPLY THE PRINCIPLES OF GRACE:

Depression is often caused by PEOPLE, and most of the time by people we cannot escape, or people we love, or people we cannot confront, or people we trust.

By applying the principles of grace we will develop the ability to look at people and see them as GOD sees them.

This includes the ability to let them live their lives as unto the Lord, and trusting God to make His way clear to them. This technique lets people make mistakes without your judging them. Matthew 7:1-5

5. FOCUS ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST:

When we focus on Jesus Christ it helps to cure depression because it gets our eyes off our spouse, our children, our neighbours, our friends, ourselves and our problems. Hebrews 12:2

Instead, as we move through the day, we are thinking about the Lord Jesus Christ, His plan for our life, the Father's provision for each incident in our life, and His provision of wisdom for each decision we must make.

6. TRUSTING AND APPLYING THE PROMISES OF GOD

When we trust and use the promises of God we then enter into the "REST" phase of Christian living.

We need to have a good grasp of just who God is so that we will not hesitate to believe that He can do what He has promised to do. Hebrews 4:1-11 [see topic PROMISES]

We need to know Him as He reveals Himself in the Bible. We need to believe Him when He tells us what He will do for us. Cast your burden on the Lord because He really does care for you!! 1 Peter 5:7

7. RELAX – TAKE IT EASY – BACK OFF AND LET GOD DO HIS WORK.

A relaxed attitude is based on knowing God personally and intimately as His special child that you are. A relaxed attitude is one of the results of living in the Word of God, walking in fellowship with Him, trusting in and using His promises to you, and being focused on Jesus Christ.

If you are a Christian, YOU are His personal gift to His Son, who categorically stated that no one can ever snatch you out of His Father's hand, nor out of His John 10:27-29

You are personally being trained and groomed by God Himself to rule this entire universe with Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. God already sees you seated in heavenly places perfectly sanctified and glorified. See topic on ROYAL FAMILY OF GOD

To have the glory, you must also have some suffering for a little while on this earth. This is part of your training. See topic on CHRISTIAN LIFE - SUFFERING

8. STRIVE FOR INNER HAPPINESS IN YOUR LIFE:

Inner happiness is not possible for the Christian who is occupied solely with himself and his own needs. It is also not possible for the person who occupies himself solely with his own problems, his own circumstances and his own efforts.

Inner happiness is a state of happiness and joy based on knowing that God is everything He claims to be and that He can do ALL that He has promised. See topic on BEATITUDES

Inner happiness is the joy of living where every provision for physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being is being made by God in the life of a Christian who is walking in daily fellowship with Him.

CHRISTIAN LIFE – SUFFERING

DYING GRACE

PSALM 89**INTRODUCTION**

This descendent of Ezra sings of the Lord's character because he is sure of the Lord. Unlike the previous psalm this one celebrates the certainties of God's grace and deliverance, resting on the assurance drawn from the Lord's actions in the past. As the summer follows the winter so the psalmist affirms the deliverance of the Lord will follow the test the Lord has allowed to come into the life. This psalm ends this third book of the Psalms, the Leviticus Section. It ends with praise, because praise is the right way to end each section.

As Psalm 88 showed, we can sit with our pain and not be judged by the Lord for our distress. It showed that there are problems the solutions for which may only be seen long after the sufferer has died. This Psalm encourages us that even though we may not have the answers to all our questions, we do know the One who has them. This Psalm repeats the assurance of **Habakkuk 3:17-19**.

"17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19 The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places."

