

The Songs of Degrees



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"Yahweh hath done great things for us whereof we are glad"

FOREWORD

The Songs of the Degrees are a very appropriate portion of scripture for young people to consider. One of the most obvious reasons for this is the fact that they are the work of a "brother" who accepted the responsibilities of the Truth early in his life. "Hezekiah wrought that which was good and right and truth before Yahweh his God."

A very powerful lesson springing from this study is that we do not have to be products of our social environments. Hezekiah's father was King Ahaz — one of the most wicked and faithless kings of Judah. He was so bad that "Yahweh brought Judah low because of Ahaz . . . ; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against Yahweh", and "sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus". So, in a society very similar to our own, we can look to Hezekiah for encouragement and example.

But despite all Hezekiah's good qualities, trials and tribulations still came upon him. He had to face numerous serious crises (national, ecclesial, family, and personal) at the one time. While he was suffering like Job, his imminent death and leprous condition meant that he could not have a son to carry on the line of David. At the same time, the Assyrian army was progressively taking the nation captive; and the ecclesia was divided in their reaction. Throughout all this, Hezekiah's concern was for the fulfilment of Yahweh's purpose with His people. His selflessness is a wonderful example to this generation.

Our studies of the Songs of the Degrees will take us right into the mind of Hezekiah as he faced these issues of life. No false facade is presented by the Spirit, only the genuine attitudes of a man of faith. As the discussion questions throughout the notes indicate, the principles which were relevant in Hezekiah's day must still be our guide today. For this reason, we very strongly recommend that you thoroughly research these questions.

May Yahweh's richest blessings be upon us all as we earnestly strive to follow the examples of the faithful — those who are presented in scripture as the types of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can take great comfort in the knowledge that, "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so Yahweh is round about his people from henceforth even for ever".

The Brisbane Suburban Youth Conference Committee.

WHAT ARE THE SONGS OF DEGREES?

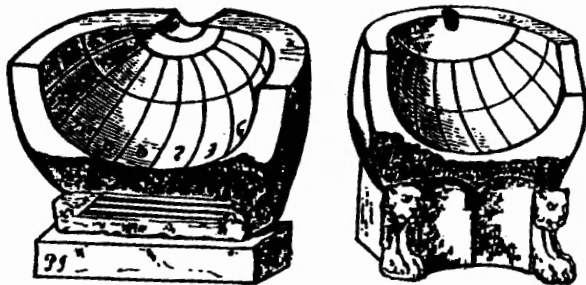
In the Book of Psalms, 15 Psalms (Psalms 120 to 134 inclusive) have a superscription which reads "A Song of Degrees". These superscriptions are part of the inspired record, and in fact the Hebrew actually reads "A Song of THE Degrees". The question we should ask is, "Why are these 15 Psalms given this superscription?"

The answer to the question lies in the occurrences of the word "degrees". The only other place where the word occurs in the Authorised Version is in connection with the degrees by which the shadow of the sun returned on the sun dial of Ahaz. This was a marvellous sign from God to King Hezekiah that he would recover from his terminal illness and not die.

"Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the DEGREES, which is gone down in the sun DIAL of Ahaz, ten DEGREES backward. So the sun returned ten DEGREES, by which DEGREES it was gone down" (Isaiah 38v8).

Eleven times the word "degrees" is used in connection with this miracle; viz. 2 Kings 20v9 (twice), v10 (twice), v11 (twice; note that the marginal rendering of "dial" is "degrees"); and Isaiah 38v8 (5 times, note the margin for "the sun DIAL of Ahaz"). In all, the Hebrew word 'maalah' is rendered "degrees" 26 times — once in the superscription of each of the 15 Songs of the Degrees, plus the eleven occurrences noted above. Apart from that, 'maalah' is most commonly rendered "steps" (10 times), and "stairs" (5 times).

So, on the face of it, we should commence our investigation of the Songs of the Degrees by looking at the life of good King Hezekiah to see if there is any connection between these songs and the outstanding miracle by which the sun returned ten degrees on the sun dial of Ahaz.



ANCIENT DIALS

HEZEKIAH'S SONGS

Continuing with our investigation, the next question to consider is whether Hezekiah wrote any songs to commemorate God's goodness to him after the sun returned ten degrees on the sun dial and he recovered from his illness. We find that Hezekiah did indeed write songs to commemorate this great occasion in his life.

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“Yahweh was ready to save me: therefore we will sing MY SONGS to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of Yahweh” (Isaiah 38v20).

So, in connection with the sign of the degrees, songs were composed by Hezekiah — songs which we now have in our Bible as part of the Songs of the Degrees.

As we examine the life of King Hezekiah and the Songs of the Degrees, we will find that unquestionably they are very closely connected.

WHY 15 SONGS OF THE DEGREES?

As previously stated, there are 15 Songs of the Degrees — Psalms 120-134 inclusive. Why should there be 15? 15 was the number of years that were added to the life of Hezekiah after he was given the sign of the degrees.

“I will add unto thy days 15 years” (Isaiah 38v5; see also 2 Kings 20v6).

THE COMPOSERS

As we examine the superscriptions of the 15 Songs of the Degrees we find that 4 were composed by David, 1 by Solomon, and 10 are anonymous.

The 4 written by David are Psalms 122, 124, 131, and 133, and Solomon wrote Psalm 127 (see margin “of Solomon”). Who then is the composer of the other 10? The answer has already been suggested. Hezekiah said, *“Therefore we will sing MY Songs” (Isaiah 38v20)*. These 10 songs written by Hezekiah relate to the 10 degrees by which the shadow of the sun returned on the sun dial (Isaiah 38v8).

There are 15 Songs of the Degrees in all, 15 being the number of years that were added to Hezekiah’s life after he received the sign. The 10 anonymous Songs of the Degrees correspond to the 10 degrees by which the shadow of the sun returned on the sun dial of Ahaz.

Why would Hezekiah include 5 songs, which were not written by himself, in the Songs of the Degrees? The answer to this question will become clear as we examine them. We will find that those 5 Psalms written by David and Solomon were exactly appropriate to Hezekiah’s needs and circumstances at the time — hence their inclusion.

GOOD KING HEZEKIAH

Hezekiah was an outstanding king. Next to David (and possibly Solomon) he was the best king ever to sit on David’s throne in Jerusalem. Consider this wonderful testimony concerning him:

“And he did that which was right in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that David his father did” (2 Kings 18v3).

“He trusted in Yahweh Elohim of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him” (2 Kings 18v5).

"I beseech thee, O Yahweh, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight" (2 Kings 20v3).

"And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before Yahweh his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered" (2 Chronicles 31v20, 21).

These verses provide a wonderful testimony to the outstanding character of this good king. In Hezekiah's life we have a great example which can provide us with tremendous encouragement to serve God faithfully.

CONDITIONS WHEN HEZEKIAH BEGAN TO REIGN

Hezekiah's name means "strengthened of Yah". He was 25 years old when he began to reign (2 Kings 18v1-2). He was co-regent with his father Ahaz for 2 to 3 years (2 Kings 17v1; 18v1; cf 2 Chronicles 28v1); his sole reign commencing after his father's death. In every way Hezekiah stands in stark contrast to Ahaz — one of the most wicked and faithless kings to reign over the Kingdom of Judah. While Hezekiah was like David, Ahaz was the exact opposite. Of Ahaz it is recorded:

"He did NOT that which was right in the sight of Yahweh, like David his father: For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim" (2 Chronicles 28v1-2).

So bad was Ahaz's reign that we read:

"For Yahweh brought Judah low because of Ahaz KING OF ISRAEL; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against Yahweh" (2 Chronicles 28v19).

Notice that Ahaz is described as "King of Israel". But he wasn't! He was king of Judah. His wickedness was so great that it was as if one of the faithless kings of the northern kingdom of Israel reigned over the kingdom of Judah. The testimony against him continues:

"And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against Yahweh: THIS KING AHAZ. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus . . ." (2 Chronicles 28v22-23 italics omitted).

Ahaz was totally profligate.

"And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of Yahweh, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger Yahweh Elohim of his fathers" (2 Chronicles 28v24-25).

Ahaz was a shocking, faithless, and abominable king. He was a self-seeking and a self-serving man. His name means "possessor", and he possessed all the traits that are manifested in lust of flesh, lust of eyes, and pride of life. The things that he did not possess were faith and trust and conscientiousness towards God.

Under Ahaz's disastrous leadership the spirituality of the Kingdom of Judah was almost totally extinguished. Ahaz reigned for 16 years in Jerusalem. He was 36 years old when he died (2 Chronicles 28v1). His son Hezekiah was 25 years old when he began to reign (2 Chronicles 29v1). That means that Ahaz was only 11 or 12 years old when his son Hezekiah was born; which speaks volumes about Ahaz. If we take the LXX translation of 2 Chronicles 28v1 as correct, Ahaz began to reign at 25 years, and Hezekiah was born when Ahaz was 16 or 17 years old. Either way, Ahaz was a man of the flesh through and through.

HEZEKIAH THE GREAT REFORMER

On the death of his father Ahaz, faithful Hezekiah assumed the throne in his own right. How could he be such a good king in view of the kind of family background he had? It would appear that Hezekiah was blessed with a mother who, later in life, was faithful. He also had a faithful maternal grandfather. His mother's name was Abijah and she was the daughter of Zechariah (2 Chronicles 29v1). Abijah means "my father is Yah", while Zechariah means "Yah has remembered". If Hezekiah's maternal ancestors were true to their names, he would have indeed been blessed on one side of his family with those who knew the value of raising a child in the way that he should go (Proverbs 22v6).

As young people, we should never overlook the great blessing that we have if we are privileged to have parents who faithfully serve God and bring us up to do likewise. That is something for which we should ever be thankful.

Whatever Hezekiah's background, he was an extremely faithful king. He inherited a kingdom that was in a totally disastrous condition spiritually. And to his great credit, immediately he assumed the throne, he set about repairing the tremendous damage which his faithless father had done.

In the very first month of his reign, Hezekiah reopened the doors of the House of Yahweh which Ahaz had shut. He had the priests and Levites cleanse and sanctify themselves and the temple (2 Chronicles 29v3-11). Then Hezekiah and the rulers of Jerusalem went up to the temple and sin offerings were made, the choral services were reinstated, and burnt offerings were made. Worship at the temple was established again.

"So the service of the house of Yahweh was set in order. And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly" (2 Chronicles 29v35-36).

This teaches us that, no matter what the circumstances in our ecclesias or in our own lives, things can be dramatically improved spiritually if we will but turn to God and walk in His ways.

HEZEKIAH'S PASSOVER

Having set things right in Jerusalem, Hezekiah then invited all Israel, including those of the then seriously weakened northern kingdom, to come up to Jerusalem to keep the passover, and many from the northern kingdom came (2 Chronicles 30v11).

Normally, the passover had to be kept on the 14th day of the first month. But the temple was not cleansed until the 16th day of the first month (2 Chronicles 29v17). So the passover could not be kept at the normal time. However, provision was made under the Law of Moses for the passover to be kept in the second month in certain circumstances (Numbers 9v9-12). So it was kept in the second month.

It was a great time of unity, joy, happiness, and fellowship in Jerusalem.

"And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 30v25-26).

Moreover, the work of reformation which started in Jerusalem was extended throughout all the kingdom of Judah.

"And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before Yahweh his God" (2 Chronicles 31v20).

HEZEKIAH IN TROUBLE

When Hezekiah was 39 years old he faced 4 great crises in his life. As we shall discover, it was concerning these crises that the Songs of the Degrees were largely written.

HEZEKIAH'S INTERNATIONAL CRISIS

The first crisis to confront Hezekiah was an international one. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, "entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself" (2 Chronicles 32v1). Further, Sennacherib "was purposed to fight against Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 32v2).



