

Going Up to Zion

by Art Katz

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the Hebraic mindset, Zion, and the pilgrim's journey to restore Israel's distinction and relationship with God.

Duration: 1:13:00

Scripture: Psalm 2:6, Psalm 68:8, Psalm 80:3, Psalm 80:19, Psalm 94:1, Psalm 102:13, Psalm 121:4

Topics: "Zion"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of the presence of God in the worship of Israel. The people of Israel expected and called for a powerful manifestation of God during their observances. However, over time, they lost the true sense of God's presence and their worship became perfunctory. The speaker highlights the need for a renewal of the understanding that God is the central actor in their worship and in all of reality. He also emphasizes the importance of the congregation in experiencing and witnessing to the reality of God's presence.

Transcript

So this is an attempt to draw from a source here that will give us something of the mentality the Hebraic tent of Shem the intrinsic elements that compose the distinctive faith of Israel lost to present day Jewry but will be restored and will be a millennial glory when it shall be fulfilled at the end of the age. So I'm really so impressed with the way this scholar in his study of the Psalms has culled out some of the distinctive elements that constitute the Hebraic mindset or the Hebraic spirit. And so the word Hebraic is much more than just a designation of something generic or racial.

It's a spiritual reality. It's ultimate spiritual reality. And it was once Israel's distinction and needs again to be ours and has been lost to us.

So Lord grant grace as we review this and bring to our attention what you will from this. He talks about finding in the Old Testament Psalms something of this distinctive that celebrates the God of Israel and that Yahweh Shabbatot the Lord of hosts is present in the sanctuary in Jerusalem. Zion is the place of God's presence.

Zion is a mystery word. I don't even know that it's Hebrew. It's interesting that it's located in the Jebusite stronghold.

It was the last stronghold of the enemies of Israel. All that was Canaanite, all that was pagan was caught up in this final stronghold that mocked and dared anyone to take it. I forgot the name of the general who volunteered to go up and to take it and became the seat of David's reign the city of David, the hill of Zion.

But the fact that it was a Canaanite stronghold indicates the powers of darkness celebrating that place above any other and thinking themselves indomitable and give me another word undefeatable so that it was taken by a man whose name I've forgotten one of the generals whose name has to do with the father satisfying the father that is altogether significant Anybody know the name of that general? Abner Is it Abner? Ab is father, probably glorifying the father as the incentive to go against great odds and yet to succeed so it's interesting that C.

Austin Sparks who is a source of great blessing to us has written a booklet on Zion something in the mystery of Zion that completely excludes any reference to the things that we're going to set forth today and tries to understand that mystery word in the context of a kind of spiritualized faith removed from its Hebraic roots well, he's an Englishman after all and that may well explain it but what he writes is significant but I think that the ultimate understanding of the mystery of Zion has got to go back to its very origin and what it meant to Israel as the very center of its faith so there was an annual pilgrimage to Zion three great feasts that required God's people to go up anyone who's gone to Jerusalem knows it's a going up and it's a tortuous going up it's not an easy ascent it's

quite a demand both physically and spiritually and yet it was the heart of their relationship with the Lord whose presence they expected to find at Zion and would make their whole pilgrimage worthwhile he writes it is not the imminent holiness or the magic saturation with the numinous that these prayerful people seek it's not some magical pseudo-spiritual something that flesh can conjure they enter into a meeting with the majestic person of Yahweh the mystery of the city of God is this wonderful occasion Yahweh is in the midst of her Psalm 46 verse 5 therefore Zion is a fountain of life Psalm 36 verse 9 he's deriving all of his understanding from what is deposited in the Psalms in the celebration of Zion as the place where Israel meets with her God of course if you meet with your God

that's the fountain of life it's the refreshing that you go back to the place where you were and carry that blessing and encouragement and renewing with you the sanctuary lies in an eternal radiance here shalom, peace reigns according to the fullness of the word under the shadow of the wings of Yahweh Yahweh Y-A-W-E-A-E-H is an optional pronunciation of something that no one knows for sure how the famous tetragramaton the four consonants Yod-Heh-Vov-Heh should be pronounced could be Jehovah, Yahweh and other optional renderings but I like that Yahweh seems very much to touch the sense of that name Yahweh is present when the ark is brought through the gates of the sanctuary remembrance is made of the first historical events it was David who liberated the ark from its emergency quarters and

brought it to Jerusalem reminiscences of the late great central sanctuary of pre-davidic times of Shiloh are heard in the cultic name Yahweh Shabbatot the Lord sometimes they will not say Yahweh or pronounce the name they'll say Adonai, the Lord Shabbatot, the captain of the host is present when the ark is brought up thus the entry of the ark recalls the basic event that brings home to the present the cultic legend of Jerusalem that is attached to the shrine of the ark which Yahweh chose as his habitation and as his resting place this basic event is the foundation and the center of the present worship so there's a whole history and a tradition of the bringing up of the ark of the Lord which is the presence of God by David into Jerusalem remember how he danced and how he scandalized his

wife that his behavior was undignified as a king so in coming up to Zion for these pilgrimages there's a rehearsal of all that preceded there's a reacquaintance with the history of Israel itself going even through its pilgrim wanderings in the wilderness and out of bondage the Lord opening the way through the Red Sea and the law at Zion and then establishing his habitation in Zion they have to enter there was something called the gates of righteousness in Hebrew Shari Sadak the word Sadak is righteous and the ark itself is taken out and paraded and brought through again on these great and solemn occasions who may ascend the hill of the Lord who may stand in his holy place these are the Psalms that are read as the ark of God is lifted up and moved in the sight of all of the pilgrim

worshippers who have come up to Zion to be restored in their relationship with the Lord whose presence is actually to be found there where he dwells that is his habitation for us that's poetry for them it was literal fact where there's no understanding of the sacrifice required except the incentive that in the going up they would be touched again and united again with the sense of their God who dwells in this particular place we know he's omnipresent and yet at the same time there is a particular sense of himself reserved for those who will make the pilgrimage and in making the pilgrimage they are renewed in their historic understanding of what the ark itself represents and where God has been pleased to deposit it and this is central to the whole identity of Israel as Israel and that this

