

SONGS OF DEGREES

by W.W. Fereday

W.W. Fereday's reflections on Psalms 120-134, the pilgrim songs of ascent, tracing the spiritual journey of the soul drawing near to God.

21 Chapters

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Songs of Degrees

Chapter 1

Recovery or Return Journey

by John L. Erisman

Recovery or The Return Journey as typified by the “Songs of Degrees”

Introduction

No doubt the Spirit of God has something special in the grouping of these Psalms under this heading; they were evidently written at different times and by different authors.

The word “degrees” means a “going up” or “ascent,” and is used elsewhere in the sense of steps, as to Solomon’s throne and as to the future temple, in Ezekiel 40. These Psalms then may be taken in a moral sense of going up.

If we take a glance at the last one of these Psalms, we find it speaking of those in the house of the Lord – in the sanctuary blessing the Lord, or as worshipers in His presence. We might say then that it is the path that leads to becoming a true worshiper. We find the Lord uses this very term in speaking to the poor outcast woman in John 4:23. He is speaking of the interval that was to take place between the casting off of Israel on account of His rejection, as we learn elsewhere, and their being received again (Rom. 11:15, 25).

In John 4:23 the Father is seeking worshipers, and we learn that “God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). In verse 23, two places of worship are spoken of – that of the Samaritans and that of the Jews. The first was not the truth, and the second was no longer of the Spirit.

These Psalms are evidently historical in their origin, or in some past application, and also prophetic as to a future application. No doubt there is a typical application for us; for “Every scripture is divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, fully fitted to every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17 JND).

We have found where the path ends: a true worshiper in His presence. But from whence does it start? From John 4 we see that it can start from a very low beginning; this should be an encouragement to us, since none need be left out.

Psalm 119

It is quite instructive to see that this series of Psalms begins just after the 119th, which, as we know, is the longest and is occupied in the setting forth of the Word of God. There are evidences in this long Psalm that the Word had been let slip, and it had lost its influence on the soul.

“I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies” (Psa. 119:59).

“Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Thy word” (Psa. 119:67).

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes” (Psa. 119:71).

Then the last verse: “I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek Thy servant; for I do not forget Thy commandments” (Psa. 119:176).

Some have thought that the Spirit of God used Ezra to group these Psalms as suitable to their state in journeying from Babylon to Jerusalem, and thus are prophetic of the remnant in the latter days.

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy word.”
Psalm 119:9.

Psalm 120

(vs. 1) "In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and He heard me." If the Word of God has been let slip in our lives, we find ourselves in circumstances not in accordance with it; the realization of this would cause distress and exercise similar to that we have in this verse.

(vs. 5) "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech." His feet are in the wrong place, and he is surrounded by those whom he thought were his friends, but finds deceit on every hand. Such, no doubt, will be the case of the remnant in the day of apostasy that is to come when the Spirit of God first begins to work in their hearts. But could it not be true of everyone in all dispensations in similar circumstances?

No doubt this refers to their being in captivity to the Gentiles. "That I dwell in the tents of Kedar," that is, among those who would take that which God has set up as an approach to Himself and make it a mere thing of nature. All those who do this would come under this heading.

The term "Kedar" is applied to the Ishmaelites and to the Arabs generally. It was with the Arabs that Nehemiah had to contend; they sought in every way to gain an entrance among the Jews and did in Nehemiah's absence-into the very house of God! (The Arabs are now contending with the Jews for the land of Palestine.)

(vs. 2) "Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue."

(vs. 4) "Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper."

(vs. 6) "My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace."

(vs. 7) "I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war."

In Babylon there were Jews who had no exercise as to the return of the remnant in Ezra and Nehemiah's time; they were satisfied to remain where they were. It was a mere handful that came back, and verses 2-4 and 6-7 could well be applied to those who had given up the true hope of Israel in that day, as it will be of those in the future who have allied themselves with the beast and the false prophet. It is also the attitude of those of all times, since the Church has been established, whose hope is in this world only; they see no reason for the deep exercise the Spirit of God has laid upon the hearts of the remnant.

From their earliest history there had always been some among the children of Israel who had never gotten beyond looking at their place in this world as that which was by the way of nature, or a national relationship. They had not considered the longing of the Lord for them when in Deuteronomy 5 they had told Moses, "Go thou near, and hear all that the LORD our God shall say;... and we will hear it, and do it" (Deut. 5:27). The response of the Lord was, "Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!" (Deut. 5:29). There is a longing over them also in Deut. 32:28-29. Trace this similar sighing after them as voiced in Psalm 81:11-16,

about five hundred years afterward. Then at a later period, in Isa. 48:16-19, but especially verse 18: "O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." But it was too late; captivity was at hand. This prophecy was about three hundred years later than Psalm 81.

In Isaiah 48 they were given instructions to flee from Babylon with a voice of singing. In Psalm 126, the time had come; and their mouth was indeed filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing.

In the past they were never able to rise up to the fact that being a child of Abraham called for a life of faith; but in the future, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power" (Psalm 110:3). "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer. 31:33).

In our Psalm, after being aroused, they learn that those with whom they had formerly been content to dwell, were really not true friends, but just the opposite. They can only count upon the Lord for deliverance from among them.

Would not the application of "I dwell in the tents of Kedar" be analogous with Eph. 5:14? "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (or, "Christ shall shine upon thee" (JND Trans). The shining upon him discovers to him where he is-sunken down to the level of the world-and the result is, such a one is in deep distress!

Psalm 121

In Psalm 121 there is a realization of the fact, that to get to the place of blessing, a long journey lies ahead – a journey beset with dangers, for the enemy of our souls does not give up easily.

(vs. 1) “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” The one who has these deep exercises, in looking around seems to see no direct pathway out; the way looks all closed in on every side. Then there comes the realization that his help comes from the Lord.

(vs. 2) “My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.” He then has the assurance of care all along the journey from the One who has made the heavens and the earth.

(vss. 3-4) “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”

(vss. 6-8) “The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve ... thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.”