THE EXTENT OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

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In the face of this crisis Hezekiah delivered a stirring exhortation to his people. He said:

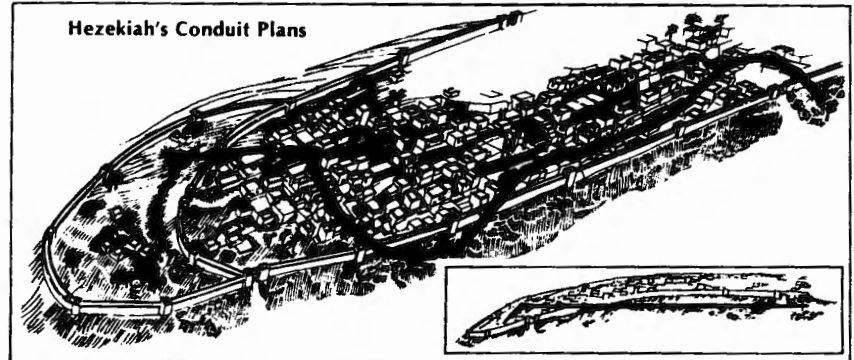
“Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is Yahweh our God to help us and to fight our battles” (2 Chronicles 32v7-8).

Initially the people responded.

HEZEKIAH'S ECCLESIAL CRISIS

The initial response to Hezekiah's exhortation to the inhabitants of Jerusalem was short-lived. When the siege of Jerusalem actually took place many of its inhabitants lost faith. As they looked out from the city walls and saw approximately 200,000 Assyrians surrounding the city they were afraid and dismayed. This sparked an ecclesial crisis for Hezekiah.

Unfortunately many in the city of Jerusalem could not see beyond the natural defences of the city — the walls, bars, gates, and the aqueduct which Hezekiah had dug to bring water down from the Spring of Gihon to the Pool of Siloam within the city walls.



WALLED CITY OF JERUSALEM AS VIEWED FROM MOUNT OF OLIVES IN HEZEKIAH'S DAY.

So far as the provision of water was concerned, Isaiah, who was the contemporary prophet, complained to the inhabitants of Jerusalem that *“ye have not looked unto the maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago”* (Isaiah 22v11). They could not see the hand of God in the creation of the spring, and in the creation of the rock formation which made it possible for the tunnel (aqueduct) to be dug. Their eye of faith was dim indeed!

Many in Jerusalem abandoned their faith in the face of Assyrian opposition. They regarded themselves as good as dead. So Isaiah says, *“thy slain men are not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle”* (Isaiah 22v2). They had given up the fight before the battle had even begun. They could see but one outcome of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem — death and destruction! Their one thought was to make the most of what little time they thought remained before Sennacherib took the city and them with it. So

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they said, *"let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die"* (Isaiah 22v13). The Apostle Paul takes up these words in 1 Corinthians 15 as an appropriate motto where people have no hope in the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15v32).

This faithlessness in the ecclesia was a major problem for Hezekiah.

Today we need to be careful that we do not become equally faithless. Despite all the signs in the world that God is working among the nations, we can become complacent and live our lives as if God does not exist — as if this is a time to eat, drink, and be merry. If we do that we shall not obtain a place in the Kingdom of God.

HEZEKIAH'S PERSONAL CRISIS

At this very time, in the midst of these international and ecclesial crises — in the very year that Sennacherib's army poured down from the north and invaded Judah and besieged Jerusalem, Hezekiah fell desperately sick (Isaiah 38v1). We know that it was the same year because he reigned in all for 29 years (2 Kings 18v2), and after his sickness God added 15 years to his life (2 Kings 20v6). It therefore follows that it was in the 14th year of his reign that he was desperately sick, and that was the year that Sennacherib came down (2 Kings 18v13).

Further, that the events were in fact concurrent is implied by the expression "in those days" in 2 Chronicles 32v24. Verse 22 of that chapter deals with Yahweh saving Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib. Then v24 says "in those days Hezekiah was sick to the death".

As we shall see later, the sickness with which Hezekiah was afflicted was almost certainly the dreaded disease of leprosy. The sickness was terminal and Hezekiah was critically ill. *"In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah . . . came unto him, and said . . . thou shalt die, and not live"* (Isaiah 38v1).

This statement by Isaiah would have constituted a great personal crisis for the desperately sick Hezekiah. He had done so much and yet so much more needed to be done. But Isaiah said to him, *"thou shalt die"*.

Hezekiah provides a marvellous example of how we should conduct ourselves in times of personal crisis. Despite the apparent hopelessness of his situation, Hezekiah remained faithful to God. He continued to trust in Him, and consequently he was delivered out of this crisis and the others that beset him.

HEZEKIAH'S FAMILY CRISIS

In addition, the solemn and ominous words of Isaiah would have added yet another crisis to the international, ecclesial, and personal crises being faced by Hezekiah.

In fact, to Hezekiah, Isaiah's words would have been almost totally inexplicable. Hezekiah had great faith in God's promises to David. He knew that Yahweh had promised David that *"there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel"* (1 Kings 2v4), and, *"I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels"* (2 Samuel 7v12).

But here was Hezekiah at death's door. He had not married. He had no seed. So the question that now must have plagued Hezekiah's mind was how the royal line of David was to be continued — that line that would ultimately lead to the Lord Jesus Christ. Who would succeed him on David's throne? How could his family be extended? Isaiah's words, "*thou shalt die*", must have thoroughly bewildered the critically ill Hezekiah.

In fact Hezekiah (called Ezekias in Matthew 1v9 and 10) was in the line that led to Joseph and not to Mary the mother of the Lord. But poor king Hezekiah could not have known this at the time, and, anyway, there was no son to immediately follow him on David's throne. Would God's promise to David fail? To Hezekiah that was unthinkable. It was, however, an additional concern for him to struggle with at this time of unprecedented crises in his life.

HEZEKIAH'S TYPICAL RESURRECTION

What was Hezekiah to do in view of this family crisis? He did the only thing a man of faith can do in such circumstances — pray to God. God heard his prayer and answered it speedily:

"And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of Yahweh came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith Yahweh, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: ON THE THIRD DAY thou shalt go up unto the house of Yahweh. And I will add unto thy days 15 years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria . . ." (2 Kings 20v4-6).

The expression "*the third day*" is interesting. When we come to the New Testament, we find that after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ he says to his disciples:

"These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead THE THIRD DAY" (Luke 24v44-46).

But where do the scriptures (the Old Testament) teach that the Lord Jesus Christ would rise from the dead on the third day? The fact is that they don't teach it by direct statement at all. But they do clearly teach it by allegory; and in a very beautiful way. Set out below are three places where it is taught:

1. Abraham journeyed for THREE DAYS with Isaac, who is called "*his only begotten son*" (Hebrews 11v17; cf John 1v14). Abraham had been commanded by God to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. For three days (in Abraham's mind) Isaac was as good as dead. And on the third day (Genesis 22v4) believing that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead, Abraham received him from the dead in a figure (Hebrews 11v19). These events were typical of Christ's own death and resurrection.

2. Jonah was in the belly of the great fish **THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS** (Jonah 1v17). So the Lord told the scribes and Pharisees that in keeping with Jonah's experience, the Son of man would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12v40).
3. Hezekiah, who was Yahweh's suffering servant of Isaiah 53 for his own day (as we shall see), and therefore a great type of the Lord Jesus Christ, was, like the Lord, healed of his mortal sickness on **THE THIRD DAY** (2 Kings 20v5).

So Hezekiah was raised from his death-bed on the third day, and was to witness a miraculous victory over the forces of King Sin, as represented by Sennacherib and his army.

During the 15 years' extension to his life, Hezekiah married and produced a son who was to follow him as king on David's throne.

HEZEKIAH AND ISAIAH CHAPTER 53

Many prophecies of scripture have more than one application. They have an elementary but **ONLY PARTIAL** fulfilment near the time they were given, while their principal and ultimate fulfilment occurs much later.

The clearest example of this is given in the prophecy of Habakkuk. Chapter 1v5-6 says:

*"Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up **THE CHALDEANS** . . ."*

Now nothing could be clearer. The work which Yahweh was going to perform was to raise up the Chaldeans who were going to invade the kingdom of Judah. This was punishment for its iniquity. The prophecy is absolutely specific as to whom the invader was going to be: the Chaldeans, otherwise known as the Babylonians. And so it came to pass. Nebuchadnezzar and his army came down and carried away the Kingdom of Judah, and destroyed the temple of Solomon.

But approximately 650 years after Habakkuk's prophecy had its elementary fulfilment, the Apostle Paul said to the Jews of his day, *"Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets"* (Acts 13v40). Which prophecy did Paul have in mind? Habakkuk chapter 1v5; because he immediately goes on to quote the Septuagint (Greek) translation of Habakkuk 1v5 in Acts 13v41:

"Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you."

So the Apostle Paul says that the prophecy of Habakkuk 1v5, which Habakkuk specifically said applied to the Chaldeans, also applies equally to the Romans some 650 years later. They, like Nebuchadnezzar, were going to come down on the Jewish people and afflict them and destroy Herod's temple, which they did in AD70. This was a second application of the prophecy.

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If it were not to stray too far from our subject, it could be clearly shown that the principal and ultimate fulfilment of Habakkuk's prophecy will occur in our own day, when the Russians, like Nebuchadnezzar and the Romans, will come to take a spoil and to take a prey (Ezekiel 38v13). This will be the third application of the prophecy.

The purpose of setting out that dual (and triple) application of prophecy is to establish a principle of interpretation which will help us understand how Isaiah chapter 53 can apply both to King Hezekiah in his own day, while having its real and ultimate fulfilment in the marvellous work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are clear parallels between the life of Hezekiah and the life of our Lord. Set out below are some of the parallels between Isaiah chapter 38 and Isaiah chapter 53. As we study the Songs of the Degrees we will find that there are other events in Hezekiah's life, not specifically dealt with in Isaiah chapter 38, which also parallel the work of Christ as set out in Isaiah chapter 53.

ISAIAH 38 HEZEKIAH	ISAIAH 53 CHRIST
v.1 Sick unto death	v.4 Stricken, smitten of God and afflicted
v.1 Thou shalt die	v.8 Cut off out of the land of the living
v.3 Walked before God in truth	v.9 Done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth
v.3 Wept sore	v.11 My righteous servant
v.5 I will add unto thy days	v.3 A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief
v.8 I will bring again the shadow of the degrees	v.10 He hath put him to grief
v.10 In the cutting off of my days	v.10 He shall prolong his days
v.11 I shall not see Yahweh in the land of the living	— Sun darkened at the death of Christ (Luke 23v44-45)
v.12 Cut off like a weaver my life	v.8 Cut off out of the land of the living
v.12 Mine age (Hebrew age or generation — see Strong 1755) is departed	v.8 Who shall declare his generation? (same word as 'age' in Isaiah 38v12)
v.12 He will cut me off	v.10 Yet it pleased Yahweh to bruise him
v.14 I am oppressed	v.7 He was oppressed
v.15 In the bitterness of my soul	v.11 The travail of his soul
v.16 So wilt thou recover me and make me to live	v.10 He shall prolong his days
v.17 For peace I had great bitterness	v.5 The chastisement of our peace was upon him

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ISAIAH 38 HEZEKIAH

v.18 Grave . . . death . . . pit

v.19 The father to the children shall
make known thy truth

ISAIAH 53 CHRIST

v.9 He made his grave with the
wicked and with the rich in his
death.

v.10 He shall see his seed

For his own day and time, Hezekiah was the suffering servant of Isaiah chapter 53. That, of course, in no way detracts from the ultimate fulfilment of the prophecy which God wrought in the wonderful work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

WHAT WAS HEZEKIAH'S ILLNESS?

Hezekiah's sickness seems certain to have been some form of leprosy. In 2 Kings 20v7 and Isaiah 38v21 the symptom of the sickness is stated to be a boil. The Hebrew word translated "boil" in both places is the word 'shechiyn'. The word is "derived from an unused root word probably meaning to burn; inflammation i.e. an ulcer" (Strong's Concordance 7822). It is the same Hebrew word that is used 3 times in Leviticus chapter 13 to describe the boil associated with leprosy (Leviticus 13v18, 19, and 20).

The same Hebrew word 'shechiyn' occurs in Job 2v7 where it is used of the boils with which Job was afflicted and from which he suffered so terribly. Of 'shechiyn', used in that place, Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon says, "used of a kind of black leprosy endemic in Egypt, called by physicians "elephantiasis", from the skin being covered with black scales, and the feet swelling up".