God is a God of justice and righteousness and worship in the Old Testament is not a magical renewal no dramatically engineered performance but an encounter with the Lord of all of life isn't that precious he's making sure that we don't misconstrue this as if this is some theatrical thing that Jews are themselves performing to give them a high which would be more descriptive of our charismatic experience no this is an authentic, solemn God-ordained encounter with him who is the God of all of life he who enters the place of the presence of Yahweh confronts the Lord of all life and we need that renewal of who the Lord is and in that sacred and solemn place or by process of erosion and attrition just by the forces in the world that impinge against the faith and threaten it God would

necessarily become trivialized if there's not a place of meeting a place of union a place where he waits to be found again as the Lord of life and who is the Lord of justice and righteousness holiness God will necessarily become diminished in our own understanding and comprehension and celebration so that he himself becomes trivialized if he becomes trivialized in those who purport to believe and are sincere in their belief what shall we hope for in the world so to maintain an acute sense of God as God is central to the whole of Israel's celebration of God this isn't just ceremony, this isn't just religious play this is a significant renewal for the world's sake and for the nation's sake that those who are brought again into contact with the life of God at Zion will make him known as he

in fact is and not as men think him to be would to God that we have something like this correspondingly in our Christian life and maybe for the want of it God in fact is trivialized in our Christianity we need to wince every Easter with the Easter eggs and the bunnies and the Christmas trees and all the kinds of things that are threatening to swallow up this sense of God given at Zion to this people as the very heart and the distinctive of their life into which we who are far off without God and without hope in the world have been brought we who are in the pagan world and reveling in orgies and pagan celebrations and sacrifices through beasts have been brought nigh by the blood of Messiah think on that into the commonwealth of Israel it's not just a political structure into this framework

of understanding and of reality itself in fact I would not exaggerate to say this is reality this is the touchstone this is the nexus of very reality itself for reality is God and any deviation from him is unreality so

here's a place of renewing and here's a place into which those who are far off and without God have been invited and brought by the blood of their Messiah the pathetic and unhappy thing is that those who are far off and have been brought nigh have themselves lost the sense of that privilege that distinction and that grace it's a mystery Paul said now being revealed that the Gentiles shall have be one with Israel in the household of God and be made one new man it's a remarkable framework but if we don't appreciate that and that appreciation needs to be kindled anew or it

will diminish and diminish to the point that we forget that we were brought into an already existing body not all Israel rejected Messiah there were faithful ones who expected him and received him as being the very fulfillment of their faith and continued and kept that messianic and biblical faith alive into which you were brought into an existing body so the church has lost that sense maybe it's another habit and has become an autonomous and independent entity without any recognition of that connectedness and for which reason it itself has suffered and suffered great loss I believe that more than any other factor this will explain why the church in Japan is a trifle less than 1% after generations of missionary effort constitute the church in Japan you'll not find a congregation as a rule

of over 30 people and it's dormant, stultifying fixed, it has a certain limitation because all it is is the replication of what was brought to it by western missionaries who themselves did not have this consciousness I have a book called The White Man's Gospel written by an Indian Christian he's one of the leaders of the work to the Indians with the Christian Missionary Alliance, he spoke here at one time and his book repeats what he shared with us, he said the reason that after a life of involvement with my own Indian people, seeing how difficult it is to win them to the gospel and those that are our one often fall away so quickly, very few retain the faith I'm persuaded after all these years to say that the heart of what is wrong is that we have not communicated in the gospel the issue

of Israel and the centrality of the Jew and the faith into which the Gentiles have been brought, they have received a truncated Gentilized version of the gospel that somehow does not enable them to be sustained I don't want to get romantic and fanciful, but we know the propensity of Indians for alcohol, which may be the upward side of the coin that says they have a capacity for spirituality of an uncommon kind, and if that is not met in a significant way they're going to find deviant ways to fulfill it so we're being called back to something that has been neglected and I think that's on time in the domain of the sanctuary the pilgrim is surrounded by the indescribable glory of Zion that is celebrated in hymns and poems like the high heavens in Psalm 78 is the sanctuary built, the

perfection of beauty the joy of all the earth what seems to us to be poetic and fanciful language is just nuts and bolts statements of those who are experiencing something at Zion that is the joy of all the earth they experienced it as a joy for us it has become a kind of fanciful language and poetry, for them it was a graphic description of the reality to be found in the place that God had reserved for himself as the place of his dwelling it is the joy of all the earth Yahweh is in the midst of her and that is the secret and the wonder of the unearthly splendor and inviolability of Zion it's the epicenter of Israel's whole distinction and life and meaning and being so praise and glorification are in the last analysis always applied to Yahweh or Jehovah himself on Zion the festival

congregation pays homage to the presence of God, on him the highest God, the king, the creator and the judge of the world is this honor bestowed we've talked here already that we've lost the sense of God as creator which was alive in their consciousness because there was a rehearsal of the entire faith of Israel and that to the degree that we have lost the sense of God as creator we have lost the sense of God as