The remnant in the future day will be under the special protection of the Lord (Rev. 7). Though for the most part they are unconscious of it, they are protected from the judgment falling upon the earth. They do however suffer from the persecutions of the beast and the antichrist. There is at this present time an angelic care exercised over those who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:14). Both classes would seem to be covered by Psalm 91:1: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” It does not say, he that hath the knowledge of the secret place, but he that dwelleth there. We may have the knowledge, but are we really dwelling there? One has thought that the abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, might be said to be exercised in an especial way when His own are gathered together waiting upon Him.

Another care is exercised, according to Phil. 1:6; but it is followed by exhortations in Phil. 1:10 as to our responsibility. See also 2 Cor. 1:14. The sense of the Lord’s care over us and the exhortations as to our responsibility should strengthen the awakened desire to follow on in the path of faith, whatever the obstacles may be (Eph. 3:16-21).

When in the place of blessing, there is a going “in” (communion) and “out” (for service) that is of Him. John 10:9: “in and out, and find pasture.”

Psalm 122

In Psalm 122 we find the end of the journey set before us. It is the house of the Lord in Jerusalem - the city that the Lord had chosen to place His name there, where was His sanctuary (Psalm 78:67-69).

There is companionship too in this journey. When we were led in true exercise by the Spirit of God, we found others exercised by the Spirit desirous also to go on in the same path of faith.

(vs. 1) "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD." Then faith looks off to the time when one's feet will stand in Jerusalem.

(vs. 2) "Our feet shall stand within Thy gates, O Jerusalem." This is followed by meditation as to what is to be found there.

(vs 3) "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together."

(vs 4) "Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD."

When building the wall, Nehemiah said, "The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall" (Neh. 4:19) Those were remnant days-the beginning of a recovery from what carelessness and disobedience had brought in. See 2 Chron. 36:14.

Faith sees Jerusalem "compact together," when in reality it lay in ruins at the time when the journey began; but the energy of faith could change all this. "Compact together" makes one think of what we have in the New Testament, "gathered together" and "fitly joined together and compacted" (Eph. 4:16), the result of the unity and operation of the Spirit of God in producing the unity (Eph. 4:3), which is far beyond anything that man can bring about.

Another thing: it is not simply where the feeble remnant was going, but "whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord"! Faith takes in the whole of Israel, though the greater part were long since lost among the nations. Faith embraces the whole, and so now the Lord would not have us stop short of the whole body of Christ, the Church. Our faith must realize that anything short of this is sectarian and stops short of what is outlined for us in the path of faith according to the scripture (Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:13).

"Unto the testimony of Israel." This brings before us the Ark of God which contained the tables of the law, which was spoken of as the dwelling place of the Lord God. It was also the true gathering center for all Israel (1 Chron. 13:6; 23:25). This should bring before us the One who is now the true Center of the Church – the One of whom it could truly be said, "Thy law have I hid in my heart." In such a place one is in the position where thanks can be given unto the Lord—"To give thanks unto the name of the LORD." This is what He desires, as we shall see as we proceed with these Songs of Degrees.

(vs 5) “For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.” The thrones of the house of David was the place where justice was administered. Absalom sought craftily to usurp the throne on the plea that justice was not being done. He declared that failure had come in; but, though there was failure present, yet it was not as extensive as he sought to make out. This world has yet to wait for the “King” to “reign in righteousness” (Isa. 32:1). He was here once, but was rejected (Luke 19:41-44). The setting aside of David was not allowed, and Absalom lost his life in attempting to do so.

Is it not striking that the Lord, when speaking of the Church which was yet to be established, gives it this character – the place of justice, because He is in the midst (Matt. 18:15-20)? How many times the enemy has sought to set this truth aside on some such plea as Absalom’s!

The true effect of the unity that is of the Spirit is the exercise that peace might be there. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” Should not the need of collective peace exercise our hearts now? How often has individual responsibility been unduly pressed with sad results. The same one that could speak of conferring “not with flesh and blood,” afterward speaks of going to see Peter and abiding with him fifteen days, and again going up and communicating privately to them of reputation, lest by any means he had run or should run in vain (Gal. 1-2).

(vs. 8) “For my brethren and companions’ sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee.” The one who has been voicing these godly exercises has now learned to speak of those whom he has found to have like precious faith as himself, as his brethren. A relationship has been formed by the Spirit of God with these and God’s chosen center, and its peace is their one consuming thought and objective.

Psalm 123

Having set the end of the journey before us, there is a going back to other aspects of the journey. I believe in this series of Psalms we have the end set before us three times, and a going back and making a new start twice to prepare the heart for the journey. It reminds us of what is said to Elijah – “The journey is too great for thee” – and so it would be for us if we attempted it in our own strength. This Psalm 123 reminds us of the pause in the journey of the returned captives under Ezra (Ezra 8:15-31). He proclaimed a fast by the river Ahava, “That we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.”

When Ezra’s company journeyed back across the deserts, they had no Shechinah cloud to guide them, and no manna by the way; but they had guidance and watchful care. The heavens were not closed to them now (Lev. 26:19; Deut. 28:23). Years before, Solomon in his prayers had besought the Lord for those who would be in this very circumstance (1 Kings 8:33). So they have guidance from the One who “dwest in the heavens.”

(vss. 1-2) “Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens.” Is it not the guidance by the eye spoken of in Psalm 32:8, “I will guide thee with Mine eye”? “Our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that He have mercy upon us.” They will abide His time. Nevertheless, they feel the contempt of those that are at ease in Babylon, or satisfied to remain where they were.

(vss. 3-4) “Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly filled with contempt. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.” They are characterized as “proud” – those who scorn the path of faith – and is it not ever thus? “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God” (Psa. 10:4). The “pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16). Undetected and unjudged pride has wrought havoc among the people of God.

Psalm 124

In Psalm 124 there is an answer to the faith mentioned in the previous Psalm. The dangers that have been passed bring the realization of the deliverance of the Lord-that He is on the side of His people.

(vss. 1-3) "If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say; If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us: Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us."