LEPERS OUTSIDE THE GATE OF JERUSALEM

Further, we have already seen that Hezekiah was Yahweh's suffering servant of Isaiah 53 for his own day. Isaiah 53v8 says that "*he was stricken*". The Hebrew word 'nega' there translated "stricken" is used 60 times in Leviticus chapters 13 and 14 in connection with the plague of leprosy. The Hebrew word 'nega' is rendered "plague" 58 times and "sore" twice in those 2 chapters. In all, the word 'nega' only occurs 77 times in scripture.

We will see some of the implications of Hezekiah's being smitten with leprosy as we study the Songs of the Degrees.

THE ASSYRIANS SLAIN

Probably at the very time that Hezekiah was healed of his sickness, Yahweh performed another marvellous miracle in removing the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem. One night the inhabitants of Jerusalem went to bed with the massive Assyrian army surrounding their city and engaging in their normal manoeuvres. Little did the Assyrians know that Yahweh had told Hezekiah that the Assyrian invasion was doomed:

"By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, . . . For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake" (2 Kings 19v33-34).

With Hezekiah's typical resurrection imminent, the time had now come for Yahweh to deal a fatal blow to the Assyrian forces of Sennacherib, who were the representatives of King Sin:

"And it came to pass that night, that the angel of Yahweh went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh" (2 Kings 19v35-36).

And there he was assassinated.

BYRON'S POEM – THE DESTRUCTION OF SENNACHERIB

The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen on their spears was like stars on the sea
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green
The host with their banners at sunset were seen;
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown
The host on the morrow lay withered and strown!

For the angel of death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed on the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved and for ever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostrils all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray on the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider, distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail;
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances uplifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Asshur* are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broken in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow at the glance of the Lord!

* Another name for
Assyria — Ezra 4v2;
Psalm 83v8.



SENNACHERIB ON HIS THRONE AT LACHISH

THE PATTERN OF THE SONGS OF THE DEGREES

Through all these trials and difficulties, Hezekiah remained a true and faithful servant of his God. At times he was in **DISTRESS**. But his **TRUST** in God never failed. Like the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12v2) he was able to look beyond the present distress to see the great joy of the day when there would be **BLESSING AND PEACE IN ZION**.

When we examine the Songs of the Degrees, we find that the pattern which these Psalms follow seems to be:

Introduction

A Psalm of DISTRESS, followed by
a Psalm of TRUST, followed by
a Psalm of BLESSING AND PEACE.

So we have 5 groups of 3 Psalms, each of which follows this pattern. The pattern is clearly discernible if we simply take the first verses of each of the 3 Psalms in the first group.

Psalm 120v1 "In my DISTRESS I cried unto Yahweh" — here is DISTRESS.

Psalm 121v1 "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, From whence cometh my help. MY HELP COMETH FROM YAHWEH . . ." — here is TRUST.

Psalm 122v1-2 "I was GLAD when they said unto me, let us go into the house of Yahweh. Our feet shall STAND WITHIN THY GATES, O JERUSALEM". In this Psalm there is a picture of BLESSINGS AND PEACE IN ZION in the glorious age to come.

We shall discover, as we examine the Songs of the Degrees in detail, that they contain wonderful lessons which will help us in all the DISTRESSES of life to put our TRUST in Yahweh, so that ultimately we may find BLESSING AND PEACE IN ZION, in the age to come.

May our studies and discussions together on these wonderful Songs of the Degrees help us all to that end.

When we consider the wonderful privileges we have in the Truth as revealed in the Songs of the Degrees, we can truly say:

"YAHWEH HATH DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US; WHEREOF WE ARE GLAD" — Psalm 126v3.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE MATERIAL

This set of Youth Conference Notes has largely been written with limited reference to other published material. Additional help in understanding the life of Hezekiah and the Songs of the Degrees may be obtained from the following sources:

THE LIFE OF HEZEKIAH

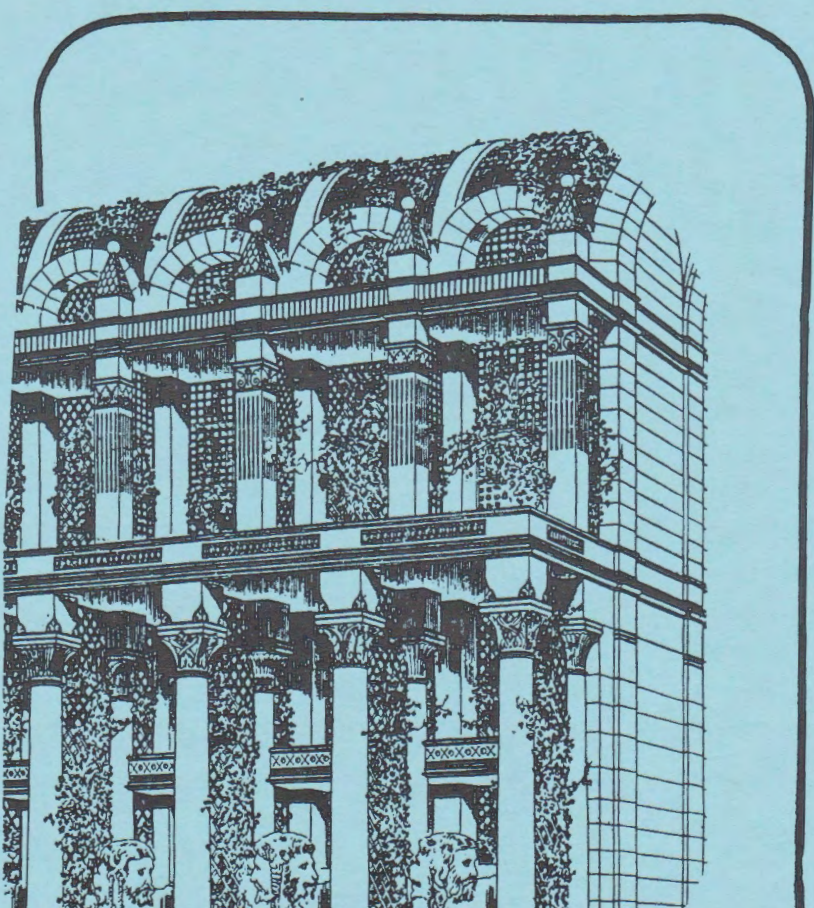
REFERENCE	AUTHOR	OTHER DETAILS/PUBLISHER
* The Story of the Bible	Bro. H.P. Mansfield	Vol 5 pp 188-194 LOGOS
* The Story of the Bible	Bro H.P. Mansfield	Vol 6 pp 3-36 LOGOS
# The Kings of Israel and Judah	Bro Jim Cowie	Vol 2 pp 51-74 GRAPHOMATIC PRESS
# The Ministry of the Prophets	Bre Roberts/Walker	Chaps 36-39 CHRISTADELPHIAN OFFICE

THE SONGS OF THE DEGREES

† The Songs of Degrees	Bro Paul Cresswell	SCRIPTURE STUDY SERVICE
* The Songs of Degrees	Bro Paul Cresswell	1975 Brighton Ecclesial Special Effort
† The Companion Bible	Bullinger	Appendix 67. THE LAMP PRESS
† = Currently available	* = Not currently available	# = Availability unknown

STUDY No. 1

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem . . .



STUDY No. 1

PSALMS 120, 121 and 122

PSALM 120 – A PSALM OF DISTRESS

INTRODUCTION

From this Psalm we learn that we have a loving heavenly Father who is prepared to help those who put their trust in Him. This was Hezekiah's experience and it can be ours as well.

Psalm 120v1 *"In my distress I cried unto Yahweh, and he heard me."*

King Hezekiah was in very great distress. Jerusalem, his beloved city, was besieged by the Assyrian army. Rabshakeh, the General of the Assyrian army, was shouting faith-destroying blasphemies to the inhabitants of Jerusalem as they looked out from the city walls. Hezekiah himself lay critically ill, struck down with the dreaded disease of leprosy. The Jerusalem ecclesia was divided. Some were faithful; others were not. In addition, Hezekiah was greatly troubled, because, as he lay dying, he was conscious of the fact that he had produced no seed to continue the royal line of David. There was no successor to sit on David's throne. Consequently he desperately wanted to "see his seed" (Isaiah 53v10).

So, like the Lord Jesus Christ, Hezekiah was oppressed and afflicted (Isaiah 53v7). What was Hezekiah to do? The only thing a man of faith can do in such circumstances is pray to Yahweh. What great comfort there is in the final words of this verse — "and he heard me".

Hezekiah knew the words of David — words later taken up by the Lord on the cross when he said:

"For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard" (Psalm 22v24).

Hezekiah was heard, and God will hear us too.

So, in the opening words of these Songs of the Degrees there is great comfort. Here, truly, is confirmation of James' declaration that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5v16).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Hezekiah was saved when he cried unto God in prayer.

- (1) What are the conditions under which God will hear our prayers in times of difficulty?

- (2) Does someone have to be baptised before they can cry unto God?

Psalm
120v2 ***“Deliver my soul, O Yahweh, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue.”***

The lying lips and the deceitful tongue belonged to Rabshakeh — the General of the Assyrian army. Rabshakeh stood below the city walls and cried with a loud voice in the Hebrew language, *“Don’t listen to Hezekiah. Don’t let Hezekiah deceive you. He can’t deliver you from this siege. Ignore his exhortations to trust in Yahweh. Yahweh can’t deliver you. Look at our record. Look at the countries that Assyria has overwhelmed in its military campaigns. The gods of the other nations have not been able to deliver them and neither will Yahweh deliver you”* (cf 2 Kings 18v28-35).

What was to be done in the face of this blasphemy? What could be done? No words of any kind were going to convince this proud Assyrian. So the command came from Hezekiah, *“Answer him not”*. So the people held their peace and answered him not a word (2 Kings 18v36).

To see how the punishment was going to fit the crime we need to note that, in physical warfare designed to take a city, arrows were sometimes shot over the city walls. The arrows would be tipped with burning charcoal made from the roots of the juniper tree. The idea was that the burning charcoal on the tip of the arrows would set the city ablaze, so forcing its surrender.

FIGURATIVELY, that's what Rabshakeh had been doing. He had been shooting his arrows tipped with juniper over the walls of Jerusalem. He did that figuratively not literally — see Isaiah 37v33. His blasphemous words were like sharp arrows tipped with juniper. They were designed to destroy the faith of the inhabitants of Jerusalem so they would surrender.

In scripture a false tongue is likened to a sharp arrow. (e.g. Jeremiah 9v8). The tongue is also likened to a fire (Proverbs 16v27; James 3v5-6). Rabshakeh had used his tongue to shoot his fiery blasphemies into Jerusalem.

How was Rabshakeh to be repaid? "*Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord*" (Romans 12v19; Deut. 32v35). The Jerusalem Bible puts the question as, "*How will HE pay back the false oath of a faithless tongue?*" The "he" is of course Yahweh. He is the "mighty" — the 'gibbor' — of verse 4. How would the Mighty pay back the Assyrian?

David provides the answer when he uses a similar metaphor and says, "*Yahweh also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave HIS VOICE; hail stones and COALS OF FIRE. Yea, he sent out HIS ARROWS, and scattered them . . .*" (Psalm 18v13-14).

Similarly, David in Psalm 64 speaks of the workers of iniquity who bend their bows to shoot their arrows of BITTER WORDS. But he says that in response, God will shoot at them with arrows, and suddenly they shall be wounded, and so they shall make their OWN TONGUE to fall upon themselves (Psalm 64v2-3, 7-8). That was to be Rabshakeh's destiny as well.

Hezekiah knew the course that events would take. He knew that although the proud Assyrian had planted the tents of his power between the seas, towards the glorious holy mountain, yet he would come to his end, and none would help him. (Compare Daniel 11v45 which deals with the invasion by the latter-day Assyrian — Russia).