king he is king by virtue of being creator he is the lord of what he has created he has the right to govern and rule because it's his creation but if you lose the foundation you lose the rulership and then God himself is diminished so all of these things are revived renewed in the comprehension and the experience of those who make the pilgrimage and come up to Zion that's in the

wisdom of God to require it three times of the year so in powerful descriptions the phenomenon of a consuming fire announces his appearance, lightning and thunder accompanying the radiant advance of God, his face flashes the worshipping congregation prays, shine forth from, expressed in Psalm Psalm 80, 94 they plead, let thy face shine and also the individual prayer calls out, arise awake awaits an overpowering self-manifestation of the God of Israel they're expecting something they call for something, they get something they get an overpowering sense of the God of Israel lest they fall into kind of a religious mentality and continue to perform perfunctory services because they were required, but they lost the sense of the God who is honored by those observances that needs to be renewed by

every going up you can see the spiritual application of this, for them a physical ascent for us a spiritual ascent and of course the pathetic thing is that modern day Jews have lost this entire sense of their own history and the church has not been in the place to remind them maybe again we're repeating ourselves this is what will move them to jealousy that we who were not Jews by birth have a greater sense of the uniqueness of their God and his holiness and his character and his presence and his sense of himself that we know by the spirit seeing that our sins have been forgiven and the blood has washed us that we have an atonement at one with God the Father and we can communicate through that reality that which has been lost to them for the very reason of the forsaking of the salvation

of God and that they would be jealous to consider what they have rejected, Paul says they are the enemies of the gospel they are so blinded in their rejection because of how has it been brought to them I'm just reading the manuscript of a book by David Barron that chronicles something of the horrors that Jews have had to face through the centuries in Christian lands and every Easter season and every plague and every thing for which Jews could be blamed wholesale, I mean wholesale slaughter, entire communities dying at their own end through suicide rather than face the alternative of be baptized or die, they'd rather die than to be baptized into this gentile thing that has been forced upon them at the point of the sword how could that be have anything to do with the God of Israel so we

see in Paul as the apostle who communicates the sense of God who entreats the gentiles I appeal to you, I entreat you never at the point of threat or force there's a gentleness that is characteristic of God that Jews have not seen historically by those who are trying to compel them to the faith at the threat of the loss of their life is that the alternative? we'll take the loss of life, thank you and we'll call that loss of life Kiddush Hashem sanctifying the name that God of our fathers is more sanctified and revered by our suicide wiping out our own children and wives than by submitting to the mob and he just documents that in every nation of England that they wholesale of course it's a trophy to kill Jews and to obtain their possessions so the motivation for enraged mobs who are

nominal Christians who have not the spirit of God is so inflammatory that it recurs again and again and again and the whole history of Israel is steeped in blood and associated with a name that has been so poisoned and corrupted that they're not considered my mother could not speak it, I could not speak it 38 years ago I required a grace from God to call upon the name of the Lord the only way I had ever spoken Jesus was as a curse word and now I'm called to honor and revere that name for there's no other name given on the heaven and earth whereby a man may be saved if God did not give me the grace that

morning on May 26, 1964 I'd not be here now but a grace actually was given to get that name out, so poisoned and corrupted was I by all of this history which I did not know in measure as I

know it now but the sense of it is in the air that Jews breathe and as I say, taking it from their mother's milk so that the name Satan has done a colossal job in so corrupting that name because he knows, if we don't know well enough that there's no other name given whereby a man may be saved and so in order to keep Jews from that calling, that name has suffered remarkable atrocity at the hands of supposed Christians, now for an unbelieving Jew, any Gentile who's not a Muslim is a Christian and these knights and crusaders who locked them up in their synagogues where they were burned to death, had crosses on their chests, and when they destroyed them in Jerusalem the legend is that they went around the walls of the burning synagogue singing something about adoring Jesus so that's fixed in

the history and consciousness and memory of this people and provides for us who are concerned a remarkable obstacle that only the grace of God the power of the spirit can overcome so the hymns that honor the God of Israel as highest God king, creator, and judge of the world and the titles bespeak the majestic greatness of his power, Yahweh alone is El Yom El Kol Haaretz the most high over all the earth the God of Israel is not a provincial deity he's not a tribal God he's the God of all the earth and the sense of the breadth and majesty of that God is renewed and found again in every pilgrimage to Zion his throne is established from eternity that means if Jews are suffering mishap and opposition it's not because God is ignorant of it it's a statement of something that has to come probably

the consequence of our sin because he's enthroned in the heavens forever there's that sense of God's majesty which is of course lost to Jews today and therefore they can blame the Germans, they can blame Arafat they can blame the PLO they blame the visible human thing before them not recognizing that there's a God enthroned in the heavens for whom these are only his instrument and his rod the worshipping congregation pays homage to him with the shout Adonai Melech, Yahweh is king and acknowledges the universal power of the God King whose splendor fills the whole world but the one who is God most high and king is at the same time the creator he has overcome the powers of chaos and has given stability to the earth in wondrous order and conformity to law he has permeated all of creation also

the heavenly sphere and the constellation are the work of his hands the acts of creation is the basis of God's world's dominion where does this German scholar get all of this out from the testimony of the Hebrew scriptures themselves out from the Psalms culled out from the whole remarkable depository that the Psalms are celebrating this God as creator, as king, as the ruler of all the earth, the enthroned one where shall we get that sense who have neither never had it or have lost it in the same place where he got it in the Psalms, in that remarkable literature that celebrates God as God and finally the king and creator is also the judge, is enthroned in heavenly height above the peoples and judges the nations in all these perfections of power so clearly expressed here the worshipping