PSALMS 89:1-52

1 I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. **2** For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. **3** I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, **4** Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah. **5** And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints. **6** For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD? **7** God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him. **8** O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee? **9** Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them. **10** Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm. **11** The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them. **12** The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name. **13** Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand. **14** Justice and judgement are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face. **15** Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. **16** In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. **17** For thou art the glory of thy strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. **18** For the LORD is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our king. **19** Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. **20** I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: **21** With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him. **22** The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him. **23** And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. **24** But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted. **25** I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. **26** He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. **27** Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. **28** My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. **29** His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. **30** If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgements; **31** If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; **32** Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. **33** Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. **34** My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. **35** Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. **36** His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. **37** It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah. **38** But thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed. **39** Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant: thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground. **40** Thou hast broken down all his hedges; thou hast brought his strong holds to ruin. **41** All that pass by the way spoil him: he is a reproach to his neighbours. **42** Thou hast set up the right hand of his adversaries; thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice. **43** Thou hast also turned the edge of his sword, and hast not made him to stand in the battle. **44** Thou hast made his glory to cease, and cast his throne down to the ground. **45** The days of his youth hast thou shortened: thou hast covered him with shame. Selah. **46** How long, LORD? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? shall thy wrath burn like fire? **47** Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? **48** What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah. **49** Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth? **50** Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants; how I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people; **51** Wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O LORD; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed. **52** Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen.

REFLECTION

1 I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations.

2 For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens.

Have you ever expressed the emotion and affirmation of verse one here believer? It is a good thing to praise the Lord, but it is a better thing to praise the Lord continually through this life and then forever. The glimpses of heaven we get in Ezekiel and Revelation indicate that worship is a great part of our activity with the Lord and it is therefore appropriate to get worship to a high level here and now. Let us sing of the mercies of God towards us, and let us do so with all our heart and mind. 1 Corinthians 14:12-19.

The psalmist will now sing of the Lord's faithfulness through the generations of his ancestors to underline his reasons for continual praise. It is knowing the certainties from the past that prepares us to face the present and be strong as we look into the future. On the basis of the actions of the Lord throughout revealed history the psalmist can make the affirmation of verse two; mercy will be built up forever, and in God's faithfulness the heavens have been laid down.

The stability and order of the created universe is God's testimony to the order and system of His Plan, and the coming collapse of the star systems, and the changes in the heavens, are His affirmation that there is a plan for this universe that goes well beyond it. God's mercies go on forever, and even though this universe doesn't go on forever, the heavens do, and there is a new heaven and earth in the Plan of God.

God's faithfulness is reflected in His Plan for us and is bigger than our present universe. God's faithfulness goes beyond time into eternity. The stars will fall, and that very fact proves God's faithfulness in His creation, for it points beyond space and time into eternity. God's mercy and grace goes beyond this universe to the next. Psalms 102:25-27, Isaiah 34:4, 51:6, Hebrews 1:10-12, 2 Peter 3:10-13, Revelation 12:4.

3 I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant,

4 Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah.

At the heart of the Plan of God are the chosen people of God, and at their heart is the family of David. The plan for this present universe centres in and round the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David. 2 Samuel 7:8-29, Isaiah 55:1-11. The promise of the Davidic Covenant is absolute and certain. God's PROMISES are absolutely secure; what the Lord has promised will occur. The Lord Jesus will rule from Jerusalem over the entire earth. Zechariah 12:10 – 14:21, Revelation 20:1ff. David is the centre of the Plan and the rulership of the Lord is the fulfilment of the DAVIDIC COVENANT. Ephesians 1:20-23, Philippians 2:9-11, Revelation 5:8-14. Refer to the BTB study CHRIST – CELEBRITYSHIP, PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING, and RETURN OF OUR LORD.

5 And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints.

6 For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?

The action within the heavens in the Great Tribulation period will certainly underline the Lord's creative power and the certainty of the Plan working out. When one third of the stars "fall" from the sky, exploding in giant supernovas all will know that these events occurred millions of years ago, and yet they have all just appeared here on earth at this specific time, and all will see that this is indeed a sign. Believers will be strengthened, but the unbelievers will be hardened and continue their resistance to the plan and so they will build up the case for their final condemnation. Revelation 6:13, 8:12, 12:4.

The "wonders" of the Lord are seen in the perfection of His plan in that stars that are many millions of light years different in distance from the earth will all be seen to die in a few days. This level of coordination is well above the probabilities of chance and all men will know at that time that this is the Creator's warning to all surviving men to repent. It is not just the wonders in the heavens that can bring man to his knees before the Creator; it is the actions of the Lord towards His faithful servants through the centuries that demonstrate His love and care for all. Psalms 8:3-5. There are no powers on earth, under the earth, or above the earth that can challenge the Lord God. Romans 8:28-39, 1 John 4:4.