Psalm 120v5 "*Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!*"

How could Hezekiah, who was then shut up in Jerusalem by the siege of Sennacherib, say, "*I sojourn in Mesech?*" In Ezekiel 38, Meshech lay "*in the uttermost parts of the north*" (Ezekiel 38v2, 15 R.S.V.). Even in the days of Hezekiah it lay directly north of Israel in the northern extremity of the Assyrian empire. Hezekiah undoubtedly recognised the Assyrian invasion as a type of the latter-day invasion of Israel by Russia. He saw in Sennacherib and his army a political manifestation of the power of King Sin. Here was a king of the north (cf Daniel 11v40) who was come up against God's people as a cloud to cover the land (cf Ezekiel 38v9, 16). So, shut in and surrounded as he was by this king of the north, Hezekiah felt as if he sojourned in the very land of Meshech itself.

In the tents of Kedar, Hezekiah saw another implacable enemy of Israel. The Kedarites dwelt to the south and east of Israel. They were descended from Ishmael (Genesis 25v13). The name 'Kedar' is used collectively in scripture to represent all the Arab tribes (e.g. Song of Solomon 1v5). The descendants of Ishmael are used typically in scripture to represent those who exhibit all the attributes of the thinking of the flesh, as opposed to those who are spiritually-minded (Galatians 4v22-23, 29).

If Hezekiah were living in our day, Meshech and Kedar would represent the Russians and the Arabs who are the deadly enemies of the nation of Israel.

Hezekiah felt shut in and oppressed by similar powerful invading forces in his own day.

In these forces Hezekiah saw a full manifestation of Israel's enemies. Here was lust of flesh, lust of eyes, and pride of life. Here, in the proud, boastful, Assyrian was sin unrestrained. Hezekiah was surrounded by the enemy. He felt as if he sojourned in Meshech and dwelt among the Arabs.

Hezekiah felt keenly the pressure of the foe that encamped against him. He was learning that "*we must through much tribulation (or "pressure" as the word means) enter into the kingdom of God*" (Acts 14v22).

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

The Assyrian invasion of Israel types the latter-day invasion by Russia.

Provide examples of dual and triple applications of scripture in prophecy, and summarise the way that the Assyrian invasion types that of the coming invasion of Israel by Russia.

Under this pressure he exclaims in verse 6:

Psalm 120v6 ***"My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace."***

The Lord Jesus Christ must have often felt like Hezekiah:

"Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round" (Psalm 22v12, which is Messianic).

"Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him" (Matthew 12v14).

“When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death” (Matthew 27v1).

Christ’s disciples, in measure, had similar experiences. The Lord said to them, *“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matthew 10v16)*. Truly the disciples, and the Lord himself, must have often repeated Hezekiah’s words to themselves: *“My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace”*.

They are the experiences that we can expect as we struggle to uphold the Truth in the midst of a world that is at war with God, and rejects the peace that is to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14v27; 16v33).

There was a great contrast between Hezekiah and Sennacherib as verse 7 makes plain.

Psalm 120v7 *“I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war.”*

Hezekiah says *“I am for peace”* or, as the margin has it, *“I am a man of peace”*. In a sense Hezekiah was *“The Prince of Peace”* (cf Isaiah 9v6). Hezekiah was like David, who had cause to say about his enemies,

“Let not them that are mine enemies falsely (margin) rejoice over me: neither let them wink with the eye that hate me without a cause. For they speak not peace: but they devise deceitful matters against them that are quiet in the land” (Psalm 35v19-20).

So, while Hezekiah was for peace, Sennacherib was for war.

“After these things, and the establishment thereof, Sennacherib king of Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself. And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem . . .” (2 Chronicles 32v1-2).

The marginal rendering of *“he was purposed to fight”* is *“his face was to war”*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
 The world today is at war with God and therefore with us. The Lord said, *“In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16v33)*.

(1) How is that tribulation felt today, and how do we cope with it? (As well as scriptural examples, give examples from your own personal experience if possible).

(2) How large a part should prayer play in coping with tribulation and difficulty? What else should we do?

So, in Psalm 120, we have Hezekiah's cry of distress. He is desperately sick. The kingdom of Judah is invaded. The ecclesia is largely faithless. There are other problems as well. What can he do? He did what we must all do in the difficulties of life: TRUST in God. Hezekiah gives expression to his TRUST in God in Psalm 121.

PSALM 121 – A PSALM OF TRUST

INTRODUCTION

The Psalm reveals the unwavering TRUST that Hezekiah had in Yahweh. He knew that his only help lay in God, and that God would protect his going out and his coming in. We must learn to develop such a wholesome trust in God ourselves despite the faith-destroying materialism of the age in which we live.

Psalm 121v1-2 ***"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from Yahweh, which made heaven and earth."***

So far as verse 1 is concerned, it would be better if there was a full stop after the word "hills", and a question mark after the word "help". i.e. *"I will lift up mine eyes to the hills. From whence cometh my help?"* That is in fact how it is in the Revised Standard Version.

In view of Hezekiah's great faith and enlightened understanding, why would he say *"I will lift up mine eyes to the hills?"* He certainly knew that his help did not come from the hills as such, but that it came from his marvellous God.

However, so far as Hezekiah was concerned, it may have been that the strong, immovable, unchangeable, hills reminded him of his God. They may have reminded him of the great power of the Creator of the hills — the Creator of heaven and earth.

If that was so, then Hezekiah was like David, because certainly the attributes and character of the hills reminded David of his God:

“I will love thee, O Yahweh, my strength. Yahweh is MY ROCK, and MY FORTRESS, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; . . .” (Psalm 18v1-2).

The word for “rock” in Psalm 18v2 is the Hebrew word ‘sela’, which, as a proper noun, is the name of the fortress we know as Petra. It is a vast, immovable, natural, rock, fortress inside a hill, lying south east of the Dead Sea. David, with great faith and determination, captured Petra from the Edomites although it provided outstanding protection from the enemy for those inside it. But David saw in Yahweh an even greater refuge from his enemies. The hills of Petra reminded David of the wonderful attribute of protection that was found in his God, so he says “*Yahweh is my Sela* (or Petra)”.

The Hebrew word for “fortress” in Psalm 18v2 is ‘metsudah’, or, as we would say today, Masada — that remarkable hill down on the western shore of the Dead Sea, which looks like a massive cork which has popped up out of the desert sand. It was at Masada that David, on one occasion, holed up from Saul. There the Jews for so long resisted the Romans after AD 70. David understood very well the qualities of Masada as an outstanding fortress. But he saw those qualities, and far more, in his God. To him, Yahweh was his real Masada, and he said so. You see, when David looked at the hills, they simply reminded him of the outstanding characteristics of his wonderful God who had created them all.

Hezekiah may well have been thinking along these same lines when he says in effect “*I look to the hills, but I see in them the great power of the Creator of heaven and earth who made them all. TO HIM will I look, and IN HIM will I trust.*” What was Sennacherib’s power when compared to that of the Creator of heaven and earth? Nothing! Nothing at all! Sennacherib was absolutely powerless when confronted by the God of heaven.

Hezekiah knew the source of his help. Yahweh had promised that the Assyrians would not enter the city of Jerusalem. Hezekiah had complete trust in God and in what He said.

“Therefore thus saith Yahweh concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith Yahweh” (2 Kings 19v32-33).

Hezekiah had total trust in that declaration from God. His trust was but a continuation of one of the first things that is recorded of him after he ascended the throne:

“He trusted in Yahweh Elohim of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him” (2 Kings 18v5).

Hezekiah’s trust in God was a defence which Sennacherib and Rabshakeh were unable to destroy.

Unfortunately, we don't always display Hezekiah's trust in God. How often could the Lord's words to the disciples be repeated to us, "Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?" Why is it that our trust in God is so much less than that of David, and of Hezekiah, and of the Lord Jesus Christ?

One of our problems is that when we look at the mountains and hills, they are all we see. When we look at the trees and stars, they are all we see. We rarely take time in this materialistic age to look beyond these things to contemplate the great power, majesty, and might, of the Creator who fashioned them long ago.

That was Isaiah's complaint against the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who were faithless in the day when Sennacherib put the city under siege. They could not see beyond the natural defences of the city — the walls, the gates, and Hezekiah's aqueduct which brought water down to the pool of Siloam. So far as the marvellous provision of water was concerned. Isaiah complained that they:

"have not looked unto (Yahweh) the maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago" (Isaiah 22v11).

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Hezekiah and David saw the hand of God in the natural creation about them.

How can we increase our own awareness of God in this materialistic age in which we live?

Psalm 121v3-4 *"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."*

The word "keepeth" which occurs in verses 3 and 4, and "keeper" which occurs in verse 5, and the word "preserve" in verses 7 and 8 are all derived from the same Hebrew word.

Our God is a great "keeper". He slumbers not nor sleeps. He stands in great contrast to men and pagan gods. Elijah demonstrated the uselessness of pagan gods as "keepers" on Mt. Carmel. There he mocked the prophets of Baal who cried unto their God but to no avail. No response came! Elijah said to the prophets of Baal:

“Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he SLEEPETH, and MUST BE AWAKED” (1 Kings 18v27).

In great contrast to pagan gods, our God is the epitome of watchfulness. As the prophet said to King Asa, *“the eyes of Yahweh run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him” (2 Chronicles 16v9).* And in Psalm 127v1 Solomon says *“except Yahweh KEEP the city, the watchman WAKETH but in vain”.*

Now there may be a progression of thought here between verse 1 of Psalm 121 where Hezekiah says, *“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills”* and Psalm 121v4 where he says, *“he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep”.* In Israel it was the practice to place watchmen on strategic high hills throughout the land. They would continuously scan the countryside for sign of an approaching invasion. At the first sign of an enemy the watchman would signal to the watchman on the next hill, and so on, until the message was conveyed to the city of Jerusalem where an appropriate response was organised.

But, if a watchman on a hill fell asleep, an invader could sweep into the land without warning. This may be what Hezekiah had in mind in verse 1. Possibly his words in that verse have the additional import that *“NOT to the watchmen on the hills do I lift up mine eyes. I lift up mine eyes to Yahweh who made heaven and earth, and who slumbers not nor sleeps. He is my infallible keeper”.*

DISCUSSION QUESTION:
 In view of the fact that Yahweh is our “keeper”,
 How do we account for the fact that accidents and tragedies sometimes occur to those who are in, or associated with, the household of faith?

Psalm 121v5 *“Yahweh is thy keeper: Yahweh is thy shade upon thy right hand.”*

Here Hezekiah presents yet another word picture of our marvellous God. He says in the words of the Authorised Version, *“Yahweh is thy shade upon thy right hand”.* While the Hebrew word ‘tsel’ here rendered “shade” does have that meaning, it has a figurative meaning as well. Figuratively, it means “defence or protection”. The word is actually rendered “defence” in Numbers 14v9.



So Yahweh is a defence at our right hand. Why there? The answer seems to lie in the fact that, as we “*put on the whole armour of God*” (Ephesians 6v11), we have the shield of faith in our left hand, and the sword of the spirit in our right. As we do battle in the warfare of life and we wield the sword of the spirit, sometimes the shield of faith may be knocked or moved aside, figuratively exposing the right side of our body. In such an eventuality, Hezekiah saw Yahweh at his right side, as a defence or protection in the warfare of life. He is at his right side to sustain, protect, and uphold the faithful warrior against a mortal blow.

David uses the same imagery.

“I have set Yahweh always before me: because he is AT MY RIGHT HAND, I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16v8).

If you are going to take hold of an object with a sure grip, (if you are right-handed), then it is the right hand that you will use. With Yahweh at our right side, there is someone of marvellous strength and security for us to grasp hold of as the storms of life sweep over us.

The fact that Yahweh was at his right side provided a wonderful sense of comfort and security to David and Hezekiah, and of course, the Lord Jesus Christ as well.

Peter makes reference to this matter in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ:

“For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is ON MY RIGHT HAND, that I should not be moved . . .” (Acts 2v25-28).

When all forsook the Lord and fled, God was still there at his right side.

“Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, BECAUSE THE FATHER IS WITH ME” (John 16v32).

We, too, can enjoy that great comfort. As one of our hymns says:

*God is my strong salvation,
What foe have I to fear?
In darkness and temptation,
My light, my help is near:
Though hosts encamp around me,
Firm to the fight I stand!
What terror can confound me,
With God at MY RIGHT HAND?*

(Hymn 53)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In any battle there are dangers for the warrior. That is true even in the matter of defending the Truth from attacks by errorists.