community pays homage and glorifies the God of Israel enthroned on Zion I wrote here a little note, what gentile Christian of even the most celebrated kind has the faintest intimation of this Semitic glory intrinsic to all Israel and to those who are in identification with her who has the sense of God enthroned on Zion who is the judge of all the earth and the nations and who is king by virtue of being creator and is enthroned on Zion how many Christians and leading Christians have this sense and communicate it, not necessarily as a direct message but whatever the message something of the tremor of this ought to be insinuated, ought to be expressed with every expression it's something like preaching Christ does preaching Christ mean that it necessarily has to be the explicit subject of

every preaching or is it that whatever the subject even the subject of Israel and the restoration of Israel is at the same time a preaching of Christ a bringing of the substance, the ethos the spirit, the nature, the sense of himself into every proclamation and I'm saying if that's true this can be true also and the fact that it's not true has robbed us who sit in those congregations and yawn something of the majesty and the sense of God as God that was central to Israel's whole identity has been lost it needs to be returned to Zion or an entering of that tent to find the sense of God and to communicate it not to Jews but to the world itself there is not enough regard for the mystery of Yahweh which is attested everywhere in the Psalms, is the statement of this German scholar with which I

certainly agree so, that's where God places his king I have set you upon the hill of Zion at the right hand of Yahweh as the unimpeachable anointed of the God of Israel and from whom and out from where the law shall go forth and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem to all nations that they study war no more God stands in unshakable faithfulness to this covenant and will establish it this is the faith of Israel and it should be the church's expectation and expectancy also so this chosen king of the lineage of David occupies a key position in the worship of Jerusalem as lord of the temple and as the anointed one he assumes a mediating function, he is the instrument of Yahweh's rule and judgment of his hope and salvation he's talking here about King David the literal physical King David who

is the prototype of the Jesus to come who is also a son of David and will be a ruler from that same throne the king himself is a model and a statement of God so the Psalms have profuse expression of the glory of the anointed one of Yahweh even when the insignificance of a nation that is shrinking does not keep this sense of him and the knowledge that the world rule will issue from the throne of David there's something here I'm wanting to get at the congregation of Israel surrounds David as king with a sense of respect and esteem even though the profuse expressions of glory of the anointed of Yahweh may itself diminish the congregation of Israel celebrates King David even in view of his sin and his own fallenness and even in the growing sense of Israel's kingdom diminishing there's still a

respect and esteem paid to the figure of David enthroned at Zion that is intrinsic to the character of Israel and when I read that I thought what kind of respect ought we as the church ought to have for a diminishing Israel even though they lose their luster and they lose their character and they are diminished would it be appropriate in becoming for us to maintain a certain respect and reverence even for that whose light is fading or has faded as Israel paid that kind of respect to King David wouldn't we be more the church if we would have that kind of respect for them the festive congregation comes together before Yahweh not only for praise and jubilant homage for adoration and for meeting the manifestation of the word of God of Israel that proclaims Yahweh's great deeds of the past and

present in time of great afflictions it also enters the holy place with prayers and petitions in sackcloth and ashes it's not just a celebration and a high feast day it's also a time of authentic brokenness isn't it remarkable to balance those things that the Lord can be celebrated in the majesty but because he's Lord because he is majestic we come also with a certain contrition and a brokenness and petition and pleas for restoration and for forgiveness and so many of the prayers and supplications of Israel are caught up in the Psalms that speaks of the grievous afflictions of Israel and that Yahweh has rejected his people on this account not only the history of salvation becomes problematic but even the foundations of the earth have begun to totter if Israel's salvation is in question

and God is rejecting his own people what are the foundations then of the world itself they begin to totter if the foundations fail what shall the righteous do so Israel the guardian of the foundations seeing that

there's a sense in which God has departed where their armies are defeated where Rome has come to prevail over Israel or its temple destroyed come with a sense of being afflicted and come to cry out to God and to plead with him not only for the restoration of that glory to themselves but that the whole of the foundations of the world are at stake and that this kind of an understanding is totally Hebraic that what is particular to Israel is the issue of reality for all the world and therefore if Israel is not jealous for their God and come with supplications and pleas for their

restoration to themselves what can be hoped for or expected for the foundations of the world which are tottering there's great stake there's great weight involved in Israel's relationship with its own God not only for itself but for all nations so so many of the Psalms are this kind of a cry and the congregation has occasion to look back on the occasions of God's faithfulness when restoration has come and trust that it will come again how are we to explain the great catastrophe why has the wrath of Yahweh been kindled these questions break out with elemental force are the sons bearing the iniquity of their fathers how is Yahweh's conduct to be understood Psalm 44 expresses the conviction most clearly God's people are suffering for Yahweh's sake because of its ties to Jehovah, Israel is

assailed by insult and enmity so not only the issue of its own sin and failing but its very identification with God makes them candidates for oppression and devastation that come from their enemies, what does it say in the Psalms, for your sake we are killed all the day long as sheep so it's not only for our sins or the sins of our fathers that we suffer affliction, we suffer affliction by virtue of our very identity with you because all the nations of the world hate this God the world is at enmity with God and it will find out those people who are representative of Him to ventilate not only their scorn but their physical abuse and their violence so here comes the Jews up to Zion battered by these hostile forces and crying out to God either in acknowledgement of their sin or the sins of