7 God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.

8 O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?

Whenever the Lord acted directly and openly in history there was fear in the hearts of all men and women who saw the deeds of the Lord. That fear didn't necessarily translate into obedient action at all times but there was impact in the Lord's actions. When we see the events of the Exodus Generation we are staggered at their unbelief, and yet we see today people brought to their knees in fear after an accident which nearly took their life and yet within days they may be back to their godless path of life.

If a person doesn't want to see the truth, it doesn't matter how powerful the actions the Lord takes to try to arrest their slide into hell, they can still resist and reject the truth. Jesus makes this point in the parable of the "Rich Man and Lazarus the Beggar". Luke 16:31. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, even though

one rose from the dead.” God is overwhelmingly strong, and is absolutely faithful, and when He moves against Satan and his demonic forces their end will be sudden and final. The enemy cannot resist the Lord and win. Revelation 19:19 – 20:2, 10, 14-15.

9 Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.

10 Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm.

It is the Lord who has set the bounds of the seas and the nations. Job 14:5, 26:10, 38:8-11, Psalms 66:5-6, 69:34, Matthew 8:24-27, 14:32, Acts 17:26. The Lord can raise a storm and calm a storm by a word of command in answer to a believer’s prayer. The greatest beasts (Rahab, Leviathan) can be smashed in pieces and left as skeletons and fossils in the desert places and the enemies of Israel have been scattered upon the ground many times. The ancients had found the bones of giant creatures and spoke of “dragons” and giant creatures as there was ancestral memory passed down the generations of giant creatures that walked the earth in earlier times. Genesis 6:4, Job 41:1, Psalms 74:14, 104:26.

The bones of giant animals were a mystery and hinted at in early stories, but the death of armies that attacked Israel was a fact of recent history so many times that the people could look at battle sites all around the land and point to them and say, “That is where the Lord delivered us”. From the days of the Exodus through until the days of Ezra and Nehemiah there were deliverances from armies that would otherwise have destroyed the people and the nation state.

11 The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fullness thereof, thou hast founded them.

12 The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name.

The heavens are the Lord’s for He made them, and will unmake them. The earth is the Lord’s not man’s; we live here as stewards, not owners. We look at things and name them, and we err in thinking that we have some form of ownership over them. We are visitors here in this universe. It was made for us and it will be folded up and put away when it has done its job, and God is the sole decision maker in this area. Everything is the Lord’s.

Now pause and reflect upon this fact, for it is central to prayers being offered up and prayers being answered. When we ask the Lord for something we are asking the right person! Only the Lord is able to answer prayers and has the power to perform all things within this universe. The points of the compass are our reference points, but they are space indicators that remind us that we are very limited as creatures ourselves of space and time. Mountains in the land are tiny compared to the great mountain ranges of the world but all mountains are reminders of man’s smallness. Let us get that message clearly and strongly; we are small, and God is greater than our minds can fully fathom.

13 Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand.

14 Justice and judgement are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

God’s power is without limitations except those that flow from His holy character. God cannot do injustice or violate His own character. This gives us incredible stability and assurance, for we can know that the history of the world will not be a random flow of disjointed events, but a steady advancement towards a certain future. The nobility, power, and majesty of the Lord are in view in verse thirteen. The CHARACTER OF GOD is spelled out in verse fourteen. Refer to the BTB study of this doctrine again as it is central to this Psalm. Deuteronomy 32:1-4, 33:27-29.

15 Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.

16 In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.

The people who know the “joyful sound” are blessed. The joyful sound they walk in is the sound of their own praise and worship. We make our own music as we walk through this world, and some of us walk miserably as a result of not singing as we go. The challenge to all believers is to walk in the music of their soul and that music is to be praises and worship to the Lord who has everything in His hands and who upholds each and every believer in His power. Refer again to the BTB study WALKING and LIGHT.

Every day, throughout each day, we are to walk in the praise and worship of the holy name of God, and as we do that we will discover that the Lord’s righteousness will lift us up and we will be exalted. This means that we will reach the role and responsibility we are meant to hold in this earth, and also it means that we will receive glory and exultation from the Lord. 1 Peter 5:5-9.