(1) What must we do to arm ourselves for the battles of life?

(2) Do we feel, like David, Hezekiah, and Christ, that God is at our right hand; and if not, what can we do about this?

Psalm 121v6 "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night."

The picture in this verse is one of Divine protection 24 hours a day. Sun and moon encompass the whole day under the symbols of their ruling powers (Genesis 1v16). Elsewhere in scripture the symbols of day and night are used to indicate the whole day long. Jacob in his complaint to Laban says:

"Thus I was; in THE DAY the drought consumed me, and the frost BY NIGHT; . . ." (Genesis 31v40).

Well, says Hezekiah, with God at my right hand I have protection day and night. Hymn 184 in our old, Australian Hymn book has words which perhaps summarise Hezekiah's thoughts. It says:

I need Thee EVERY HOUR,
Stay Thou near by;
Temptations lose their power
When Thou art nigh.

The Lord Jesus Christ, in describing the blessings of the future age, may have had Hezekiah's words from this Psalm in mind when he said:

"... neither shall THE SUN light on them, nor any heat" (Revelation 7v16).

By that symbology, the Lord was saying that, while we (like Hezekiah) may experience tribulations in this life, in the glorious Kingdom of God we shall no longer suffer distress from hostile governments and individuals — they are represented by the sun. We can extend that to say that the MOON is a symbol of hostile religious organisations (Revelation 6v12; 12v1), and, in that glorious day, they will be absolutely powerless to proclaim their error and persecute the saints.

Psalm 121v7 ***"Yahweh shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul."***

When Hezekiah says *"Yahweh shall preserve thee from ALL EVIL"*, he does not mean that we will not suffer trouble or distress in life. He *means* what Paul means when he said *"The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom"* (2 Timothy 4v18). Paul could say this after having been through the trials and tribulations of a dedicated and active service in the truth — a service which, for Christ's sake, led to beatings, imprisonment, stoning, shipwreck, being robbed, being left for dead, and so on. (See 2 Corinthians 11v23-27). But Yahweh kept him from eternal harm, and through the process of trial moulded him for the kingdom.

Because of his trust in God, Hezekiah was able to write the words of Psalm 121v7 from his own experience. He was delivered from the evil Sennacherib and his army. He was delivered from the sickness which had brought him to the gates of death.

The expression *"he shall preserve thy soul"* reminds us of the words spoken of the greater Hezekiah — the Lord Jesus Christ — *"That his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption"* (Acts 2v31).

Psalm 121v8 ***"Yahweh shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore."***

The expression *"going out and coming in"* indicates the whole of life (cf Deuteronomy 28v6; 2 Samuel 5v2). As Hezekiah looked back over his own life, and the life of David, he could see that no matter what the circumstances, Yahweh was there, and had promised to be evermore with those who put their trust in Him.

"Thus Yahweh saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side" (2 Chronicles 32v22).

We need to learn the lesson, that, no matter how desperate the situation may seem, we must be like Hezekiah. We must TRUST in Yahweh who has promised to deliver us from all evil.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(1) In what way will Yahweh preserve us from all evil?

(2) Seeing that sin brings suffering, is it true that those who suffer much evil must be great sinners?

(3) Is evil more likely to increase our faith or diminish it? Give scriptural examples.

(4) Is Psalm 121v8 applicable to us today?

PSALM 122

BLESSING AND PEACE IN ZION

INTRODUCTION

Now, in the Songs of the Degrees, we come to the first of the 4 Psalms which were written by David, and used by Hezekiah. That it is a Psalm of David is indicated by the superscription (the words at the top of the Psalm) "A Song of (the) degrees of David". Hezekiah used this Psalm of David because it beautifully expressed his own thoughts and feelings at this time.

Both David and Hezekiah had a great love for the temple. David, of course, longed for it to be built, and, although not allowed to build it, dedicated himself to gathering the material that it might be built by Solomon. When Hezekiah ascended the throne, he longed for the temple which his father had shut up to be opened again. In the very first month of his reign, he directed the temple doors be swung open, the temple cleansed, and the services recommenced (2 Chronicles 29v3, 16, 20). The temple featured very prominently in the lives of both of these great kings.

But it was not the Temple of Solomon that David and Hezekiah really had in mind. They looked forward to the glorious temple of the future age. They both knew that it was not until "a king shall reign in righteousness" (Isaiah 32v1) that true and lasting peace would come to Jerusalem, and they looked for that time. Although Hezekiah was glad to go again into Solomon's Temple after he was healed of his leprosy, his real joy awaits the future. Then he will be permanently healed of his mortality and in glorious immortality he will be extremely glad to go into the House of Yahweh.

Psalm 122v1 *"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of Yahweh."*

David, of course, never went into the temple literally. It did not exist in his day. But he went many times to the place where it was going to be built. He could see it in his mind's eye, just as we can picture the temple of the future age on Mt Zion. Unquestionably David could see beyond the temple that Solomon was to build to that which will be built by his greater son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what David really had in mind in this verse. As we proceed through the Psalm we shall find that it is the House of Prayer for all nations that is principally in view. We will be truly glad if we are found worthy of immortality when the Lord comes, and we are able to go up into the house of Yahweh with David and Hezekiah.

Hezekiah had a foretaste of that joy which we hope will be ours. He had been mortally sick. He had the dreaded disease of leprosy, which, under the Law of Moses, would have excluded him from temple worship. He was sick unto death.

As Isaiah 53v4 says, the inhabitants of Jerusalem did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.

In this stricken, helpless state, Hezekiah prays to God (Isaiah 38v1-2). We know what he wanted. He wanted to be healed. He wanted to be restored to life, as it were, that he might go into the temple. God heard his prayer and answered it.

“Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith Yahweh, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day THOU SHALT GO UP UNTO THE HOUSE OF YAHWEH” (2 Kings 20v5).

It was to be on the third day. For Hezekiah, it was going to be a kind of resurrection. Hezekiah’s body of humiliation was going to be redeemed from death. It was a great type of the resurrection of the Lord (see the section in the Introduction headed “HEZEKIAH’S TYPICAL RESURRECTION”).

What joy, what great joy, there would have been for Hezekiah, when, on the third day, he was raised from his death bed, and was able to go into the house of Yahweh. But a far greater joy awaits him after his ACTUAL resurrection in the future.

Psalm 122v2 *“Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.”*

How we should long for the day when our body of humiliation will be changed and fashioned like our Lord’s glorious body (Philippians 3v21), so that our feet might stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.

We need to picture that joyous scene. We need to have in our mind’s eye a vivid concept of that glorious city. To be able to live successfully now, we need a vision of the future, so that like our Lord we might be able to endure the cross and despise the shame (Hebrews 12v2). Where there is no vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29v18).

David looked for the wonderful day in the age to come when the city of Jerusalem will be the epitome of unity, harmony, and peace.

<p>DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:</p> <p>(1) How can we tell that the “House of Yahweh” refers to the temple of the future age?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

- (2) David and Hezekiah's affections were on "things above", (i.e. on eternal things). What can we do to increase our affection and longing for the Kingdom?

Psalm 122v3 ***"Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together:"***

The words "compact together" (Hebrew 'habah') are rendered by Rotherham as "all joined together as one". The idea of this Hebrew word is "fellowship". In a sense that was true of the city of Jerusalem in the days of David and Hezekiah. There was a wall around the parts of the city so that it was "compact together". The hill of Moriah where the temple stood in the days of Hezekiah was joined to the Hill of Zion (to its south) by a kind of fortified bridge — a bridge that probably formed part of the city wall. So the city was "compact together". And the word 'saalem' as we have it in JERUSALEM stems from a root word meaning "to be whole or complete, and by extension to be at peace".

But was Jerusalem a united city in the days when Sennacherib came down? Not at all! There were walls and gates and bridges, but the people of Jerusalem were not united behind their king. Some were faithful. Some were faithless. Some said "*let us eat and drink! for tomorrow we shall die*" (Isaiah 22v13). Some trusted in Yahweh. Others looked to Egypt for help.

Is Jerusalem a city which "is joined together as one" today? Is it united? Not at all! Jews and Arabs live there. It is a city of tension. There is no unity of thought. There is no unity of religion. There are Christian churches, Moslem mosques, and Jewish synagogues. There is hatred and strife in Jerusalem today.

But it will "*be joined together as one*" in the gladsome day when it shall be called "*the throne of Yahweh*" (Jeremiah 3v17).

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Be prepared to describe and support with scriptural references your concept of the Jerusalem of the Coming Age.

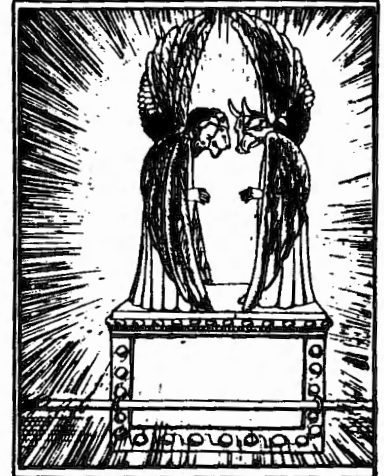
Psalm 122v4 *“Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of Yahweh, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of Yahweh.”*

The “testimony” refers to the ark which contained the 2 tables of the Law of Moses. They were the tables of the testimony (Exodus 16v33-34). And the tribes of Israel should have gone up three times each year to appear there before Yahweh, who dwelt between the cherubim on the ark of the testimony.

Had the tribes of Israel gone up faithfully to appear before Yahweh as represented by the ark, they would not have been in the trouble that they were in with Sennacherib’s army over-running the kingdom of Judah and besieging Jerusalem.

“When a man’s ways please Yahweh, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Proverbs 16v7).

Of course some of the tribes had come up when Hezekiah invited all the tribes to come to Jerusalem to keep the passover. But it was a fairly pitiful response.



The Ark of the Testimony

Psalm 122v4 really looks to the glorious future when all the tribes of Israel will go up to the temple in Jerusalem to worship God in spirit and truth, and to give thanks to the name of Yahweh. In that day the “testimony of Israel” will be seen wonderfully manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ and the immortal saints (See further explanation about what the ark represents in the notes on Psalm 132v13-14).

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

How is the Ark of the Testimony a fit symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ and the saints in immortal glory?

Psalm 122v5 *“For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.”*

In the days of Solomon’s temple it was the duty of the king himself, and the priests, to exercise judgment (Deuteronomy 17v9-10; 2 Samuel 15v2-3; 1 Kings 3v16).

But we should note that what we have here are THRONES of judgment, because, again in this verse, we are conveyed into the future. Here we see Jerusalem when it will be the city of the great king. In that glorious day the thrones will not be manned by fallible mortals but by immortal king-priests whose great privilege it will be to sing in joyous gratitude:

“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; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5v9-10).

The thrones which are mentioned in the latter part of Psalm 122v5 are particularly *“the thrones of THE HOUSE OF DAVID”*. By the “house of David” we understand the mortal house (or family) of David as mentioned, for example, in Zechariah 12v7, 10, 12. These thrones will be manned by the apostles as the Lord promised them:

“And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon TWELVE THRONES, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19v28).

All the prayers of the saints which have flowed from their lips over thousands of years will then have been answered, and Jerusalem will truly be a city of peace, with the mighty Prince of Peace reigning on David’s throne.