their fathers or acknowledging that for your sake all the day long we are sheep to the slaughter and crying out for vindication Lord so long as you allow us to suffer this without any evidence of your ability to intercede in the behalf of your people, how then are you God, your own testimony is at stake in your ability to stand with us and defend us in the afflictions that we bear, this is the deeps of the cry of the Psalmist it's not just as I've said before a relief that flesh desires that we don't have to bear affliction, more important than our personal suffering or national suffering is the issue of God's reputation which is at stake because it seems to say to the world that God is not God if He'll not stand in defense of His covenant people if He's nowhere to be found and we're

suffering as sheep led to the slaughter where is the testimony of the God of Israel to the nations this is the cry of the Psalms and this cry as well as the celebration of God is intrinsic to the faith of Israel it's a remarkable tension of acclaim and acknowledgement and worship and at the same time elements of travail, supplication and deepest cries for the vindication of God we're trying to identify what is the genius of Israel, what is the quintessence, what is the character that God established with a people so as to demonstrate it to the nations and to the world and to bring others into that tent and into that reality what are the constituent elements that make Israel, Israel the ability to celebrate and worship the God who is enthroned in Zion and at the same time to have the

deepest kind of travail and sense of tragedy for our failure and sin that have shamed Him and blasphemed His name but also at the same time that measure of affliction that we have to bear by the very identification with that God and yet why isn't He quick to answer, why the delay these questions and this cry comes up in the pilgrimage to Zion, they supplicate and they groan, for they've come to the place

where they are to meet with Him didn't Solomon say that when he dedicated the temple, Lord when we are cast out of the nations and when we are suffering affliction let us turn to you and to the place that you have designated where you are to be met and you are to be sought, hear us in that day and hear our cry and give answer this is the faith of Israel so God's honor is at stake and the

nations have mocked Yahweh what we find so often in the Psalms is the torment and the mock of the Psalmist suffering these afflictions with the great tormenting goading question, where is your God? there's no evidence of Him, how dare you boast in Him when He's not coming to your aid, suffering the affliction that we put upon you so the sufferings of the people of God are no passing political crisis they are imponderable afflictions that arise in view of the foundation of the history of salvation and Yahweh's universal power over history it's a remarkable drama that God allows Himself to fall into eclipse He's not quick to answer, He's allowing Himself to be defamed, because when He will come through, He'll come through with unspeakable glory and His honor will reverberate to the ends of

the age, but meanwhile the people who are appointed and elected to make Him known have got to suffer the tension of that waiting that's not only true of them, it's true of us let me read that statement again, the sufferings of the people of God, whether it's Israel or ourselves, are no passing political crisis, it's not going to be alleviated by a new prime minister or a Christian president so called they are imponderable afflictions that arise in view of the foundation of the history of salvation and Yahweh's universal power over history if there's anything distinctive about the mindset of Israel, is that God is the God of history, history is not some mindless accumulation of events that take place independent of Him, history is His story, it is God acting in the affairs of men and of

nations and moving through these events to bring us to a final consummation, we lose that sense of God in the history of nations the actuality of events we've lost the Hebraic sense and we become then an addendum we're just a Sunday phenomenon we're not expected to see God in history and we don't invite His participation and we don't express it for that reason please, P-L-E-A-S cries are raised that Yahweh step forth from seclusion and shine forth when you read in the Psalms, Lord show Thy face, where He sheds His face from us, or let Thy light shine forth, this is what the people are crying for that He would demonstrate Himself in time and in history and before nations, that He would restore Israel, correcting the frightful call of judgment by hearing the lament of those who pray because

the all encompassing question is Yahweh Lord of history, will Jehovah display His might in the midst of this world in fact, aren't these the final scenes of history God in fact intervening the Lord Himself coming with His feet on the Mount of Olives, that split and defeating those enemies of Israel that have already reduced the nation by thirds God's actual coming what that we expect when we shall look upon Him whom we have pierced, when He comes as deliverer, the whole consummation of history is this visible interjection of God in time and place, He's no longer abstract He's the principal actor as Himself this is the whole hope of Israel which has been lost to them but is alive with us, and I'm finding this theme expressed in the orthodox commentary on the Psalms they have this

eschatological expectancy, they don't talk about seeing Him whose wounds that we have inflicted but they talk about the visible coming of the Messiah God to be our deliverer in the last day going all the way back to the deepest traditions of Israel will God counteract the devastation of His people with a sign that will manifest His control of history among the nations the prayer songs of Israel events, the unfathomable mystery that the nations who do not know Yahweh Jehovah and yet hate Him rise up against the witness of God saving and ruling will in order to destroy Him.

The prayer songs and thanksgivings of individuals occupy the most space in the Psalms but these songs are unintelligible if they are considered from the viewpoint of the tradition of salvation and of the reality, if they are not considered in that context, of a congregation assembled in Jerusalem. If we just think that these Psalms and these cries are individual laments and not the collective and corporate cry of the nation, we miss the whole context and the genius of this cry this is a nation that comes up, this is corporate, this is the congregation of God's people, this is assembling before Him with your wives and your children dependent upon His mercy and upon His answer if we lose this sense, we lose the genius of these Psalms and what they represent is what this commentator is saying here.

There is no private piety in the book of Psalms. The singers of the Psalms of prayer and thanksgiving always arise from the worship of the congregation of Israel. The formulas and formulations have evolved from the world of their corporate religion The conviction of being heard, the very heart of the songs of lament lives on in the unshakable reality that the God of Israel so according to the deliverance experienced by members of the people of God this does not remain private knowledge but is communicated and witnessed to the great congregation prayer and thanksgiving of the individual are encompassed by the reality of the congregation and I would say the reality of the congregation is reality if in any way it becomes reduced to private piety as has been true of our Christianity we lose the heart of the reality of Israel to which we are called equally as congregation equally as God's corporate people equally as standing before him and crying out.