17 For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted.

18 For the LORD is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our king.

If we want the best prosperity this world has to offer for us on our path, then we will find it on the path the Lord has called us to walk. The “horn of plenty” is available for the believer who walks with God alone. We will always have “plenty” of resources to achieve all that God has called us to achieve. We will never be short of resources from the Lord to do His will for our life.

We are to ask and we will receive! Matthew 7:7-11, Mark 6:22-24, Luke 11:9-13, John 11:22, 13:24, 14:13-14, 15:7-16, 16:19-30, Ephesians 3:14-20, 1 John 3:22, 5:14-16. It cannot be clearer than these verses make this principle; if we ask

of the Lord in accordance with His will for our life we are assured of His gracious answer. We are exulted to the very heights the Lord wants us to occupy in this life if we walk in prayerful obedience and joyful service.

If we cannot rejoice in the Lord as we serve, something is wrong with our attitude or with what we are doing! The Lord calls us to joyful service. He is our King, and He is our defender; who can stand against the Lord as our enemies try to stand against us? Let us call upon the Lord to squash our enemies and deliver us from all difficulties in joy. Nehemiah 8:10, Habakkuk 3:18-19, John 10:10.

19 Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people.

20 I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him:

The Lord spoke directly to David and gave him a vision and a promise of majesty. The DAVIDIC COVENANT was received and rejoiced in by David and although he sinned, he repented and was restored to his place. David was the focal point of satanic attack as the one who carried the promise of Messiah, and so he faced harder and more vigorous testing than probably any other man before the Lord himself. David buckled and fell, but in God's grace he dealt with his sin and was lifted up again. Psalms 51.

He received the words of the Lord directly and from Samuel and Nathan the prophets. 1 Samuel 16:11-13, 30:6, 2 Samuel 7:1ff, 22:2-7. He was anointed for the Lord's service as the replacement king to Saul, but he learned patience and righteousness through the coming years, and he did not try to gain the throne by murder. He was anointed king, but he waited for the Lord's timing to become king and enter into his anointing. He was sensitive to the timing and will of the Lord alone.

21 With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him.

22 The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him.

David was a man who was unstoppable when he walked with God. He was beaten and distracted into sin and civil war only when he walked away from God. Israel was a small nation and there was no reason why it should have been able to build the powerful state it did, except that the Lord was with David and Solomon. They established a mighty kingdom and were respected by nations that would later destroy their descendants.

The reasons for their greatness and the later sad destruction of their descendants centre round their obedience to the Lord. David was unstoppable because he walked with God and the power of God guided him, and so he fulfilled his destiny and was able to rule a land even greater than that seized by Joshua four hundred years before. The wicked men who tried to stop David got nailed by his army and his God. If God be for us who can be against us? Romans 8:28-39.

23 And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him.

24 But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted.

The only people who stand against the people of God are fools, and they are soon to be judged and seen by all as fools. The only thing that gives us defeats, and the fools who hate us and God some victories, is our own disobedient walking. If we walk with God, in His will for our life, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, then we are unbeatable. Anyone standing against the will of God will be destroyed over time, for you cannot, as a creature, fight the Creator, and win for any significant period of time.

Those that hate God will eventually be plagued by the Lord. Take a long and hard look at the faces of those who hate God and act immorally against their fellow man, and what you will see will shock you. You will see hard and bitter people whose very faces are twisted and lined by the life they have lived.

The contrast is seen when you look at those who have walked with God in truth and in Holy Spirit power, for they have walked in joy, righteousness and mercy, and such people have happy and contented faces and peaceful spirits. Their "horn of plenty or power" will be exulted through their walk with God, for they will be relaxed in their life and walk, rejoicing as they go. There are two paths through this life; walking with God in the hard places, but with joy, or with Satan in the "broad way of apparent prosperity", but it is the way of deception and terrible bitterness of spirit. Matthew 7:13-14.

25 I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers.

26 He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

The picture here is of an enormous person looking towards the north, with his left hand in the Mediterranean Sea and his right hand in the Rivers Euphrates and Tigris. It is a picture of the massive expansion of the kingdom of David and Solomon, which will stretch from Egypt to the Euphrates, but it is an even more powerful picture of the kingdom of Israel under the Messiah who reigns as Great David's greater Son. Ezekiel 47-48.