(vv. 4-5) They had escaped the overflowing scourge of waters sent out by their enemies which the Lord held back This should bring before us the Lord Jesus Christ whom the waters overflowed for our sakes. There were two different sources from which the waters came that overflowed Him. "All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over Me" (Psalm 42:7) – the wrath of God's judgment as to the sins He bore that we might never come into or under them. In Psalm 69 it is the waters of hatred against Him from the heart of man as led on by Satan (Rev. 12:15-16). We can feel something of the latter in fellowship with His sufferings, or it may be in His government He may allow us to taste of this hatred on account of our ways in order to bring us back to the point of our departure.

(vs. 7) "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped." How came they to be in this snare? We learn elsewhere that it was on account of their failure to heed the Word of God, and their disobedience; He allowed them to go into captivity. In 1 Timothy we read of those who fall into snares; one is a religious snare, and the other is a worldly snare. In 2 Tim. 2:24-26 we have instructions for recovery out of the snare of the devil-those who are taken captive by him at his will; when out of communion a path is pursued in self-will, and we come under the power of the enemy.

(vs. 8) "Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth." There is no looking for worldly help now. The world has its organizations of various kinds for the help of its own. The more simple and dependent we are, the less we know of these. But we taste of that grace and mercy ministered to us from on high, and we also learn of the practical side of those bonds of Christ which unite us together in Him.

Psalm 125

(vs. 1) “They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever.” Their confidence in the Lord’s care over His own is based upon the position that Zion has in His thoughts and purposes.

He chose mount Zion when all had failed. “And He built His sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which He had founded forever” (Psa. 78:69 J.N.D). His care over them is based on His purposes concerning them collectively. It seems that the tendency of the heart is to give up collective testimony when discouraged, and to feel that the promises concerning the individual path alone abides. But the Scriptures do mark out a collective path for faith (2 Tim. 2:22).

(vs. 3) “For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous.” This is encouraging; as another has said, “It is of measured duration as well as measured severity.” And those days are to be shortened for the sake of the elect of Israel in the future (Matt. 24:22). Those of this dispensation have similar promises (1 Cor. 10:13).

(vs. 5) “As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity.” The “crooked ways” are really apostasy. In the future it will mean following the antichrist.

(vs. 5) “But peace shall be upon Israel.” Oh, how the collective portion is here emphasized! They realize that Jehovah will restore and bless them as a nation. From the very beginning, after bringing them through the Red Sea, the desire of Jehovah was expressed to plant them in the mountain of His inheritance, “in the place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in” (Exod. 15:17). In this present dispensation, it is not a geographical center; but “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).

“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father” (John 4:21). “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” John 4:23-24).

Psalm 126

(vs. 1) “When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.” Jehovah turning again the captivity was like a dream; humanly speaking, there was no hope; but now that their feet were turned in the right direction, there was rejoicing and singing.

(vs. 2) “Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing.” When they were in Babylon, they had no song; they could not sing Zion’s songs of victory while they were captives of their enemies. Is it not ever so? When in the wrong path, the joy is gone; there is no rejoicing or singing. When such is the case, the tendency of the heart is to blame circumstances or persons for the lack of joy. The joy can only return when the heart is poured out to the Lord in self-judgment and not in self-vindication. We miss the path first in spirit; later the feet carry us in a wrong course. In this Psalm the joy is such that even the heathen discern it and say, “The LORD hath done great things for them.”

(vs. 3-4) “The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south.” There seems to be a realization in these last two verses of the Lord’s care over them when it was not appreciated. In Isaiah 63:9 it is said, “In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old.” There is the assuring comfort to the mourning ones in their trials and persecutions, as is brought out in the following verse:

(vs. 5) “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy”

(vs. 6) “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

It is very noticeable how it changes from the plural “they” of verse 5 to the singular in verse 6. This last verse is very beautiful in that it describes what the Lord passed through as He went about endeavoring to reach their hearts and consciences.

He was here as the Sower and wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41); but He is coming again, bringing His sheaves with Him. The Psalmist no doubt was thinking of His gathering back all Israel. But Isa. 49:5 shows that there would be a time in which Israel would not be gathered, due to their rejection of Him; and the light would go forth to the Gentiles, and His salvation to the end of the earth. So when He comes to Israel in the coming day of the Lord, He will have the heavenly sheaves with Him—those He has previously caught up to be with Himself (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Then, later, He will be revealed from heaven, and will come to be glorified in His saints (2 Thess. 1:7-10); after that, Israel shall be gathered back (Isa. 49:5-23).

Psalm 127

The instruction given in this Psalm, entitled, “A Song of Degrees of or for Solomon,” is most striking.

(vs. 1) “Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” What house had more divine instructions as to it, and more preparations for its building, than the temple which Solomon built? We read of David’s plan which he had received by the Spirit (1 Chron. 28:11-12), which he gave to Solomon, and of the material which he had prepared for it, of which he says, “The LORD made me understand in writing by His hand upon me.” It reminds us of what was said to Moses as to the tabernacle, “See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.”

Do not we learn from this that the pattern and all the material were prepared under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that though Solomon was a chosen vessel to build the house, yet it was possible for self to enter in and the building not be acceptable to the Lord? In the chapter mentioned in 1 Chronicles, he is told to serve the God of his father with a perfect heart and with a willing mind, for the Lord searched all the hearts and understood all thoughts. This should be a warning for those who would attempt to overturn existing companies and make them over. All such attempts will be in vain if there is no subjection to His Word as a whole—not merely taking up some part of it. It is well to bear in mind the Lord’s answer to Satan in Matt. 4:7, “It is written again.” What bearing does some other portion of His Word have on the proposition which has been broached? “There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand” (Pro. 19:21).

Solomon in his later years departed from the Lord, as we learn in 1 Kings 11, and had to learn from the Lord that the kingdom was to be divided; his wives turned his heart away after other gods. He introduced afresh into Israel that which ended in the judgment of God in the removing of Israel from the land of promise and scattering them among the nations. This brought about the destruction of this very house. In prayer at its dedication, Solomon referred to Deuteronomy 12, and claimed the promise, “My name shall be there.” We learn from 2 Chron. 36:19 that the Chaldeans “burnt the house of God” to fulfill the word of the Lord at the mouth of Jeremiah, which was the sad result of departure from the Lord.

