

Psalms 74:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. This verse represents one of the psalm's most theologically significant appeals. The psalmist does not argue based on Israel's merit but on God's covenant commitment. The prayer is grounded not in human worthiness but in divine faithfulness.

"Have respect unto the covenant" (habbet labberit, הַבֵּט לְבָרִית) uses nabat (to look, regard, pay attention) in an imperative form. The psalmist asks God to look at—to remember and honor—His covenant. Berit (ברית) is the foundational concept of Israel's relationship with God: the binding agreement established at Sinai, renewed through history, promising mutual commitment between Yahweh and His people.

"The dark places of the earth" (machashakkei-eretz, מַחְשָׁקֵי-אָרֶץ) describes regions of darkness—whether physical (caves, hiding places) or metaphorical (places where light of truth and justice does not penetrate). "Habitations of cruelty" (ne'ot chamas, נְאוֹת חַמָּס) indicates dwelling places filled with violence, wrongdoing, and oppression. Chamas is the same word used to describe pre-flood corruption (Genesis 6:11) and injustice throughout the prophets.

The verse connects covenant and justice. God's covenant with Israel was not merely private arrangement but had implications for the entire earth. When God's

people suffer under cruelty, His covenant honor is at stake. The appeal asks God to act for His name's sake, to demonstrate that His commitments are reliable.

Historical Context

The covenant (berit) was the organizing concept of Israel's relationship with Yahweh. Unlike surrounding nations whose gods were capricious and unpredictable, Israel's God had bound Himself by solemn agreement. The Abrahamic covenant promised land, descendants, and blessing (Genesis 12, 15, 17). The Mosaic covenant established the terms of relationship at Sinai (Exodus 19-24). The Davidic covenant promised an eternal throne (2 Samuel 7).

Appeals to covenant appear frequently in biblical prayer. Moses interceded for Israel by reminding God of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 32:13). Nehemiah prayed: "Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses" (Nehemiah 1:8). The covenant provided grounds for prayer that transcended human merit.

The mention of "dark places" and "cruelty" reflects the violence experienced during the Babylonian conquest. 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52 describe the brutality: killing the king's sons before his eyes, blinding the king, carrying away captives, burning the temple and palace. The psalm asks God to consider this suffering in light of His covenant promises.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does appealing to God's covenant differ from appealing to our own merit or righteousness?

2. What promises of God can believers appeal to in prayer during times of suffering?
3. How does the connection between covenant faithfulness and justice on earth inform our understanding of God's character?
4. What are the 'dark places' in our world today, and how might the church pray concerning them?

Interlinear Text

אֶת	מִתְשִׁיבָּה	מְלָאִים	לְבָרֵית	בְּגָתָן
Have respect	unto the covenant	H3588	are full	for the dark
H5027	H1285	H4390	H4285	H776

תַּאֲדַת	מִתְמָסָה
of the habitations	of cruelty
H4999	H2555

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 106:45 (Covenant): And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies.

Hebrews 8:10 (Covenant): For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

Psalms 89:28 (Covenant): My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him.

Psalms 105:8 (Covenant): He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations.