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Israel's time of trouble under Antichrist

Psalm 44

This is a familiar psalm, the contents of which have provided much support and comfort to the people of God in this New Testament era as the Church of Christ has appropriated this psalm to itself. What truth there is in verses 1-8.

1. The need to instruct the young in the merciful dealings of God toward their fathers. "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out," verses 1-2.

This is a vital task for parents, especially fathers. The church must teach the next generation what God has done in the past.

2. The debt we owe to God for His providential dealings with us is also set before us. "How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them," verses 2-3.

As I have travelled through England, even on my way to this meeting, virtually every church spire is a monument to the work God did in this land in former times. Now those mercies are long forgotten except by the likes of us here today. How indebted we should feel toward the God of our fathers for the merciful work of reformation and revival He wrought in former times of blessing.

3. Bold faith is stirred up when we remember the past mercies of God. "Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob. Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever. Selah," verses 4-8.

A recalling of God's former mercies excites the psalmist to pray the Lord to do again what He had done in the past. Since He has not changed in His power or purpose why should we not see Him act again in the manner in which He worked in times past?

To make such an application of this and other passages is not wrong as long as we do not understand these words to refer exclusively to the New Testament Church and forget that they were written primarily for Israel. That would be a fateful error which would deprive us of a right and full understanding of the words of the psalmist.

I. THESE WORDS APPLY FIRST AND FOREMOST TO NATIONAL ISRAEL.

As we read the psalm we are immediately confronted with two difficulties as we seek to identify the time that the psalmist refers to.

1. The location of Israel. "Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people. My confusion is continually before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me," verses 14-15.

In the Old Testament, Israel suffered exile under Babylon in the days of Jeremiah. However, at that time their exile was confined to the land of Babylon whereas here they say, "Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat; and hast scattered us among the heathen," verse 11. Again, "Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people," verse 14.

This is more like the scattering of Israel that followed the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. It does not



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refer to that scattering but the words are more in keeping with such a scattering than they are with what happened at the time of the Babylonian captivity.

2. The spiritual state of Israel. Here is another difficulty. Israel is faithfully adhering to the Lord at this time of trouble and affliction. "All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; Though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death. If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god . . . ," verses 17-20.

This cannot be said of Israel in the times of Jeremiah and the Babylonian captivity or Israel's state in AD 70.

I believe that we are pointed forward to a time of trouble and strife for Israel in which she will suffer, not for her sins but for her adherence to the Lord and His truth. It is the time when Israel will be awakened to the truth and enabled to stand against the pretensions and claims of the Antichrist. It is the Antichrist who is referred to in verse 16. "For the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth; by reason of the enemy and avenger."

It is the voice of the redeemed remnant of Israel that we have speaking in this psalm. It is that time of which the prophet Hosea speaks. "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days," Hosea 3:4-5.

Ezekiel also pointed to that time. "For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God," Ezekiel 36:24-28.

Zechariah also makes reference to this time. "And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God," Zechariah 13:9.

Thus when the time of Antichrist's manifestation comes there will be a spiritually awakened people in the land of Israel who will read and understand the warnings of the Saviour in Matthew 24:15-27.

This then is a psalm which gives us a foreshadowing of the cry of Israel unto God in the time of Jacob's trouble.

3. Thus during this time of trouble the Jewish remnant will recall God's former mercies to the nation. Verses 1-3. This has ever been the sequence of events whenever God moves graciously amongst His people and stirs their hearts and souls to seek Him. It is what we need to see today amidst the spirit of carelessness and indifference toward the things of God, even amongst believers.

4. Such reminiscing will stir up faith and give rise to prayer. Verses 4-8. Victory is here anticipated. It will be a victory given of God and not wrought by their own hand. These words bring us into the very prayer meetings of the Jews in the latter days.

II. THE CHARACTER OF ISRAEL'S TRIBULATION IN THE LATTER DAYS IS SET FORTH HERE.

Verses 9-22.

1. It will be most severe. "But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame," verse 9. "Cast off and put to shame." So God will deal with His people for their ultimate good.



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2. The enemy caused to triumph over them. "Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy: and they which hate us spoil for themselves. Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat; and hast scattered us among the heathen. Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price," verses 10-12. This is reminiscent of the bitter hatred for the people of Israel that was borne toward them by Nazi Germany. This hatred will again be manifest but to a great measure and will be the instrument by which the Lord will humble His ancient people and bring them back to Him.

3. They become a reproach and are put to confusion. "Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us. Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people. My confusion is continually before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me," verses 13-15.

4. Their chief tormentor will be the Antichrist. "For the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth; by reason of the enemy and avenger," verse 16. Daniel says this of the Antichrist. "And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time," Daniel 7:25. The same picture is presented in the book of the Revelation. "And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations," 13:6-7. Antichrist will be the personification of blasphemy.

5. The Jews' sufferings then will be that of the Gentile church. "Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter," verse 22. These words were applied by Paul to the New Testament saints and their sufferings. "As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter," Romans 8:36.

In truth, Gentile believers will be joint sufferers with the redeemed Jews at the time spoken of by the psalmist. But please note that only the true-born believer, the blood-washed elect will ultimately refuse to bend and bow before the Antichrist. "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," Revelation 13:8.

III. THE CRY OF THE SUFFERER TO GOD.

"Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast us not off for ever. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth. Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies' sake," Psalm 44:23-26.

1. They cry to awaken the Lord from apparent sleep. How often God stirs His people to greater fervency by showing apparent indifference!! This cry is echoed in heaven. "And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" Revelation 6:10. "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:7-8. "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil," 1 Peter 3:12.

2. God's arising is our deliverance. "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous," Psalm 112:4. He is our saving light. "Arise, O LORD, in thine anger, lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies: and awake for me to the judgment that thou hast commanded," Psalm 7:6. "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him," Psalm 68:1. It enough for the Lord to stand for evil man to fall.

3. That 'arising' is the return of the Lord Jesus. "And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops



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of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth," Isaiah 2:19-21.

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh," Revelation 19:11-21.

May the Lord bless this meditation of His Word today.

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