Notice if you're not used to it when we meet as a group in prayer how difficult it is for some people to pray we're intimidated it's unfamiliar to us if we have any prayer it's our private prayer life but we don't know how to come in before the Lord as the congregation of God's people and raise up a corporate supplication to the Lord and yet that was the turning point of World War II as we read from that famous book on intercessor Reese Howells that they were on the same campus in Wales at a Bible college and could meet frequently as the Lord stirred them and they came together as a congregation and prayed the corporate prayer and mind of the Lord and that Reese Howells did not hesitate to rebuke anyone in that circle who began to pray his private individual prayer that should have been

prayed in the prayer closet long before and he would stop them and remind them we are seeking to find and to pray the mind of the Lord that is given to the congregation and that that kind of prayer that kind of intercession is ultimate and opens the heavens and brings answer of a kind that private prayer will not so this is Israel's tradition but it has been lost to us because we have been brought into another context more of the world than it is of Zion the Lord has founded Zion and in her the afflicted of his people find refuge alongside of the self-reliance of the poor there are many expressions that the people of God, the righteous are equally the poor, the defenseless the helpless and that's why their cry is so resonant it's not actually the issue of a literal poverty it might be

that, but poor in the sense of the awareness of our own weakness, our own intrinsic limitation and that of God be not God we perish this is the poor this is the one to whom he looks and the righteous one who is the poor is also the object of the opposition of the powers of darkness of the enemies of God's people who especially hate those who look to God in their poverty and in their trust these people are called the righteous and their opposition is called the wicked there's a remarkable simplification of all of life in the Psalms it's not good guys and bad guys it's the righteous and the wicked the blameless and the cruel and if that's not true of reality in the world today, it will be at the time of the Lord's coming the centrifugal forces operating that move us toward one or the other,

neutrality and the lukewarm faith will not be a position that will be tenable, will either be the righteous, poor of God, afflicted by the wicked, or will be among the wicked, will be the persecuted or will be the persecuted towards and there'll be nothing in between and that's the framework of understanding that's communicated in the Psalms itself for that was the truth of the history of this people throughout its time and will be the character of the reality that prevails, I think, again at the end of the age it's interesting that the Lord calls those who extend mercy to the least of these his brethren, the righteous come, enter the kingdom prepared for you, righteous so sinister forces arise even among friends and relatives and they want to separate the servant of God from Yahweh by

means of accusations and persecutions the verdict of condemnation is to be pronounced over the righteous, curses pursue him magical implications are to ruin him, in scorn the question is heard, where is now your God?

God-forsakenness must lead to a separation from God, which is the endeavor of these enemies the purpose of the wicked is to separate the righteous from their God by accusations by condemnations, by threats by mocking taunts where is your God? finally, even the righteous are so battered by the accusations and the hostility of the wicked that they throw in the towel and join them so a theme that is frequently to be noted in the Psalms independent of sickness is slander and persecution the false accusations that assail the righteous ones so the innocent seek refuge with Yahweh the sanctuary is the asylum, the place of refuge for those accused and persecuted, who as the poor take advantage of the sacred right of the poor and invoke the privilege of assistance and help of Yahweh, going up to

Zion is not a vacation it's not a light activity it's a life and death quest and necessity of great urgency for those who are catching it because they're remaining faithful to God, even in the absence of the signs of his faithfulness and are continually mocked and taunted and go up to Zion to bring these pleas and these cries to God, to honor his own name and to vindicate his name by showing himself faithful to those who keep covenant despite the hostility and the discouragement everywhere about them if this is not a picture of the church in the last days, I don't know what it is and how shall we understand it except by drawing from their experience, for we are united with them, the church in the last days finds a common ground with the history of Israel, who knew in its essence, in its

history the kind of experience and travail that is increasingly coming upon us for the same reason, we are the covenant people of God, we stand for his name we are accused and slandered the accuser is always around us, and even through brothers and sisters something of this torment and accusation comes and we feel ourselves poor and inadequate and so we go up to Zion not perhaps the literal physical city, but come up before the Lord, seek him collectively and corporately as his people, maybe he's waiting for that cry, to give an answer that will only come when we like the Israel of old, assemble before him, in the place of his presence, and acknowledge the desperation of our need, that may well be the very reason for our persecution that God is persecuting us allowing ourselves to be

persecuted for the sin of our privatistic mode of living, that we have never known or have rejected the configuration that is appropriate to the God of Israel as a commonwealth, as a people of God and that we have allowed our lives to become separated and come together for the virtue of a Sunday service or to obtain something in a facility like this, but our lives are essentially privatistic and independent, casually related to one another and God will allow a persecution to come upon us that will drive us to become the people of God whose supplication that he waits to hear as he did of the Israel of old when we'll come together and maybe in that day we'll find each other the congregation of the ancient people and we'll find

the congregation of the present people out of the mutuality of

our common persecution for the same reason because we are afflicted by the wicked because they hate God and hate the people of God who stand for God.

Where is our encouragement to be found? The book of Psalms. The cries and the pleas of those who have preceded us who faced circumstances like that and came up to Zion and poured out their soul before God whose presence was to be found in that holy place.

They made their petitions known. They remind Yahweh of the wonderful works that have been experienced and witnessed. They address Yahweh on the basis of his honor and in all their lamenting and pleading, these petitions unceasingly manifest hope, confidence and the conviction that they will be heard.