One can understand how important it would be to have this Psalm inserted here for the returning captives with visions and thoughts of the house and the city that should be built for the Lord.

(vs. 2) “It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so He giveth His beloved sleep.”

“For so He giveth His beloved sleep” is in contrast to the worry of man over his projects when things are not going to suit him.

Doubtless, too, this Psalm will have its place with the awakened remnant in a future day when they realize that the house that was built by the nation in unbelief was not of Him and was destroyed (Psalm 74:5-8). The temple which Psalm 74 mentions as being destroyed, seems to have been accomplished by the treachery of some of those within working with the enemy from without. There is a temple yet to be built which will be in accordance with the instruction of His Word (Eze. 40:44).

If the principles of Psalm 127 had been heeded by the builders in Christendom, both great and small, there would not be the confusion that exists today. Has there not been much use of the “untempered mortar” (Ezek. 13:10-16)?

The Apostle Paul in Acts 20:29-30 says, “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” There are two characters of builders here. The “wolves” have just a mere profession; they really have no part or lot in the matter. Then there are those who are really children of God, but the Lord is not their true Object—they are not true shepherds. Their own interests come first, and their desire is to build up a following. Jude 12 and 13 tells us something of some of these builders.

In 1 Corinthians 3 we learn of the material that some of these builders introduced into the house; material which, while it makes a great showing here, would not stand the test of that day when all is reviewed by the Lord.

In 2 Timothy 2 we learn something of the results of these builders. A “great house” has been built. It is no doubt much larger than the foundation which the “wise master builder had laid.” The great house contains vessels of various materials – some to honor and some to dishonor. That which is called the house of God in 1 Tim. 3:15, is now likened to a “great house” (2 Tim. 2:20). A man is told to purge himself from the vessels of dishonor and he “shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.” He is told to “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22).

In 1 Corinthians 3 we have the “wise master builder” who has laid the foundation. Then we have the exhortations to the builders; every man is to take heed how he builds. The good builder will take heed to the foundation that has been laid and also to the material that he uses. The bad workman will have his own interests before him and will introduce false materials, evidently to make a great showing in the eyes of man; but these materials will not stand the test of the fire in that day (1 Cor. 3:12-15). The Lord has given us how every man’s work shall be tested in that day in order that it might search and exercise our hearts now; and it is very searching to realize that in that day all of that which we may have thought commendable will be burned up, though we ourselves may be saved, yet so as by fire. There may be a mixture in our lives—some things done for Him which will be of the nature of gold, silver, and precious stones, which will stand the test, and some things in which self has entered in and will not stand the test. The Lord alone will be the Judge of what the proportions really are in our lives.

Then there is a “corrupt” workman whose sole interest is to corrupt or defile the temple of God. Such will be destroyed; no doubt such answer to the “wolves” of Acts 20:29 and Jude 10, 11.

In 1 Cor. 10:21 we read of the "Lord's Table" and the "table of demons." Here we have the Apostle contrasting that which the Spirit of God set up, with the false worship of the heathen - that which man, led on by Satan, set up before Christianity appeared. This brings before us something which is almost entirely overlooked in Christendom; i.e., the identification of the worshiper with the table at which he partakes. The Apostle shows this principle had been true of Israel of old by their being partakers of the altar at which they ate. But the Apostle is not here speaking of the tables set up by the man speaking perverse things, or the bad workman of 1 Corinthians 3. Neither is he referring to those he mentions in 1 Tim. 1:19, 20, who have overthrown faith and a good conscience. In the days of the apostles the bad workmen were not permitted to go this far in their mixture of good and bad workmanship. This was spoken of as that which was to come afterward.

Could anyone dare to say that this mixture of bad and good which could not be classed as the table of demons must be the table of the Lord? Why then the call to purge oneself from the vessels of dishonor? Do we not have here that which the bad workman introduces to make the great house which ends in Babylon? In Revelation 18, Babylon is announced as becoming the habitation of devils. God's people are exhorted to come out of her and not be partaker of her sins. Historically, the fall of Babylon takes place after the true Church has been translated, so it would seem that none of His people of this dispensation would be in her at that time. It may possibly be that in the time of the tribulation, some of the remnant may have been attracted by her false pretensions and gone in only to find out her true character later. The exhortation then would be to God's people throughout the ages, so that whenever the Babylonish traits were discerned, there should be a coming out of her. This would be for us when the state has assumed the great house character of 2 Tim. 2:20, but for the remnant of the future day in Israel, it will be whenever those Babylonish traits are manifested and especially when she publicly endorses the antichrist and his idolatry (2 Thess. 2:8-12).

In Laodicea the church is filled with pride at its human institutions, but is characterized as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." It has lost the sense of what the Lord values. It is not called upon as a body to repent; but His own who are there, whom He loves, He rebukes and chastens. Why? Is it not that they may hear the voice of the One who is outside but who is knocking at the door of the heart of the individual? What an appeal: "If any man hear My voice." His desire is to have communion with every one of His own. What would be the result of individuals hearing His voice and supping with Him? Would not this very fact unite all together around Himself?

From the above, we see that the Lord expects His own to have discernment as to being in a false position. Perhaps He may have to rebuke or chasten us in order for us to see it, especially so when our eyes are upon self, man, or some other object than Himself.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, often called the book of contrasts, we have the new position of those who are the Lord's, contrasted with what had formerly been their portion before Christ came. Now, owing to His rejection, such ground is set aside by Him, as Shiloh of old had been. These contrasts lead up to the last chapter, where the Lord is seen as gone forth outside the camp. Evidently this is an allusion to what was done in Exodus 33 when Moses caused the tabernacle to be set up outside the camp on account of idolatry being introduced there. Here in Hebrews the Jews are looked at as having introduced human traditions which ended in rejecting the Lord when

He came to His own (John 1:11). He is looked upon as gone outside (Heb. 13:12-13). Are we not to learn from this that that which man introduces, corrupts that which had been set up originally by the Lord, so that when there is no power within to deal with it, it finally becomes necessary to leave it and go forth unto Him outside the camp where He is?