During the Great Tribulation period the waters of the earth will be polluted and living things will die in the oceans and rivers. Revelation 16:3-4. The Lord however provides a healing river to cleanse the rivers and oceans of the world and they are recovered and the fish species live again. Ezekiel 47:8-12. In that day the TRINITY will be acknowledged and

the Son will honour and glorify the Father. Christ is the ROCK upon which the entire Plan and purposes of God rest, and upon which the destiny of mankind rests securely.

27 Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.

28 My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him.

The Lord Jesus Christ will be seen in that day to be the true King over all kings, and Lord over all lords. There will be full and complete acknowledgement of the person and the work of the Lord Jesus in that day, for all will see the truth clearly with deception exiled from the earth when Satan and his fallen angels are judged. The mercy and love of God are focused in and upon the Lord Jesus Christ; He is the epitome of mercy, its living definition forever. The covenants of the Lord will be secure because their fulfilment rests in the completion of the work of the Lord Jesus, His work will be completed, and He will rule from Jerusalem. All this was stated in the Davidic Covenant from the beginning. 2 Samuel 7:12-16.

29 His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

30 If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgements;

The children of the Lord will live forever; we have everlasting life in Christ Jesus. We are the "seed" of the Lord Jesus; members of the ROYAL FAMILY OF GOD through our POSITION IN CHRIST. Refer to the BTB study on ETERNAL LIFE and to the other doctrines in capitals. It will be heaven on earth during the Lord's reign, and so the days of His earthly reign will be like the days of heaven. In the midst of blessing there is always rebellion, and this will occur even at the end of the Millennial Kingdom. Revelation 20:7-10. The capacity man has for rebellion is significant, but the Lord's judgement is final. The tired old earth is wrapped up and put away after the Great White Throne Judgement. Revelation 20:11ff.

31 If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments;

32 Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.

The sentences that begin with "if" are reminders to us all that man has FREE WILL, and that each act of volition can go either towards or away from the Lord and His plan for that individual. If the people of God walk away from the statutes and laws of the Lord then they will be walking away from blessing and into divine discipline. The choice is our own every day of our life; will we keep the laws of the Lord or will we live carelessly and foolishly and walk away from God's standards. We are not under the Law as such, but the laws of the Lord are His standards and they are to be kept or we will face the Lord's discipline. John 15:7-17, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-25. Refer to the BTB study on DIVINE DISCIPLINE.

33 Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.

34 My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.

The people of God are spoken of as an identity with the Lord, and that is the way God sees us. We are a gift from the Father to the Son, and are united in spiritual-physical union with him. John 6:36-46. We are too often ignorant of what the Lord has already done for us as His children. Refer to the BTB study on GIFTS GIVEN AT SALVATION. We are blessed beyond measure in Christ Jesus, and even if we fail the Lord at times, He never fails us, for He cannot deny Himself! 2 Timothy 2:12-13. God does not break His covenant, nor go back on His word in any way whatsoever. We can rest upon the Word of God and the Character of God that is behind every word of scripture.

35 Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.

36 His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me.

When God says something once it is settled and sure; the Lord does not go back on His Word. We are absolutely secure in the Lord's Word and the Lord's Plan. Let us praise the Lord, for the promises of men are often lies, but God's Word is absolute truth and we can rest upon it. The throne of the Lord is settled and secure and will stand until the sun ceases to shine. The Lord will rule upon the earth until the Lord is ready to wind up the entire universe and replace it with another. The whole concept of eternity is beyond us at this point, but we will one day understand it, and then we will rejoice in the Lord fully, for we shall see Him as He truly is and His creations as they truly are. 1 Corinthians 13:12.

37 It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah.

38 But thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed.

The Millennial Kingdom will last as long as the universe lasts and when it ends the last judgement occurs and this universe is wound up. The heavens will last as long as the Lord's kingdom upon the earth; they end at the same time after the last Judgement. The SEQUENCE OF END TIME EVENTS is already written in the scriptures; there are no surprises in the plan of God. There will have been great wrath from the Lord towards His anointed people Israel for many centuries before the Lord comes to set up His kingdom. The Jewish people accept their Messiah only after the mid point of the Great Tribulation period. They have paid a terrible price for their rebellion against the will of the Lord. Zechariah 12:10ff, Romans 11:1ff.