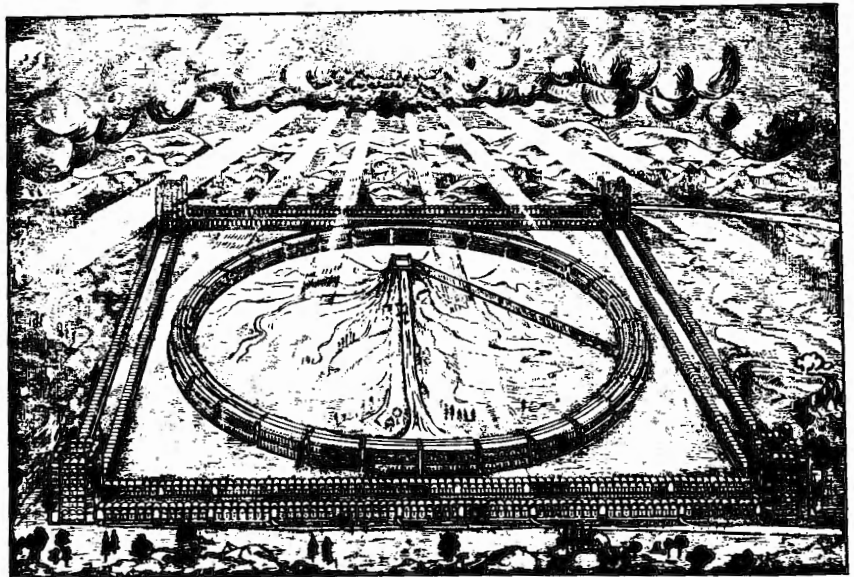
DISCUSSION QUESTION:

In what way can we prepare NOW for the work of assisting the Lord Jesus Christ to rule the world in righteousness? Will all positions in the Kingdom be equal?

Psalm 122v6-7 *“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.”*

This verse opens with a prayer for the individual to receive the peace that belongs to Jerusalem.

The Hebrew word rendered “prosperity” is ‘shalvah’. It has the basic meaning of “security”. Security within thy palaces. “What palaces?” we might ask. Gesenius suggests that the Hebrew word rendered “palaces” (‘armown’) means in certain references the “innermost part, the highest and strongest”. When that meaning is applied to the temple of the future age, it refers to the inner circle of the temple buildings which will surround Mt. Zion. This part of the temple is reserved for the Lord Jesus Christ and the immortal saints.



VIEW OF THE SANCTUARY (Prophecy of Ezekiel, chapters 40-47)
“Glorious things are spoken of thee, O Jerusalem”
Psalm 87v3

Truly there will be security there. For the saints will be the immortal messengers of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Isaiah says,

“Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man (i.e. an immortal man) shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isaiah 32v1-2).

Psalm 122v8 *“For my brethren and companions’ sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee.”*

David and Hezekiah’s “brethren” were the Jews. Their “companions” would seem to be those who, not being Jews, had nevertheless embraced

the hope of Israel. So we are able to find ourselves in this verse. For all their sakes David and Hezekiah's prayer was "peace be within thee".

We should add our own prayers to theirs and say "Amen. Peace be within thee". That is our hope. It should be all our desire.

Psalm 122v9 ***"Because of the house of Yahweh our God I will seek thy good."***

The Psalmist finishes on the point that he will seek the good of Jerusalem because Yahweh's house will be built there. That, too, is why we should pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(1) Which Jerusalem did David have in mind here — the city which existed in his own day, or the Jerusalem of the Coming Age?

(2) Why should we pray for the peace of Jerusalem?

(3) In what way do we love it?

(4) Describe what it will be like to be an immortal inhabitant of the "palaces".

(5) Does a zeal for Yahweh's house "eat us up"? If not, why not?

CONCLUSION

The House of Prayer will be the focal point of a world made new. Both David and Hezekiah longed to be able to stand within that future House of Prayer. David said *"the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up"* (Psalm 69v9). The disciples recalled those words as being applicable to the Lord Jesus Christ as he drove out the oxen and overturned the moneychangers' tables in the temple (of Herod) and proclaimed *"make not my Father's house an house of merchandise"* (John 2v15-17).

"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Psalm 137v5-6).

If only we could feel the same way that David and Hezekiah did about the glorious temple of the coming age! If only we could express ourselves as they did! If only we could see ourselves there! How much better off we would be!

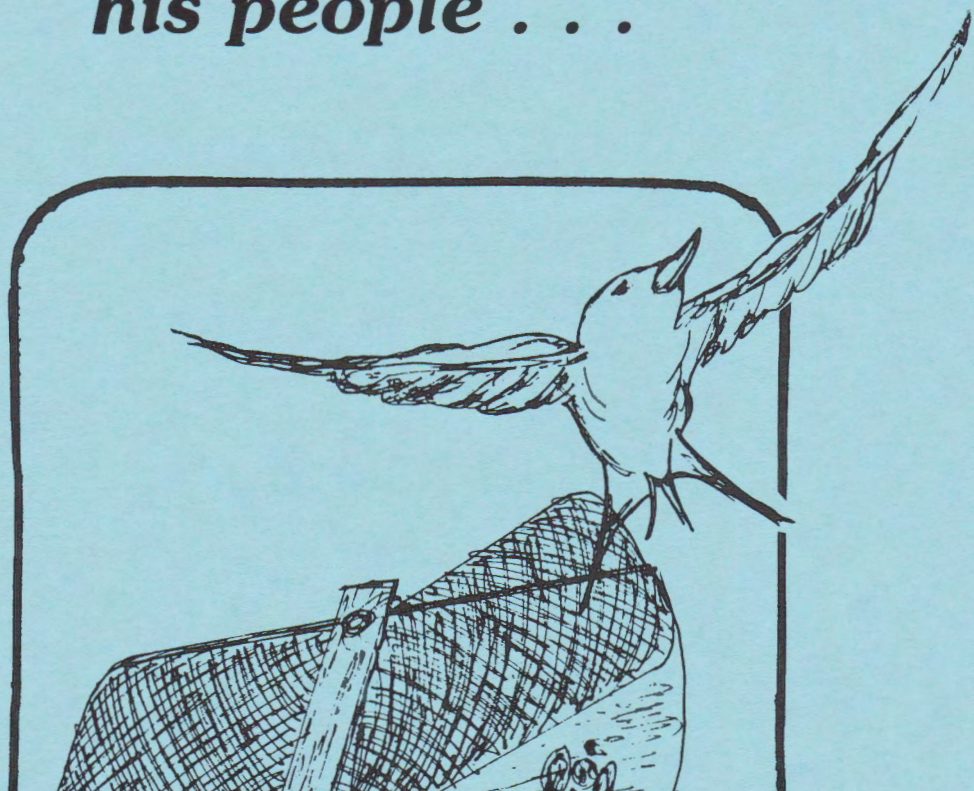
We would then more clearly see this world's goods for what they are — vanity and vexation of spirit.

Let us pray that Yahweh will soon arise and have mercy on Zion — that the set time to favour her may come soon (Psalm 102v13).

Despite the difficulties of life, we must continue to trust in God to the end that we can confidently say *"Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem"* (Psalm 122v2).

STUDY No. 2

***Yahweh is
round about
his people . . .***



STUDY No. 2

PSALMS, 123, 124 & 125

PSALM 123 – A PSALM OF DISTRESS

INTRODUCTION

This Psalm outlines Hezekiah's cry for mercy in the light of his great DISTRESS. It shows his humility as he waited patiently and looked for God to have mercy on him. The lesson for us is that we too must place our reliance upon God in the distresses of life. We must wait patiently, with our hope in God, for the outworking of His plans in our lives.

Psalm 123v1 *"Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens."*

When people are in despair, when they are cast down, when they feel without hope, they tend to drop their heads and look down. Their feelings are plainly obvious in their demeanour. At that time many in Jerusalem were totally dejected. There was a great feeling of hopelessness, and from a purely human point of view there was great cause for despair.

Also from a human point of view, the person in Jerusalem who had the greatest cause for despair was King Hezekiah. But Hezekiah was a remarkable man of faith. Despite the siege by Sennacherib; despite his own terrible sickness; despite the fact that he had produced no seed to follow him on David's throne; despite the faithlessness of many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem; despite all that, Hezekiah maintained his faith in God. He did not look down. HE LOOKED UP! *"Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens"*.

Hezekiah must have felt very much the same as the apostle Paul did on occasions. Paul said,

"Our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us . . ."
(2 Corinthians 7v5-6).

Like Paul, Hezekiah knew that the source of all comfort lay in God. Hezekiah knew that, from a natural human point of view, Rabshakeh's boast to destroy Jerusalem and its inhabitants was the most likely outcome of the siege. But Hezekiah had a source of help and comfort that Rabshakeh did not.



It is interesting, in the light of this verse, to think about where different classes of people focussed their eyes at this time. Obviously, the eyes of the Assyrians were on the inhabitants of Jerusalem — they were keenly watching them. The eyes of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were on the Assyrians — they were deeply concerned as to what their next move might be. But Hezekiah had the eyes of a man of faith. He lifted his eyes and looked to Yahweh for strength and deliverance from the present distress.

Hezekiah's faith was like that of David who said,

"Mine eyes are unto thee, O Yahweh Adonai: in thee is my trust"
(Psalm 141v8).

"Mine eyes are ever toward Yahweh; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net" (Psalm 25v15).

But we would make a great mistake if we thought that all Hezekiah had to do was look to God, and He would provide immediate deliverance. Hezekiah had to persevere in prayer. He says,

"Mine eyes FAIL with looking upward" (Isaiah 38v14).

You see, it was a matter of being faithful in prayer; of continuing in prayer; of striving in prayer; of persisting in prayer; until deliverance came.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
For prayer to be effective, patience and persistence are often needed.

(1) Why is God sometimes slow to answer prayer?

(2) Will God answer every request that we make?

Our demeanour can provide either encouragement or discouragement to others.

(3) In times of personal distress what should our demeanour, attitude, and conversation be like? (Provide scriptural examples)

Psalm 123v2 ***“Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon Yahweh our God, until that he have mercy upon us.”***

In this verse Hezekiah likened himself to a lowly servant. He was a great king. But in humility he made himself of no reputation, and adopted the role of a household servant (cf Philippians 2v7). In doing so he shows the true role for all who are faithful in Israel.

The faithful are like household servants who look to the hands of their master. There are 2 ideas here. They revolve around the fact that the hand is the symbol of authority and the symbol of sustenance.

Faithful household servants always had their eyes on the hands of their masters. By the movement of the hand the master or mistress of the house would signal what they wanted done. Immediately the faithful servant would respond to the command. In return, the householder would open his hand to provide his servants with their daily sustenance.

Now Hezekiah saw Yahweh as the great Master of His household. If Yahweh were to signal His command by the movement of His hand, His will would immediately be done. Hezekiah, as a faithful servant, knew that *“Yahweh’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save”*. He knew that at the appropriate time God would act to redeem His servants from the siege of the Assyrians. Hezekiah, and the faithful in Jerusalem, watched and waited for Yahweh’s hand to move for the salvation of His people.

In addition, as David says,

“The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145v15-16).

Hezekiah well knew that Yahweh's prior blessing had physically sustained the inhabitants of Jerusalem through Sennacherib's siege. Before Sennacherib came down, God had opened wide His hand so that there was an adequate store of food in the city. Also, by Divine blessing, and Hezekiah's aqueduct, there was a good supply of water for the city — water in the springs, pools and cisterns hewn out in the limestone rock.



CISTERNS OF JERUSALEM

So Hezekiah acknowledges his total dependence upon God for two things — redemption from the hand of the enemy, and daily sustenance of food and water.

While Hezekiah was looking to God in faith, Rabshakeh and the Assyrians were proclaiming their blasphemy to all who would listen. They said,

“Hear the message from Sennacherib king of Assyria, What gives you the confidence to stay in Jerusalem under siege? Is not Hezekiah deluding you? Is he not condemning you to die of hunger and thirst when he says: Yahweh our God will save us from the King of Assyria?” (2 Chronicles 32v10-11 Jerusalem Bible translation).

How those evil words would have made faithful Hezekiah look even more keenly to the hand of his God, who was his Master. Really Hezekiah's prayer in Psalm 123v2 is very similar to the prayer that the Lord taught his disciples

1. Give us this day our daily bread.
2. Deliver us from evil.
3. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory.

The words of hymn 57 express for us what Hezekiah knew and experienced in his own life.

If thou but suffer God to guide thee,
And hope in Him through all thy ways,
He'll give thee strength whate'er betide thee,
And bear thee through the evil days;
Who trust in God's unchanging love,
Build on the Rock that naught can more.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(1) Discuss how the social welfare system has seemingly reduced man's dependence upon God.

(2) How has this affected our spirituality?

Psalm 123v3-4 ***"Have mercy upon us, O Yahweh, 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."***

What does Hezekiah mean when he says, "We are exceedingly filled with contempt"? The Revised Standard Version has "for we have had more than enough of contempt". The Jerusalem Bible has "we have had more than our share of scorn".