But how does the helpful intervention of Yahweh come about? It comes about through the word of his answer. He sent his word and he healed them. Here we have to think of the priestly oracle of deliverance which is cited in the Psalms.

God's word can heal the sick. The verse I just quoted, Psalm 107. He sent his word and he healed them.

It is the statement of the sign of God's healing favor. With that word there is certainty. You have answered me, it says in Psalm 22.

So the cry of Israel is heard by God and answered through the word that comes and is the living word. Isn't that just what we were talking about yesterday? That Israel in the wilderness, desperate, hopeless, weak, blind, lame, faltering, and someone with them turns to them and says, your God will come. He will vindicate you.

And the hearing of that word before there is any evidence of the fulfillment of it makes the lame to leap and the blind to see and water to break out of dry ground. They are saved by a word that is sent out of a cry that comes up before the Lord. Perhaps not so much from those that are distressed as Israel but those that are in the wilderness with Israel and seek him and can call upon him.

And he gives the answer as a word that is sent. Finally, the final answer is the word himself coming as the word in his person. And when we shall see him in his final glory upon that white horse as the victorious conqueror there is one word inscribed upon him, it's the word word.

So certainty triumphs. Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? The enemies are overcome.

The event of God in the Old Testament is no spiritual or ideal phenomenon but an event that intervenes in the world. The Jews demand for signs of which Paul speaks is really a cry for certitude that it becomes apparent in Christ crucified. In the New Testament a new certitude becomes apparent in Christ but this event must not become the occasion for criticizing inferior thoughts or the older cry of Israel, I'm paraphrasing here, but to see it as the final culmination of that cry.

The Lord's own coming the final coming of the Lord as conqueror, as victor is itself an answer to the ages old cry for the certitude of a God who will come when he hears the lament of the poor and of the righteous who are being slain all the day long as sheep for the slaughter. So once Yahweh has intervened and made an end of the distress of the sufferers then thanksgiving comes into being. The last aspect of the

Psalms is the Todah Alel praise the Lord thank the Lord there's the lament there's the plea of supplication there's the cry but in the end the statement of gratitude and thanks is equally one of the great aspects of the whole Judaic or Hebraic frame of mind for the wonderful deliverance that has come to the entire community as a witness to Yahweh's saving act and the emphasis is on the experience and on the proclamation of the name of Jehovah his name will be made known in that day.

He'll be one king over all and the thank offerings are signs of homage that the poor pay in having experienced the saving power of Jehovah and celebrated also in communal meals and festivals. The cup of salvation is lifted up and writes R-I-T-S of Thanksgiving accompany the singing and the playing which is at the same time a confession the experiences of an individual are to provide helpful guidance for others. People have to learn to trust Yahweh Jehovah completely and to expect help from him alone we should point to the expression of confidence and trust and the communion with Yahweh is extolled with exuberant phrases with the God of Israel the man of prayer knows that he is well sheltered and toward him his soul waits in silence no harm will assail him who trusts.

In the Old Testament the fear of Jehovah the elemental awareness concerning the reality of God that upholds and controls all of life plays a dominating role in the consciousness of Israel the fear of the Lord, the knowledge of God, the intervener in history, the one who comes as deliverer by the sending of his word, hears the travail and pleas and cries of the congregation of his people has as its foundation the fear of the Lord, the acknowledgement of the deep reverence and understanding of himself the elemental awareness he says concerning the reality of God that upholds and controls all of life plays a dominating role in the consciousness of Israel and in that dominating role in that sense of God and the fear of God, whatever comes upon the worshipper in the condition of his life he

who is praying penetrates the riddle of the situation he becomes aware of the transitory non-essential nature of his life that somehow even what he has to bear brings a more acute definition of reality itself because at its base is the fear of God, the knowledge that he is enthroned in heaven and that somehow because you know that and even in your affliction there's a shedding off and a casting off of non-essential things of trivial things, of things you thought important fade and are dismissed because you have a central orbit of the fear of God who is king and who is resident at Zion who hears the cries of his people and who answers and if he doesn't answer immediately there are purposes that are being served that we can acknowledge and enable us to wait because we have as our foundation

a profound fear and reverence for God as God that's the heart of the matter of Israel it's the heart of the matter of the church and to the degree that we have lost it in that moment we do not reflect and resemble the people of God so will the God of Israel let his servant perish? the question appears in all its bitterness especially when the righteous contemplates the distribution of the fortunes of life, the wicked who have disassociated themselves from Jehovah experience good fortune and ease but the righteous suffer persecution and affliction every day the ultimate crisis can be found in Psalm 73 where the psalmist is right on the verge of mental breakdown and ready to lose it all because the one thing that he cannot fathom and reconcile with a righteous God is that the wicked seem to

prosper but the righteous suffer daily affliction and it vexes him to the point where he's ready to forfeit the faith but God draws him into the sanctuary into the place of the dwelling of God, into the tent into the Zion of God and there he sees their end and when he sees their end he recognizes that though they seem to be prospering, they've got one foot already in the grave and face eternal catastrophe and so God is righteous after all and that was the thing that vexed him, where is the righteousness of God who allows the

righteous to suffer and the wicked to prosper but when he saw from within the sanctuary what their end is, the whole turmoil of his soul was eased and he understood and he said, I was as a beast to you read Psalm 73, it is the heart of so much in my understanding,