At Corinth the Apostle has to tell them that they are carnal-that they were unable to discern the deceitful workers and the false apostles from the true. In 2 Cor. 10:3-5 we have the secret of discernment; namely, the casting down of reasonings and then bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. How careful it should make one in what he may feel led to put forth, that it may not be simply something of the restless spirit of man within – using untempered mortar. Long ago one wrote, “Every Christian, however simple, can watch the spirit in which friends hold and set out their views” (G.V.W.).

The latter part of Psalm 127 speaks of millennial blessing, and the Scriptures abound in the promised blessings for that day. They flow out freely when the Lord has been given His rightful place in the midst of His people-when His house has been built in dependence upon Himself.

(vs. 5) “They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.”

This reminds us of Rev. 21:24 (JND): “And the nations shall walk by its light; and the kings of the earth bring their glory to it.”

Also of the promise to Philadelphia: “Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee” (Rev. 3:9).

The prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, after the return of the remnant, had to stir up the people when their interest lagged. They showed them that they could not expect blessing in seeking their own personal things while the Lord’s house stood idle. Our blessings are not earthly, but spiritual; but they flow out from the same One whose desire has ever been to dwell in the midst of His redeemed people (Exod. 15:17; Matt. 18:20).

Psalm 128

Psalm 128 goes on to full millennial blessing.

(vs. 4-5) "Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life."

Is it not striking here, the expression "shall bless thee out of Zion"? He has once more taken up His place in the midst of His people and can bless them out of Zion. Zion speaks of grace in His choosing a place where He could go on with His people when all else had failed (Psalm 78:56-72). The priesthood had failed and also the king of His choice, David (2 Sam. 24:14-25).

Does not the Lord's gracious provision of Matt. 18:20 provide a rallying point at this present time when much failure has come in, as was prophetically foretold in Revelation 2 and 3? There are those who are called upon to be overcomers, such as are brought before us in 2 Tim. 2:22-26 and Heb. 13:11-16.

We have now reached another climax; we have now the house, the city, and millennial blessing. Perhaps it might be asked, What more could be added? But the Lord would prepare the heart more as to Himself personally. So far, we have heard more about the outward things; we have still the Person of the Lord to be brought before us, so we go back and take another beginning.

Psalm 129

This Psalm brings before us the persecutions endured by the godly remnant of a future day. We read much of this time in the Psalms, and the Lord also speaks of it in Matthew 24. The godly remnant of all times will have persecutions (2 Tim. 3:12). Also Phil. 1:29, where we read: "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake."

The natural man can glory in the outward work of the Lord even from a humanitarian or sentimental standpoint; but we learn from the parable of the Sower that though there may be a certain outward joy in the beauty of the Word, unless there is a work within the heart, the profession will be given up when difficulties or persecutions arise. When "buying of the truth" comes in, the natural man will consider the cost too great and give it up.

Psalm 130

Though sufferings for His sake are necessary to prove and make good the work in the soul, yet the Lord would not have us dwell on those things. Our hearts are prone to do this-dwell on what we have endured or given up for Him-but this brings in pride, so He cannot leave us there. He takes us aside here in this Psalm and shows us something of the wretchedness of our own hearts. He does this by allowing the light of His Word to shine upon us. This shining forth of the light of His Word was that which had aroused them no doubt in Psalm 120, but it is more intensified to them here. It reminds us of the brightness of light above the noonday sun which broke forth upon Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:3-9), and the voice that came with it revealing to him that Jesus of Nazareth, whom he despised, was now in glory. All this made him see the utter vanity and worthlessness of his former life and also of the traditions which he was blindly following.

The Lord does not allow the newly aroused soul of the 129th Psalm to remain where he could take credit to himself, but by the light of His Word leads him to self-judgment that he might not go on in his own strength, but that he might in his weakness receive strength from above which the Lord alone can supply. Psalm 130 shows the great depths of exercise through which they had been led.

(vs. 1) "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O LORD." This reminds us somewhat of that which Jonah passed through when he said, "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the depth closed me round about ... I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me forever." It was not, however, until he could say, "Salvation is of the LORD," that deliverance came. See Jonah 2:5, 6, 9.

In our Psalm he is brought to say,

(vs. 3) "If Thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

But he receives the answer which gives him peace:

(vs 4) "But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared."

And this brings in the desire to wait upon the Lord.

(vs. 6) "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning." David no doubt had many experiences in watching for the morning when hunted by king Saul, longing for the morning light to dispel the dangers of the night. So it is beautiful to see his deep exercises for the Lord spoken of as surpassing anything else through which he had passed.

(vs. 7) The true hope of Israel can now be rejoiced in on account of His loving-kindness and plenteous redemption, and is the leading on of the soul in becoming a true worshiper. This is begun here on earth and continues beyond this scene, as is seen in Revelation 5 for the heavenly people, and in Revelation 14 for the earthly people.

Psalm 131

We have here one more experience through which David, though the anointed of the Lord, had to pass before being enabled to carry out the great desire of his heart – one more experience in his training depicted by this Psalm which lasted over a period of several years.

It has been suggested that this little Psalm was the exercise of David's soul when criticized by his elder brother on the occasion of his being sent by his father to the army camp too see how his brethren fared-the very occasion of David's meeting Goliath. He was accused of "pride" and "naughtiness of heart" resulting in the neglect of his duty as that which brought him there. But it was really the father's care over them which sent him there. (1 Sam. 17:17-18.)

(vs. 1) "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." What an exercise for the Lord's anointed to pass through, and has not many a saint endured these same trials from those content with formal things, when exercised about his place or seeking the pathway marked out for faith in this world?

The result of this exercise we get in the next verse:

(vs. 2) "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child." What does weaning speak of? The freeing from the world's influences, and perhaps more, the things of nature. We eventually have to learn as to our individual path and joy in the Lord, that it must not depend upon anyone else-nature's ties or gifted servants. There must be the going on in quietness in one's soul apart from all this. One remembers a remark heard some years ago that the trees planted by the rivers of water are not dependent upon the showers, though they welcome them. One can never take the stand that all one has to do is to follow a certain gifted individual, and all will be right. This is not behaving and quieting oneself as a weaned child. The pathway of the child of God must often be individually between himself and the Lord, such as worship and some decisions which have to be made individually before Him. There are other times, however, in service and in the interpreting of the Scriptures, when it is well to seek godly counsel with others, so as to have a check upon ourselves (Gal. 2:2).