“Scorning” and “contempt” refer to the blasphemous words of Rabshakeh (2 Kings 18v19-35; 19v8-13; 2 Chronicles 32v10-19; Isaiah 36v4-21; 37v8-13). As the scriptural references indicate, the Bible records quite a deal of the blasphemy of the Assyrians. One extract from it here will suffice.

“Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed, as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Telassar? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arphad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Iuah?” (Isaiah 37v10-13).

As 2 Chronicles 32v19 says,

“They spake against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth, which were the work of the hands of man.”

No wonder Hezekiah says, *“Have mercy upon us, O Yahweh, have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly filled with contempt.”* Hezekiah’s appeal is like our hymn (based on Psalm 57) which says:

Be merciful to me, O God,
 Thy mercy unto me
 Do Thou extend; because my soul
 Doth put her trust in Thee:
 (Hymn 3).

As we think of Hezekiah, Yahweh’s suffering servant, whose soul was exceedingly filled with contempt, we can surely see in his experiences a foreshadowing of that which was to be the lot of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Isaiah 53v3 *“He is despised . . . and we esteemed him not.”*
- Psalm 119v51 *“The proud have had me greatly in derision . . .”*
- Luke 23v11 *“And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him . . .”*
- Luke 23v35-36 *“And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him . . .”*

Paul, too, had similar experiences. He said,

“being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day” (1 Corinthians 4v12-13).

When to a lesser extent men speak ill of us today, for Christ’s sake, we should not be discouraged. In fact, we are blessed when we faithfully endure such things. Peter said,

“For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God” (1 Peter 2v19-20).

The Lord said:

“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5v11-12).

Why art thou then cast down, my soul?
What should discourage thee?
And why with vexing thoughts are thou
Disquieted in me?

Still trust in God; for Him to praise
Good cause I yet shall have;
He of my count'nance is the health,
My God that me doth save.

(Hymn 28)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(1) Give examples from your personal or ecclesial experience where your soul has been filled with contempt.

(2) What has been your response in those situations?

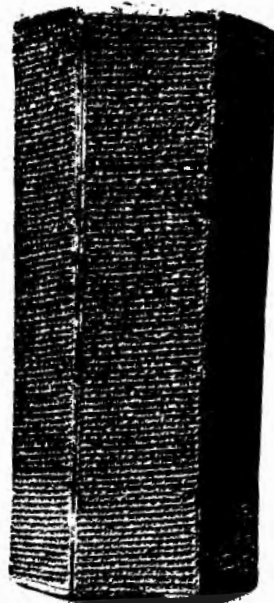
(3) How did David, Hezekiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and others withstand the pressure of the scorners?

PSALM 124 – A PSALM OF TRUST

INTRODUCTION

From DISTRESS in Psalm 123 we now sweep on to a Psalm of TRUST in Psalm 124. The superscription informs us that it is a Psalm of David. Hezekiah found it to be exactly appropriate to his own circumstances. In Verse 7 David says, *“Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.”*

Interestingly, Sennacherib used very similar imagery to describe Hezekiah’s plight. The British Museum contains a clay prism on which Sennacherib recorded 8 of his military expeditions, including his siege of Jerusalem. Sennacherib says *‘I reckoned them as a spoil. Hezekiah himself like a caged bird within Jerusalem, his royal city, I shut in’.*



Clay prism containing the final edition of Sennacherib’s annals, dated to 691 BC.



Clay tablet describing some of the tribute of the Kingdom of Judah.

But the bird escaped! *“Our soul is escaped as a bird of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped”* (Psalm 123v7).

360 years before, David had also felt shut up like a bird in a cage, as he hid from Saul. He felt like a bird in a trap. David says that Saul hunted him like a partridge in the mountains (1 Samuel 26v20). Saul, on numerous occasions, thought that he had David “shut in”. For example, he says,

“God hath delivered him (David) into mine hand; for he is SHUT IN by entering into a town that hath GATES and BARS” (1 Samuel 23v7).

As David fled from Saul and hid himself in the caves (1 Samuel 23v19, 23; 26v1), Saul again thought that he had David trapped like a bird in a cage. But Saul was mistaken and the “bird” escaped!

Hezekiah saw David’s experiences as a parallel to his own. He was not only shut up in Jerusalem by the action of the Assyrian king; he was also shut up in his own house by leprosy. On his death-bed he lay shut in by the sickness that one of Job’s friends described as “the king of terrors” (Job 18v14).

But Psalm 124 is not a Psalm of despair. It is a Psalm of trust. It is a Psalm of hope. It reveals the marvellous deliverance that Hezekiah experienced out of all his distresses because Yahweh was on his side. Hezekiah put his trust in God, Who heard his prayers and answered them. This Psalm teaches us that *“our help is in the name of Yahweh, who made heaven and earth”* (verse 8).

Psalm 124v1-2 *“If it had not been Yahweh who was on our side, now may Israel say; If it had not been Yahweh who was on our side, when men rose up against us:”*

These two verses can be summarised in the words of the apostle Paul:

“If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8v31).

Or, as David said,

“Yahweh is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? Yahweh is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27v1).

No matter what the circumstances of life; no matter how black the outlook may seem from a human point of view; even if we seem shut up like a bird in a cage — STILL TRUST IN GOD. That’s the great lesson of this Psalm.

But why does the Psalmist repeat himself? There are 2 reasons for this. So deeply was David (and Hezekiah) moved by what God had done for him when he was in catastrophic trouble that his emotions bubbled over. He felt constrained to emphasise that it was only because Yahweh was on his side that man could not prevail against him. If it had not been for Yahweh he was lost! Nothing could have saved him. Without God escape was utterly impossible.

A second reason for the repetition of verse 1 has probably got something to do with the way that the Psalm was sung. One voice may have sung verse 1, and after the words “now may Israel say”, the choir may have joined in with the same words. Be that as it may, it certainly was a Psalm sung with tremendous feeling, as the faithful gave expression to their trust in God.

Psalms 124:4-5 *“Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: Then the proud waters had gone over our soul.”*

In these verses the metaphor is changed. Now instead of the oppressor being represented as a fierce ravenous beast, he is seen as a mighty flood which would have carried them away except Yahweh had been on their side.

In a message which Yahweh sent to His people in the Kingdom of Judah He likens the king of Assyria to an overflowing flood:

“Now therefore, behold, Yahweh bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over . . .” (Isaiah 8v7-8).

But of course this Psalm was originally David’s Psalm. He, too, saw his enemies as a great flood that would have carried him away if his trust was not in Yahweh, and if He were not on his side.

“And David spake unto Yahweh the words of this song in the day that Yahweh had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul: . . . I will call on Yahweh, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. When the WAVES of death compassed me, the FLOODS of ungodly men made me afraid; . . . He sent from above, he took me; he drew me out of many WATERS; He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me” (2 Samuel 22v1, 4-5, 17-18).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
David, Hezekiah, and the Lord Jesus Christ pictured their enemies in graphic terms. They saw them as ravaging lions, rampaging bulls, and overflowing floods.

(1) Do we picture those that oppose the Truth in such graphic terms today? If not, why not?

(2) Is it true that the opposition to the Truth has not changed, but its method of attack has?

(3) Is the opposition to the Truth today more or less dangerous than in times past?

Psalm 124v6 ***“Blessed be Yahweh, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.”***

To the faithless man in Jerusalem it looked as though they would become a victim of the roaring Assyrian lion. Hezekiah himself says,

“I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones . . .” (Isaiah 38v13).



If Yahweh had not been on their side, if their trust had not been in Him, then unquestionably the inhabitants of Jerusalem would have been as prey in the mouth of the Assyrian lion.

But remember this was originally David's Psalm. Before he went to fight Goliath he carefully explained to Saul the great benefit one has if Yahweh is on one's side. David said to Saul,

"Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17v32).

But faithless Saul said,

"Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth" (1 Samuel 17v33).

David replied,

"Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God . . . Yahweh that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17v34-37).

This shows remarkable trust in God. There were other times when God delivered him out of the mouth of the Philistine lion. Sometimes in the midst of oppression and depression we are inclined to make mistakes. David also made mistakes. On occasions Saul's attitude to David depressed him. On one of those occasions he went to the Philistines for help. You see, while he steadfastly maintained his trust in God, he was required to do what he could to help himself. But he should never have gone to the Philistines, as we should never go down to "Egypt" (the world) for help.

Psalm 56 commemorates one of those occasions when David went to the Philistines. The superscription says *"Michtam of David when the Philistines took him in Gath"*. (See 1 Samuel 21v10 - 22v1). David says, in opening that Psalm,

"Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me. Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High." (Psalm 56v1-2).

Despite the difficulties created for him by Saul and the Philistines, David says,

"In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me" (Psalm 56v11).

So David's experiences were appropriate to the circumstances in which Hezekiah found himself at this time. As God heard David when he cried until Him in faith, so God would hear Hezekiah. And so too will God hear us as well.

Psalm 124v7 ***"Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped."***

Comments have already been made on this verse in the section found at the beginning of this Psalm.

It is most unusual for a bird to escape from a snare. If a bird is trapped in a fowler's net, then that usually is the end of the bird. Birds don't have the strength in themselves to break the net. It requires some extraordinary circumstances for the bird to escape.

This Psalm likens the Assyrian army to a fowler's snare or a fowler's net. Shut up in Jerusalem, Hezekiah and his ecclesia were like a bird in the Assyrian net. As everyone knew, from a human point of view, they were as good as "dead ducks", to extend the analogy. And that is what Sennacherib thought as well.

But there was far more than the human point of view to be considered. Hezekiah and some of his ecclesia had outstanding faith and trust in God. As God had delivered David, so they believed that Yahweh would deliver them. And He did! What a remarkable deliverance it was!

In Jerusalem the inhabitants went to bed one night trapped in the Assyrian net. Next morning when they awoke they found that the net was broken, and they had escaped!

The evidence of the broken net was everywhere to be seen. As they looked out from the walls of Jerusalem, there were dead Assyrians everywhere. How did it happen? During the night:

"The angel of Yahweh went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses" (Isaiah 37v36).

What an extraordinary breaking of the Assyrian net that was! What a great victory of faith it was for Hezekiah and those that were faithful in his ecclesia! How they would rejoice and sing such hymns as we might sing,

If thou but suffer God to guide thee,
 And hope in Him through all thy ways,
 He'll give thee strength whate'er betide thee,
 And bear thee through the evil days;
 Who trust in God's unchanging love,
 Build on the Rock that naught can move.
 (Hymn 57)

Psalm 124v8 ***"Our help is in the name of Yahweh, who made heaven and earth."***

What great help they had received. Their victory lay in the power of the Creator of heaven and earth. Isaiah says that *"the name of Yahweh cometh from far, burning with his anger"* (Isaiah 30v27). The blasphemy of the proud Assyrian had gone too far. Hezekiah's prayers had been those of a consistent, persistent, faithful man. His prayers were heard and answered.

It is absolutely no different today. Truly our help is in the name of Yahweh Who made heaven and earth.

After such a deliverance as that, we can imagine the feelings of great joy and gratitude they had as they sang the words of Psalm 125. Here indeed was blessing and peace in Zion — the theme of Psalm 125.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Very often in life, like David, Hezekiah, and the Lord Jesus Christ, we are saved from the hand of the enemy.

- (1) Give examples of such deliverance from scripture and your own personal and ecclesial experience if possible.

- (2) Are we as thankful as we should be for such deliverance? If not, why not?

- (3) Are we sometimes not delivered because we lack sufficient faith?

PSALM 125

– BLESSING AND PEACE IN ZION

INTRODUCTION

This Psalm depicts the extent of Yahweh's overshadowing care. It teaches us that if we are upright in heart we have the great blessing of extensive protection from evil.

Psalm 125v1 ***“They that trust in Yahweh shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.”***

Why are those that trust in Yahweh likened to Mt. Zion? The answer lies in the fact that, of all the mountains of the earth which exist today, or existed in Hezekiah's day, Mt. Zion is the only one that is sure to survive the topographical changes in the Middle East when *“his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives”* (Zechariah 14v4).

