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## **LIFE-STUDY OF THE PSALMS MESSAGE 41,42 THE PRECIOUSNESS OF ZION AND JERUSALEM IN THE EXPERIENCES AND PRAISES OF THE SAINTS**

In this message we will begin to consider a particular group of psalms, Psalms 120 through 134, which are known as the Psalms of Ascents.

Whereas Psalm 119 talks about the law, in these fifteen psalms the law is not mentioned. Instead of speaking concerning the law, these psalms refer to the matter of captivity. The people of Israel loved the law, but they did not live according to the law. After they received the law, their sins, offenses, and transgressions increased. They even went so far as to turn from God and worship idols. For instance, Judges 17 tells us of a man who set up idols in his home, who appointed one of his sons to be his priest, and who later hired a Levite to be a priest in his house. Since the people of Israel wanted to worship idols, God caused them to go into captivity in a land of idols. As the people were suffering in captivity, they forgot many things, but they could not forget Zion and Jerusalem.

At that time, Mount Zion and Jerusalem, which was built on Zion, were the only signs left on earth of God. Zion was the place where Abraham offered his son Isaac; it was also the place chosen by David. God is invisible, mysterious, and very deep. No one has seen Him. Nevertheless, Zion and Jerusalem were earthly signs of God's existence. As indicated by Psalms 120 through 134, Zion, the center, and Jerusalem, the circumference, remained deeply in the consideration of the people of Israel. For this reason, I have entitled the two messages on these psalms "The Preciousness of Zion and Jerusalem in the Experiences and Praises of the Saints." Because of their experiences, the saints could not forget Zion and Jerusalem, and in their praises

they did not neglect them. The saints were concerned not for godliness or comfort but for the fate of Zion and Jerusalem.

Israel was first invaded by the Assyrians and later by the Babylonians. Unlike the Babylonians, the Assyrians did not destroy the city of Jerusalem or devastate the temple. When the Psalms of Ascents were written, both the city and the temple remained, and the saints in captivity remembered them as signs, as symbols, of the very God whom they worshipped.

Why are these fifteen psalms called Songs of Ascents? To answer this question we need to see that when the people of Israel were captured, they were in a downward situation. To return to Jerusalem and to Zion was to be in an upward situation. Furthermore, they had to climb, to ascend, the hill of Zion, and as they were ascending they sang a song of ascents, a song of degrees.

When we were saved, we were in an upward situation and thus could not sing a song of ascent. However, we may eventually become "down" or "low" for a period of time. At such a time we are in a kind of captivity. But when the Lord gains us again and we are revived, we will sing a song of ascent. As a result of our experiences of the ups and the downs, we will no longer uplift the law, appreciating it in a natural way. We will realize that the law does not help us. Rather, the things that truly help us are Zion and Jerusalem.

Scripture Reading: Psa. 128—134

In the previous message we covered the first eight of the Psalms of Ascents. In this message we will consider the remaining seven, Psalms 128 through 134.

The sequence of these seven psalms is significant. Psalm 128 speaks of Jehovah's blessing to Israel from Zion and the prosperity of Jerusalem in Israel's enjoyment. Psalm 129 concerns God's righteous dealing with the persecutors of Israel and the haters of Zion. On this earth there is a people chosen by God as His elect, and this people is

always persecuted. This is true of the believers today, who may be persecuted for preaching the gospel and teaching the Bible. Furthermore, Zion, the highest peak of that range of mountains, signifies the overcomers in the church, the higher ones among the believers. Just as Zion was hated, so the overcomers also are hated. But God comes in to deal righteously with those who persecute Israel and hate Zion. Israel is God's elect, and God deals with those who persecute His people, but this does not mean that Israel is perfect and sinless. On the contrary, Israel has many sins and iniquities. Thus, in Psalm 130 we have a psalm of forgiveness and redemption.

Psalm 131 indicates that after we experience God's forgiveness, we become humble. Formerly, we were proud and even haughty, thinking that we alone were right and that others were wrong. But after we are enlightened concerning our real situation, make a thorough confession, and receive God's forgiveness, we become humble. We humble our heart, lower our eyes, and our soul becomes quiet "like a weaned child with its mother" (v. 2). I have had this experience many times, realizing that I am nothing, that I have nothing, and that I can do nothing. When our heart is humbled and our soul is quiet, we are in a condition that is suitable for God to come in to rest. In such a situation God can have a resting place, a dwelling. However, when we are proud and our eyes are haughty, God has no rest, no dwelling place, in us. Only when we are humble, calm, and quiet is the situation right for God to rise up, enter into us, and take us as His resting place. This is Zion becoming God's habitation, His resting place, as revealed in Psalm 132.

Next, Psalm 133 shows us that Zion is the unique place where the brothers can come together in unity. Zion is the uniting center. In any other place we are scattered and divided. When God has His rest, His dwelling place, in Zion, we can come to Him in Zion and dwell there in unity with the brothers. How good and how pleasant this is! It is like the fine oil, signifying the anointing, upon Aaron, and it is also like the morning dew, signifying grace, that descends from Mount Hermon to the mountains of Zion. This indicates that, as God's people, we need both the anointing and the watering. Moreover, in Zion God has a place where He can command His blessing. Therefore, in Zion we receive the commanded blessing of God, even life forever.

Finally, in Psalm 134 the children of Israel first charge the priests to praise God in the night, and then they bless the priests. Whereas the priests taught and blessed the children of Israel, here the children of Israel teach and bless the priests. This indicates that the children of Israel have become higher than the priests.

The sequence of Psalms 128 through 134 is logical and reasonable. We enjoy God's blessing from Zion and the prosperity of Jerusalem, and then God deals with those who persecute us and hate us. Nevertheless, we are sinful and need God's forgiveness. When we receive His forgiveness, we become humble, calm, and quiet, and God comes in to rest, to dwell, in us. Then we come up to Him to dwell in unity. As a result, we become Mount Zion; that is, we become the highest people, those who are even higher than the priests.

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***Burdens for Church Prayers***

- Pray for the blending and one accord among the saints
- Pray for the burden how to raise up spiritual children at home
- Pray for YP that they will be companions with one another to pursue the Lord together.
- Pray for the English-speaking testimony and gospel preaching on West Valley College campus.
- For daily exercise in GOW training: prophesying on Lord's day by daily enjoying His word and pursue the truth and attend Lord's day meeting on time.

***Announcement***

- Morning Revival: Crystallization study of Psalms Message 21.
- YP Pursuing of Bible Study: John Correspondence course.
- Audio and outlines of the messages from Parents and Children/YP Serving Ones Conference are available at <http://thechurchinsanjose.org/archives>.
- Prayer meeting Tuesday (4/10) at meeting hall.
- Sister Conference 4/13-14 (\$22+\$6).
- Summer Training 7/2-7, Registration deadline 5/1, please sanctify the time.
- Sixth grade conf. 5/4-6, Bible Camp 6/18-22, SST for YP 7/22-27, please sanctify the week.
- ITERO Re-speaking: 4-6pm on 4/22, at San Jose meeting hall, 124 S 11th Street.