39 Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant: thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground.

40 Thou hast broken down all his hedges; thou hast brought his strong holds to ruin.

The punishment of the Jewish people during the two historic examples of the Fifth cycle of NATIONAL DIVINE DISCIPLINE was terrible indeed. The people were reduced from several million in the first case to around 30,000, and all their cities and farms were destroyed and their surviving people reduced to slavery. Millions died each time. The third great Holocaust occurs 1942-45. Each great period of suffering in history runs for about 3 ½ years. They occurred exactly as Moses predicted they would and the people suffered their nation's total destruction both times. Refer to the BTB study of this fact of the Lord's discipline upon His people in 589-586BC and 67-70AD. Deuteronomy 28-30.

41 All that pass by the way spoil him: he is a reproach to his neighbours.

42 Thou hast set up the right hand of his adversaries; thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice.

The catastrophe that culminated for Judah in 586 led to the land being the victim of repeated raids by all the surrounding Arab groups, and after 70 AD the land was conquered and subjugated thoroughly by the Romans, and after 135-137 AD and the final Jewish revolt the Jews were actually banned from their land and a handful only stayed there until the 20th century when Israel was reborn. The enemies of the people of God were allowed to rejoice over God's people for a time and they did so, but the Lord was doing things with His people, and He has brought them back into the land today in unbelief, but ready to be revived there. God has a plan for His people and it will be worked out. Refer to the BTB studies on Israel.

43 Thou hast also turned the edge of his sword, and hast not made him to stand in the battle.

44 Thou hast made his glory to cease, and cast his throne down to the ground.

With God's judgement over the nation of Israel there has also been great deliverance, and their armies in recent years have stood against superior forces again and again, and they have won the battles. This is a sign that the hand of blessing is again on the Lord's people, as since 1948 the nation called Israel has survived against all the odds and prospered in the midst of adversity and total malice. The curses in these verses here are now laid aside.

As believers in the Word of God we need to identify such things and be challenged by them. The Lord is taking up His people again, just as the Apostle Paul said He would do. Romans 11:1-32. Refer to the EBCWA study on this section of the book of Romans and be excited, for we live in days when the Jewish people are back on the centre-stage of world history, and they will not leave it until the Lord comes.

45 The days of his youth hast thou shortened: thou hast covered him with shame. Selah.

46 How long, LORD? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? shall thy wrath burn like fire?

The psalmist asks about the length of time that they will be under discipline and the answer is, for his generation it wouldn't be long before they were restored to power and influence. By the fourth century BC the Jewish people were an important part of the Persian and later the Greek Empire, and many Jews followed the armies of Alexander the Great and this led to synagogues being established throughout the eastern Mediterranean world.

The Jews faced persecution at times, but over all they prospered, with over one million living in Egypt by the first century, when our Lord walked the earth. The Lord did not hide His face from them forever, nor did He keep on with discipline of them. The discipline however began again after the rejection of the Lord Jesus and He sadly identified that they would suffer equally badly to their fall in 586 BC, and they did. Matthew 23:37-39.

47 Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?

48 What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah.

TIME is a very limited commodity and none of us know how long we have upon this earth, and time is ticking by. There is a limit set to this universe and then time will cease and eternity will begin. To us, with minds that cannot have a thought that isn't limited by space or time, this very thought is hard to grasp, but this is the teaching of the Word of God. Time ends and eternity begins, and the world's history is on a path that is leading to the end of all the things we know and are familiar with.

The psalmist wonders whether the entire creation has been a waste of time given how things have turned out at this stage on the time continuum. It is an encouragement to us to read these words because we can feel that the Lord's plan may be falling over from what we are seeing, but it is not at all. All men are born to die and the only point there is in anyone's life is what they can do for God on their journey through this brief life. Only the Lord can deliver us from an early death and lead us through our appointed death and into the eternity that He has prepared for us.