though I was a psalmist, though I'm a son of Israel though I'm a child of Zion I was so vexed by what seems to contradict the reality of God everywhere about me that I was spitting my soul out I was at the brink of a complete mental breakdown my sanity was at stake until I came into the sanctuary of God, then I saw and when I saw the end then I realized I was as a beast before you, however much I thought I understood, I was so dull in my understanding that I allowed myself to doubt and even to question your righteousness but now that I see from the place of the sanctuary and your seeing my soul is eased and now that I see their end, I see my end and my end is glorious and therefore I can bear all of the present contradictions of this life we had a brother who was with us and there are

many who have been with us that are like him who did not see as they ought to see and he wrote a final statement, we encouraged him to write and that it would be published in our newsletter, which it was and in it, he thinly in a thinly concealed way hints that Ben Israel is either in deception or is a candidate for deception we printed that article and as it happened, he came back for a visit at the very day that I was speaking from Psalm 73 and I turned and I said to this brother, what you wrote makes perfect sense from the point of view of the natural man but had you entered the sanctuary of God, the same things that offended you and gave rise to the suspicion of our deception would have been seen entirely in another light, namely the light of God, the thing that you condemned you

would have celebrated, but you saw us from outside the place of the sanctuary, you were not in the place of the Zion of God and the tent of Shem if I could say it now in the phrase that God is employing in these days, or you would have seen completely differently so I think we made an article of that statement I either quoted or made the statement, there's always one thing that we don't know about a brother, that had we known it, that one thing would have altered all our understanding the reason we don't have it is because God has withheld it to see whether we'll be presumptuous and proud in our condemnation and not have the temper, what's that word, that reticence, that is not quick to judge, because there's always one thing that we cannot know, but had we known it, would have altered

our entire view God reserves that one thing for himself and where will he give it?

He'll give it in the place of his presence in the sanctuary of God in the Zion of God where he dwells, for those who will seek him and come up to that Zion, knowing their poverty, that however instructed and wise and knowledgeable they are about God, the purpose of God, the government blah blah blah, there's only one place of true seeing, it's where he himself is, and that scene changes everything so, I'm trying to call out something of the Hebraic mindset the things that are distinctive to the Israel of God that were theirs at the beginning now lost and needing again to be restored the things that are intrinsic to reality itself are spiritual of this kind that need a frequent reminder and a frequent opportunity as often as we go up to Zion as pilgrims, recognizing our poverty, seeking to

be blameless and righteous before the Lord and therefore invoking those kinds of things that plagued the righteous will plague us and crying out to God not for our relief but for his vindication his name and his honor having at the base the fear of God the profound reverence and fear that we don't know as we ought to know and that God is in complete command, he's enthroned and though he doesn't give immediate answer or answers in ways that baffle us, yet we have a complete confidence in his impeccable

righteousness and wisdom and it's that people that set forth God, that vindicate his name, he will honor that faith of the congregation who come up to Zion so let me just pray, experimental first shot, trying to fathom, what is the genius I'm not talking about cleverness what is the

intrinsic character of the people of Zion, what is this Hebraic thing that God exhibited, sought to exhibit through a people whom he chose for that very purpose, who were slaves who were a bunch of dum-dums who were nothings and wanted only to return to their leeks and to their garlics called out of slavery from Egypt, not as the greatest but the least, I didn't choose you because you were greatest but the least, but what did I choose you for to exhibit me the ultimate Semite the intrinsic Hebrew, if I can put it that way the very nature of God, what we have been exploring is not culture it's a way of life manifested by a nation before their fallenness, because God imbued them with this understanding, imbued them with himself, gave them sweet singers of Israel and psalms and prophets and

Moses and the law to frame a way of life, a Veltan Shalom a mode of seeing and being that constitutes reality any deviation from that is insanity and death it's the condition that the world is in, Greek versus Hebrew Hebrew not as something ethnic but as something distinctive from heaven that God intends for men on earth so let's have a little prayer a little break come back for whatever time we have for some response and questions Lord with man it's impossible but with God we're trying to put our finger on something Lord, feel a pulse get a sense of a dimension Lord, lost to us and that has left the church with destitute of an essential character a mode of being and thinking seeing and acting that would have made the church the church and the kind of witness that would have moved your

ancient people to jealousy as well as affecting the Greek Lord we want to find our way back and I thank you for this German scholar, himself a Gentile because he has spent a lifetime in the Old Testament and in the book of Psalms has garnered and brought out some of the distinctive elements that we ask you to bring to our understanding so Lord not only the content of this morning which is fragmentary and awkward and initiatory just a first statement, but the spirit the Hebraic spirit Lord, the spirit of Zion that thing that defies definition is what we're asking Lord, put something in us, communicate something in us Lord that will spoil us, that will make the sack to run and our juices flow in our mouth when we hear Zion Hebraic Tent of Shem all of these mystery words have a necessity to

be a mystery, but this is not something to dissect and analyze and to cut up into pieces and as if this is a laboratory, this is a mystery this is the very sense of yourself, this is the genius of very God that you want my God to permeate and characterize the people whom you call for your name for yourself, help us Lord, precious God on high to even have a desire to be open for this kind of communication no matter what it threatens and we'll be quick to be informed that it will threaten us or seek to Judaize us or bring us under the law, and maybe there is some small risk but Lord, it's worth it and so we're asking mercy Lord, if this is on time, if this is on your heart, and this is what you're sounding through your prophetic spokesman, and it must necessarily come through them for they

are at the sharp line, the now present thing as it is in Christ, so open our ears, open our hearts to receive it, to temper us that we ourselves Lord will recognize we have been as beasts before you, we didn't see we don't know as we ought to know and we have not communicated as we ought to know establish us Lord in this precious, ancient and present and eternal truth we thank you and give you the praise in Jesus name

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