The results of the exercise produced here would be anything but an effected spirit of piety. The experiences passed through have been such that that which is merely on the surface would either be driven inward and so the work deepened in the soul, or else be given up.

The closing expression of this Psalm is very significant:

(vs. 3) "Let Israel hope in the LORD from henceforth and forever." Who could not but say that when Israel shall arrive at the state produced here, they will be ready for the fullest blessing? And can we not say it would be so of us too? These exercises through which David passed made him realize it was only through dependence upon the Lord that the Philistine could be overcome.

Psalm 132

It is nice to see in David's vow recorded here about finding a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob, how he realized that, as much as it meant to Israel and himself, it was the place that Jehovah desired in dwelling amongst His people. It is very noticeable how Jehovah answers in a fuller way than David desired in the prayer, and declared that it was His rest, and here would He dwell, for He had desired it (vs. 14). The blessing also went beyond what had been voiced in the prayer.

The ark in 1 Sam. 4:4 is spoken of: "The ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubim"; but had they really considered who dwelt there, they would never have attempted to bring it into the battle and say as they did, "It may save us out of the hand of our enemies." They were treating it as an idol. How different David's thoughts of it and who dwelt there. Do we not learn from David's exercises why he was called "a man after His own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14)? – the only one who showed such exercises about God's thoughts of dwelling in the midst of His people.

In that first song sung on the banks of the Red Sea (Exod. 15:17-18), just after redemption was accomplished, we have these words: "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in; in the sanctuary, O LORD, which Thy hands have established. The LORD shall reign forever and ever."

Centuries had passed by since the above inspired words had been sung. The people have been brought in and planted, the Lord has taken His place among them. But we read in Psalm 78:56-70: "Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not His testimonies: but turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, He was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men: and delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand." We read the historical account of this in 1 Sam. 4:3-11. "He gave His people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with His inheritance Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And He smote His enemies in the hinder parts: He put them to a perpetual reproach. Moreover He refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: but chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which He loved. And He built His sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which He hath established forever. He chose David also His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds." That was in David's early years.

Some eighty to ninety years had elapsed since the ark had been delivered into captivity. Truly it did not remain in captivity very long. The enemy was glad to get rid of it in a few months, but it had never been returned to its former place in the tabernacle at Shiloh. We learn from the above quotation from the 78th Psalm the reason why. It was neglected in the days of King Saul, as David says in 1 Chronicles 13:3, "We inquired not at it in the days of Saul."

Is it not beautiful to see the spirit that he manifests here? He did not say, "They sought it not," or, "Saul sought it not," but, "We sought it not." He takes his place among the people as having neglected it.

This 132nd Psalm seems to be more about David's exercises than his utterances. Perhaps we might gather from 2 Chron. 6:41-42, Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, that verses 8-10 of Psalm 132 are Solomon's utterances, giving us the exercises of his father concerning the ark.

(vss. 1-5) "Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions: How he swore unto the LORD, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, Until I find out a place for the LORD, a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob."

In these five verses we have David's vow, evidently made after his being anointed as king, but during his rejection before he came into power. We see how this subject consumed him.

In Psalm 69:9 we have the words that David uttered concerning the house: "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up." These words are remembered by the disciples in John 2:17, and applied by them to the Lord when He drove out of the house the defilement that the unbelieving nation had brought into it.

(vs. 6) "Lo, we heard of it as Ephrath." That simple expression should speak volumes to us! What was Ephrath? We learn from a footnote in our J.N.D. Translation that this is the same as Bethlehem-Judah, David's home where his early years had been spent. We say, early, because soon after his anointing he was called into Saul's court to play the harp before him when the evil spirit from God came upon him, after which the evil spirit departed from him. Later, he was home for a brief period, then sent to the camp of the army where he met and slew Goliath. After this mighty victory, we read that Saul would let him go no more to his father's house. Then came Saul's jealousy, and David was compelled to flee from him for several years. When he finally began to reign, we are told that he was thirty years old. So his years spent at Ephrath were early ones, and perhaps we can conclude that David, learned of the state of the ark from his parents who evidently mourned over the condition of things in Israel, and particularly concerning the ark.

(vs. 6) "We found it in the fields of the wood." We also learn from a footnote in J.N.D.'s Translation that this is perhaps a poetical expression for Kirjath-jearim. It was there that David went to get the ark on first attempt to bring it up to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 13:5-6). Evidently then this expression, "the fields of the wood," speaks of its being in a totally neglected state.

It is evident that very few at that time had proper thoughts as to the ark's rightful place amongst them, or how could it have remained so long being separated from the altars and the order of worship brought out in Exodus and Leviticus? It is nice to notice in this respect what is said concerning the arrangement of the courses of the priesthood and of the Levites. It is stated in 1 Chron. 9:22, "Whom David and Samuel the seer did ordain in their set office." Here we have these two, the old prophet and judge, Samuel, and the youthful anointed king meeting together during David's rejection before he came into power, communing over the order of worship. Samuel we know died before David came into power.

Pause and consider the words:

(vs. 7-8) "We will go into His tabernacles: we will worship at His footstool. Arise, O LORD, into Thy rest; Thou, and the ark of Thy strength."

Does not this expression take us back to that in the song of Exodus 15, as to His inheritance and dwelling place?

It would seem that soon after the tabernacle was set up in Shiloh in the days of Joshua, it became neglected. When we read of that dreadful circumstance that arose in Judges 19-21, in the days of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, there had evidently elapsed not more than thirty-five or forty years after its setting up; yet minute instructions had to be given to the men of Benjamin, as to how to find Shiloh. This place should have been familiar to all Israel, for it had been commanded that "Three times a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which He shall choose" (Deut. 16:16).