49 Lord, where are thy former loving kindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth?

50 Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants; how I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people;

The psalmist looks around in his own day and seeks for the assurance that the promises to David are not gone like the wind, but will be fulfilled in a future time.

He looks around and sees distress and seeks the Lord's assurance that the blessing of God will return upon the people of God one day. The psalmist takes the burden of his people upon his own heart and prays for the people on the basis of his love for them and his desires for them to be restored to spiritual blessing.

51 Wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O LORD; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed.

52 Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen.

Why have the enemies of the Lord been allowed to do what they have done? The psalmist is concerned at the apparent over-kill of the Lord's discipline, and he pleads for the Lord's forgiveness and the removal of the judgement so that the Jewish people might become the anointed of the Lord again. He sees that these enemies have gone way beyond their mandate to punish God's people and have almost destroyed them.

Even though he has serious questions about what has occurred he asks for the Lord's answer, but he ends his psalm, not with his questions, but with his affirmation of praise. He knows that when all the facts are in the Lord will be seen to have been blessing his people, and he will be blessed for evermore and the believers will be blessed for evermore also. This is the faith we are called to; it is the faith that sees past the problems of today to the solutions of tomorrow in the Lord's plan. The Lord has a plan and he affirms that he believes it will work out to God's glory and our eternal blessing.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. We worship the Maker of the universe, and the Maker has a plan that goes well beyond this present "space and time universe" to a new one altogether. This sort of thought is well beyond our present limited state, but in the Lord's resurrection body we see the sort of body that has the characteristics that can go beyond space and time.

2. None will stand against the Lord and survive. There is no hope for any who rebel against God's legitimate authority as the Creator; be they angel or human, they will be judged fully and finally. There is eternal destiny in joy for the believer only. Let us praise the Lord for what He is to do in these last days and by celebrating His victory in our hearts now we will build the strength to resist the enemy's attacks now.

3. Let us remember every day that we are creatures of space and time and in prayer we speak with the Creator of all things. Let us be humble and thoughtful in all we say and do before the Lord. We are creatures limited in our thinking by space and time. We cannot even have a thought that isn't limited by these frameworks of thinking. We can use terms like infinity and eternity but we cannot really have a concept of either thing for they are beyond the bounds of sense for us. Let us remain humble in our discussion about God and His Plan and let us learn from REVELATION the things we cannot learn from observation.

4. Let us walk in worship and worship as we walk through this present world. It is worship that frees the spirit and lightens the path ahead. Let us shine the light of praise upon the path of life. Let us join Nehemiah, Habakkuk, and Paul, and rejoice in the Lord always! Nehemiah 8:10, Habakkuk 3:18-19, Philippians 4:4. This world is temporary, but the PLAN OF GOD is eternal and we are part of that plan forever. Let us praise the Lord for His great goodness towards us. Let us praise God for the plan that will work out in time and eternity, and affirm our faith that His will is being done even though we cannot see the details at present.

DOCTRINES

PROMISES

COVENANTS – DAVIDIC COVENANT

CHRIST – CELEBRITYSHIP OF CHRIST

CHRIST – PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING

CHRIST – RETURN OF OUR LORD

GOD – CHARACTER OF GOD

CHRISTIAN LIFE – WALKING

LIGHT

GOD – TRINITY

GOD – TRINITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

GOD – TRINITY IN THE TITLES OF GOD

CHRIST – ROCK: CHRIST AS THE ROCK

CHRISTIAN LIFE – ROYAL FAMILY OF GOD

CHRISTIAN LIFE – POSITION IN CHRIST

CHRISTIAN LIFE – ETERNAL LIFE

CHRISTIAN LIFE – ETERNAL SECURITY

GOD – DIVINE INSTITUTIONS – FREE WILL

ISRAEL

CHRIST – TYPES – ISAAC AS A TYPE OF CHRIST

ISRAEL – JACOB AS A TYPE OF ISRAEL

ISRAEL – NATIONAL DIVINE DISCIPLINE

TIME

CHRISTIAN LIFE – GIFTS GIVEN AT SALVATION

PROPHECY – SEQUENCE OF END TIME EVENTS

REVELATION

GOD – PLAN OF GOD