Let us again pause and consider. Has there been anything analogous to this in the history of Christendom? Has the Lord held His true place among His people? After the days of the apostles, did not the Church lose the sense of this? Did not something take place similar to Josh. 24:31? – "And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that He had done for Israel."

It is very easy to see that in the days of what is known as "the fathers," which were in the second century, departure came in. Not only did the Lord lose His place in the hearts of His people, but they also lost the enjoyment of Him and those exceeding great and precious promises. Soon the fundamental truths became clouded, and darkness settled over all of Christendom. Here and there, there was through His mercy, a remnant preserved who clung to Him with a certain measure of light that was above that of the majority of Christendom. It would seem that what was lost at that time was:

(1) The place that the Lord had in the midst of His people (Matt. 18:20). Very early human arrangements were brought in that denied Him His place, and also substituted human regulations which deprived His people of the liberty of the Spirit of God amongst them.

(2) The coming of the Lord for His own as a present hope for the Church and what consequently followed.

(3) The giving up of the heavenly calling of the Church, which brought in worldliness.

(4) The loss of assurance of eternal security of the believer. "Therefore being justified by faith" was given up, and that which the Church was warned of in Galatians was substituted: "Justified by the law" (chap. 5:4).

(5) The Word of God was taken from believers and placed in the hands of the clergy, with a resulting darkness.

What recovery has there been? We all know and can thank God for that which was recovered at the time of the Reformation when the Lord raised up certain instruments such as Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and others. The Scriptures were translated into the tongue that the common people could

read, and the truth of “justification by faith” was proclaimed. But the Spirit of God was still hindered by human arrangements, though not as seriously as before. The ministry of the Word and the arrangement of worship were still largely in the hands of the clergy. We hear nothing of the heavenly calling of the Church, nor do we have the hope of the coming of the Lord to take His own out of this scene.

Let us return to our Psalm 132 and see how the Lord’s place amongst His own is emphasized. We have mentioned the call to the Lord to enter into His rest, in verse 8; but is not the answer to it in verses 13, 14 full of significance for us? Have we ears to hear it?

(vss.13-14) “For the LORD hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest forever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.”

Then there is the abundance of blessing to be poured out in verses 15-18, far beyond what David had requested. The human heart cannot rise up to the fullness of that which the Lord is pleased to dispense to His people:

(vss. 15-17) “I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for Mine anointed.”

All this is promised in the giving of the Lord His true place. This no doubt will be very precious to the remnant of Israel in that day when, after the mourning produced by recognition of having rejected the Messiah, they will find and revel in the plenteous redemption mentioned in Psalm 130. Abundance of blessing will flow out of giving Him His true place. They will no longer be cast off, but will be cleansed of the filthy garments (Zech. 3), and clothed with salvation. The promises long considered dead are seen to bud when “My servant, the Branch” is brought forth.

This blessing continues to the end of the series of the Songs of Degrees. There is now no going back, but praises ascending to the Lord on high.

Psalm 133

(vss. 1-3) “Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”

This beautiful little Psalm from its setting here is but the natural outflow of the activity of the Spirit of God now untrammelled and unhindered, the Lord having been given His rightful place.

Sometimes the condition of things as mentioned in this Psalm are spoken of as something to be attained by builders unheeding the exhortations of Psalm 127. If these things are not true, does it not call for repentance – doing the first works and getting back to first love? No doubt, in its future application, it refers to Israel as mentioned in Ezekiel 37, brought forth from the dust amongst the nations. Then the two sticks, Judah and Joseph, will become one in the hand, and the King shall be to them all.

To give it a typical application, is not this the “unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3) and connected with chapter 2 where God is looked at as the Builder of the house? (Ephesians 3 is a parenthesis.)

“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone: In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:20-22).

What a unity, brought about by the Holy Spirit! But it can only be kept in the uniting bond of peace, by heeding the exhortations given us by “the prisoner of the Lord.” “I therefore beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2-3).

It is well to remember another exhortation: “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1 Cor. 14:33). What is needed is: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” Gal. (5:22-23).

Is not this what we find in our Psalm in the description of the anointing oil poured upon Aaron? Would it not be typical of our Great High Priest from whose ways ever arose that precious odor of the ointment which caused the heavens to open and say, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”?

(vs. 2) “That ran down upon the beard”; men wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth! “That went down to the skirts of his garments.”

Peter tells us He “went about doing good”; and is not He the only One who fits the description in Psalm 1 as that “Blessed” One?

Aaron’s sons were also anointed with him (Exod. 29:41). We have received an anointing too – 1 John 2:20 and 27: “Ye have an unction from the Holy One” – “The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you,” etc. Also 2 Cor. 1:21-22: “Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who also hath sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” We are to “show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” We are subjects too of the ministry of Christ to this end: “That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:26-27).

In our Psalm 133 we have then, this fragrance going up from those who have sought Him and given Him His true place, and their lives corresponded to the step which they had taken. The Lord’s answer to this was blessing coming down.

(vs. 3) “As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”

Here we have a lofty mountain with its head reaching up into the heavens and bringing down the blessings from above. When the Lord Jesus was here on earth He spoke of Himself as the “Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13); also “the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18).

“Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). This is the same position where Christ is as brought out in verse 20: “Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.” Again, in Eph. 2:6: “And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Psalm 134

Psalm 134 is the last Psalm of this series. We see Israel now in their true place as worshipers and called upon to bless the Lord:

(vss. 1-2) “Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.”

(vs. 3) “The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion”; that is His earthly dwelling place among His people.

In verse 1 there seems to be special significance attached to the servants “standing by night in the house of the LORD.” Is this the recognition of those who had praises for Him ere the “Son of righteousness” arose “with healing in His wings”?

During the night season alluded to in 2 Peter, “before the day dawn,” would include the “Simeons” and “Annas” of Luke 2 and those of the remnant in Rev. 7:14-15 – those who came out of the great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Israel will find in that day also a heavenly leadership in the praises to the Lord as shown by the heavenly company of Rev. 5:9: “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”

The returned remnant are now in the place of being worshipers:

(vs. 3) “The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.”

This last verse of Psalm 134 shows that the blessings for Israel, and in fact all the earth, will flow out of Zion from the sanctuary where He dwells.

In this present time or interval of His dealings with the Church, all blessings should be expected to flow out to His people both in ministry and the gospel, as in Acts 4:31-34 where it was very manifestly God’s center here below. We cannot hope to duplicate that except in principle only, for great failure has come in. Is it not a principle in Scripture that where great failure has come in, the Lord does not restore to its original place, but does restore in a measure so that faith can go on in a simple dependent way before Him?

Psalm 135 and 136

The next two Psalms, 135 and 136, seem to be attached to this series, as has already been observed by others. Psalm 135 would give us the praises that ascend from those standing in the courts of the Lord. The last verse is specially significant:

(vs. 21) "Blessed be the LORD out of Zion, which dwelleth at Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD" blessing from the Lord in the divine center.

In Psalm 136 we have a continuance, but more of His mercies being recounted, as we have often sung together: "Desert ways rehearsed above."

Application to the Church's History

Now in summing up the typical application of Psalms 133 and 134, have we anything that answers to the Church's history? We have already mentioned a certain recovery at the Reformation, but has there been anything since? That there is much truth current among evangelical Christendom that was not taught at the time of the Reformation, is well known: the coming of the Lord for the Church, taking her out before He comes to reign; the heavenly calling of the Church; the eternal security of the believer emphasized in a way that has not been since the days of the apostles; the truth as to the one body of Christ – all believers being members of this one body.

Were these truths brought out at a certain time, or has there been a gradual bringing of them out? If a search is made (and I believe that the Lord would have us search them out), we would find that they were brought out about a hundred years ago when there was a remarkable movement of the Spirit of God.

At first there was a searching of the Scriptures as to prophecy, and this led to other searchings of the Word. Finally, after much exercise, a group of men found that they were privileged to meet together in the name of the Lord alone, which they did in much weakness and dependence. This was followed by the separating effect of the Word in their lives, answering to the anointing oil mentioned above. The result was that the Lord blessed them in the bringing out of long lost but hidden truths concerning Christ and the Church, answering to the "dew of Hermon."

The children of God were delivered from the many burdens of the law, and were set free to enjoy their privileges as the children of God. There was a definite reproach to going on simply in this way, apart from all the organizations as brought out in Hebrews 13:13: "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach." The Lord has made up for all this in the joy of His approval, not only in the recovery of the precious truths already mentioned, but also in the unity and fellowship of the Spirit.

But even with all this, there could be no such thing as a perfect company of Christians. Acts 20:28-35 is a solemn warning as to what we should be on our guard against, and this very scripture shows that the Church will never be free from it. May there be the crying to the Lord on the part of all, that we be neither those who speak the perverse things, or the followers of those that do.

There is much confusion resulting from the speakers of perverse things, but "The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way" (Psa. 25:9). "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant" (Psa. 25:14).

If Acts 20:30 is true as to distracting and confusing elements coming in, 2 Timothy 2:22 also remains true: "Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." It still remains true, "There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen: the lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it" (Job 28:7-8).

Under plea of escaping the confusion that has come in, or of being able to help those still in the camp, some have sought to introduce into the camp the precious truths recovered to the saints in the going forth unto Him.

In Matthew 9:16 we have the Lord's warning: "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment; for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse." "Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved" (Matt. 5:17). Eloquent men can put a polish on these truths that may be pleasing to many an ear, but at the same time they neutralize them.

This is not said in a spirit of criticism, for every man is responsible to walk before the Lord according to the light he has. There are many sincere men going on in this way, and we can be thankful that Christ is preached (Phil. 1:18). Where this is the case there will be a lacking in depth of the truth, but God is sovereign and will bless His Word; but if there is a resisting of the truth as to shunning the reproach, or reasoning coming in, there will be a lack of real spiritual power and finally a giving up of the very truths once held and enjoyed. There will be for a time an intellectual grasp of divine things, but 1 Corinthians 13:2 says, "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." "And this is love, that we walk after His commandments.... That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it" (2 John 1:6). I believe we can say that the enjoyment of that love is the fruit of communion. "But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him" (1 John 2:5). Love is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

Scripture assures us of only one place where the truth can be preserved: "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground [base] of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15) – that which the Lord spoke of in Matt. 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

In Psalm 122 there is a reference to the thrones of judgment or justice. This is alluded to in the context preceding the well-known verse of Matt. 18:20. (See verses 15-20.) This principle is also referred to in 1 Cor. 14:29: "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge"; also 1 Cor. 5:12-13: "For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." Then again, in chapter 6:1-6.

Where is there any stay for the truth when popular men take these truths and polish them up and organize a congregation to support them in the giving of it out? Is there anything of "the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge"? Is the Lord the Center of such a gathering? Is this the way He gathers to Himself? Is the Spirit of God free to use whomsoever He will?

What does "follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" mean? What is a pure heart in this sense? Is it not simply walking in the path of faith in simple dependence upon the Lord, without reasoning as to the consequences as to one's usefulness or path of service? How often have there been reasoning and fears that the path is too narrow for one's field of service.

“Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:13).

Are we not to gather from the above-mentioned scriptures that the Lord has a path marked out for faith, and that there will be those walking in it in however much weakness?

“Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” (Rev. 3:11).

If the above principles we have been considering in our meditations on the path of ascent in these Psalms are true, then we should be able to go on in fellowship with those whose hearts have been exercised in a similar manner.

“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.” (Psa. 122:1). There He has said, “I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread” (Psa. 132:15).

“We will go into His tabernacles: we will worship at His footstool” (Psa. 132:7).

“The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:21, 23, 24).

If we have been attracted by the truth, let us not forget the spirit that goes with it which is necessary for suitable worship, and that our feet will continue in the path marked out for faith.

This reminds us of the time in John 1 when John Baptist stood and two of his disciples: “And looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto Him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest Thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day: for it was about the tenth hour” (John 1:36-39).

It was in a secret and unnamed, place, away from the multitude; and the invitation is still held forth to this day, Come and see. He would have us continue “the day” with Him – the remainder of the time we are left here.

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