As Anthem 49 says,

All they who in the Lord confide,
Shall as Mt. Zion be;
Firm as a rock shall they abide,
To all eternity.

Today, as in Hezekiah's day, Zion is a lowly hill. Other hills and mountains in Israel are higher. But in the coming age it will be elevated. Today, brethren and sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ are the meek and lowly ones of the earth. But in that day we look forward to being elevated to the status of king-priests.

So far as Mt. Zion is concerned, in that glorious day the inhabitants of the earth will sing of it, saying,

“Beautiful in ELEVATION, the joy of the whole earth, Is mount Zion”
(Psalm 48v2 Revised Version).

Mt. Zion will not be removed as the Mt. of Olives and other mountains will be removed, but it abideth for ever.

The coming elevation of Mt. Zion is the very centre of our hope. It will be the centre of the House of Prayer for all nations that Christ will build.

But even now we have to be like Mt. Zion. We have to be people that are “stedfast and unmoveable” in faith. Rotherham translates “cannot be removed” as “shall not be shaken”. The Jerusalem Bible has “unshakeable”. That tells us that the difficulties of life must not shake our faith in God.

In Galatians chapter 4 the apostle Paul says that, in another sense, we are now to be like Mt. Zion of the Coming Age. Paul makes a contrast between two mountains and two classes of people. He says that those who lived

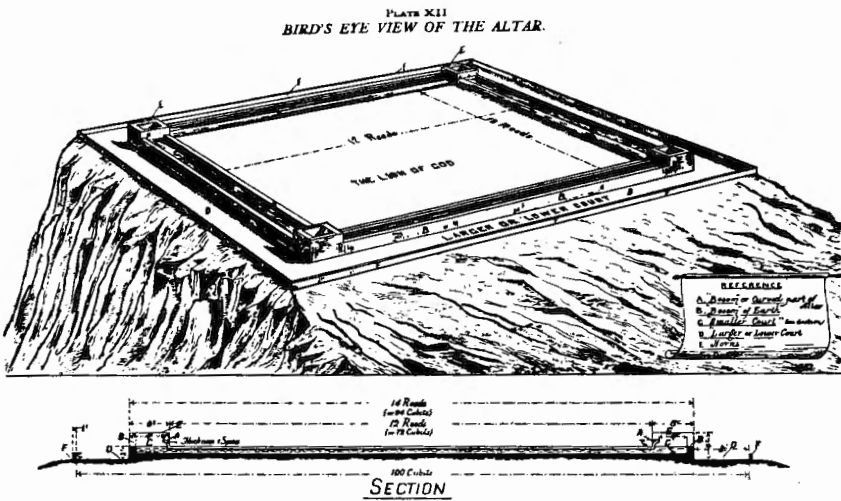
under the Law of Moses, and sought salvation therein, were like Mt. Sinai in Arabia. They were like the city of Jerusalem which existed in his own day. Such people were in bondage.

On the other hand, he says that people who are truly in Christ, are like Mt. Zion — like the Mt. Zion of the Kingdom Age. They are like the city of Jerusalem which will be the city of the great King. He says of THAT Jerusalem,

“But Jerusalem which is above (which is elevated) is free, which is the mother of us all” (Galatians 4v26).

It is our mother in the sense that we are brought to spiritual birth by the great hope which we have of its coming glory.

Many beautiful lessons can be derived from the fact that, in the Kingdom, at the apex of Mt. Zion will be the altar of sacrifice. It teaches us that, if we want to enjoy the blessings of the Coming Age and be elevated as Mt. Zion, we have to live sacrificial lives now as we await the glad day of Zion’s elevation.



So, if we trust in God, we shall be in the Kingdom as eternal and immovable as Mt. Zion. Truly Yahweh hath done great things for us whereof we are glad.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(1) Describe the topographical changes which will take place in the Middle East when Christ intervenes in the battle of Armageddon. (Provide a diagram if possible).

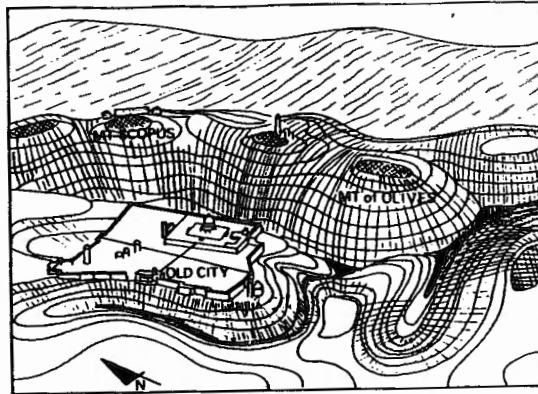
(2) Why does Zechariah 14v4 say that it is "HIS" feet, i.e. Yahweh's feet, that shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives?

(3) Why are those that trust in Yahweh likened to Mount Zion?

Psalm 125v2 *"As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so Yahweh is round about his people from henceforth even for ever."*

Again, in this verse, Hezekiah paints a picture of the security which God affords to people who trust in Him. He says that God is round about His people as the mountains are round about Jerusalem.

If you look at the city of Jerusalem, particularly as it was in the days of Hezekiah, you find that it was protected by valleys, and beyond the valleys were “the everlasting hills”. To the south (and west) was the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna), and further south the Hill of Evil Counsel. On the east was the Kidron Valley, and beyond that the Mount of Olives and Mount Scopus; and to the south-east the Mount of Offence. The northern part of the Kidron Valley was also called the Valley of Jehoshaphat and beyond that was French Hill. (Some of these names are considerably more modern than Hezekiah’s day).



A reliable water source is crucial for the survival of any settlement. Jerusalem was well-served by the spring called Gichon in the Kidron Valley. A karstic spring, the Gichon's waters were stored in pools and used during the dry summer months. Later, aqueducts and cisterns which collected and stored rainwater during the winter were used to supplement Jerusalem's supply of water.

To this day, the natural security of the hills and valleys surrounding Jerusalem and the constant water source of the Gichon are vital features of the area's topography.

Hezekiah says that, as the mountains are round about Jerusalem on every side, so is Yahweh round about His people. It is another way of expressing what David says in Psalm 34,

“The angel of Yahweh encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psalm 34v7).

That is exactly what Hezekiah believed. In the face of the impending danger he delivered a stirring exhortation to his people. He said,

“Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: FOR THERE BE MORE WITH US THAN WITH HIM” (2 Chronicles 32v7).

When the inhabitants of Jerusalem looked out on the Assyrian army they saw something like 200,000 Assyrians. They totally surrounded Jerusalem. But Hezekiah said *“there be more with us than with him”*. AND THERE WERE! He was not talking about the number of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He was talking about the angels of Yahweh that encamp around them that fear Him.

Hezekiah’s declaration of faith *“that there be more with us than with him”* was in fact a repetition of the words of Elisha, when a very similar situation arose when the Syrians surrounded Dothan,

“And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2 Kings 6v16).

But Elisha’s servant was somewhat sceptical, so Elisha prayed that God would open his eyes. Then the servant saw:

“And, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (2 Kings 6v17).

As the mountains are round about Jerusalem so Yahweh is round about His people. What a wonderful God we have! What marvellous things He will do for those that fear not man, but fear the mighty God of Jacob!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Discuss the work of the angels now, in relation to the saints.

(1) Do we really believe that the angels of Yahweh encamp about us?

(2) Do you believe that you have a personal angel?

(3) What can we do to increase our comprehension of the work of the angels in our lives?

(4) In what way will our work in the Kingdom among the mortal population be like the work that the angels do now?

Psalm 125v3 ***“For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.”***

In the first instance, “the wicked” refers to Sennacherib and his army. Isaiah declared,

“For through the voice of Yahweh shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which SMOTE WITH A ROD” (Isaiah 30v31).

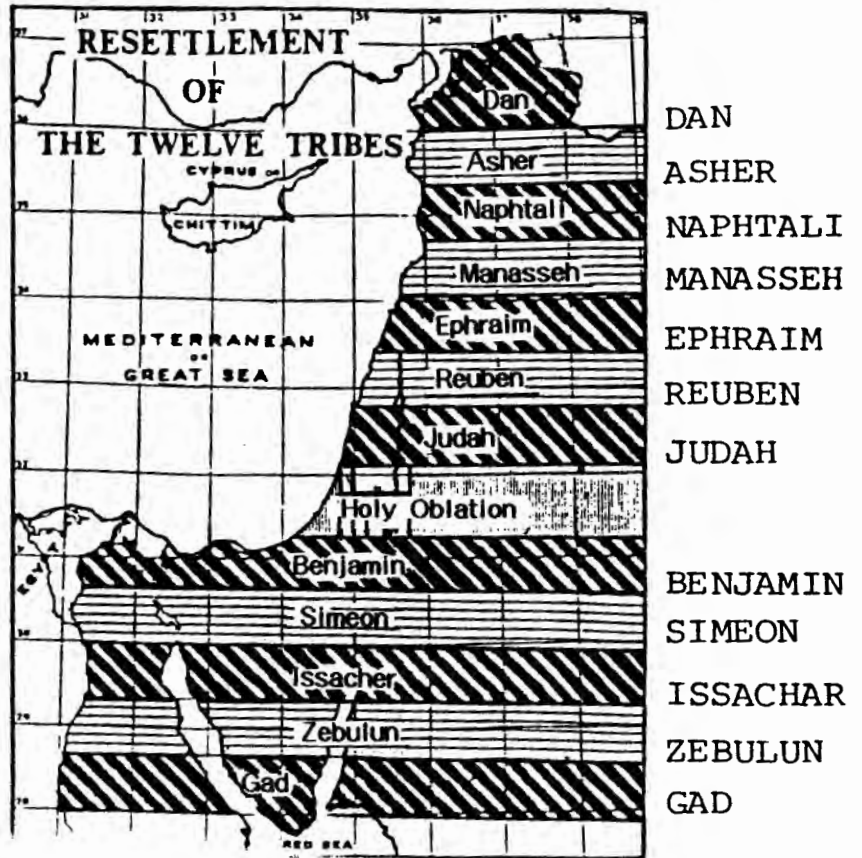
What Isaiah chapter 30 really has in view is the latter-day Assyrian i.e. Russia, as it sweeps down from the north into the land of Israel. Russia will be destroyed just as surely as was the Assyrian army in Hezekiah’s day.

The “lot of the righteous”, to which Hezekiah refers, is their portion or inheritance in the land of Israel (cf Joshua 18v10-11). Russia will not be permitted to permanently occupy Israel, but will be removed as were the Assyrians. The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the inheritance which God has promised to Abraham and his seed (Genesis 13v15).

The nation of Israel itself will be “righteous” in the day that Yahweh transforms them and causes them to walk in His statutes and keep His judgments (Ezekiel 36v27).

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

(1) Discuss this verse as it will apply in the Kingdom Age.



THE TRIBES' INHERITANCE (LOT) IN THE KINGDOM

Psalm 125v4-5 *“Do good, O Yahweh, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts. As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, Yahweh shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.”*

These final verses of the Psalm deal with the issues of eternal life and eternal death — to do good or to do evil. When the Jerusalem Ecclesia was faced with the challenge of Rabshakeh and the army he commanded, some chose to do evil. They turned aside from the Truth and entered into “crooked ways”.

There is an important lesson here. Hezekiah prayed that Yahweh would do good to those that are upright in heart. There is none of us that is “good” in the absolute sense. The Lord made that point. He said to the person who addressed him as “Good Master”,

“Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19v17).

So it is being “upright in heart” and “keeping the commandments” that is important. If we are upright in heart we will fear God. While Yahweh has promised extensive protection to those that “fear him” (Psalm 34v7), He will not be concerned with those that turn aside to crooked ways to work iniquity. As anthem 49 says,

Do good, O Lord, do good to those
Who put their trust in Thee;
Who in Thy shadow find repose,
And evil counsels flee.

There was much evil counsel from the workers of iniquity in Hezekiah’s day. From without was the appeal of Rabshakeh. His evil counsel was that members of the Jerusalem Ecclesia should “come out to me” and “make an agreement with me” (2 Kings 18v31). Rabshakeh’s appeal was the appeal of the world. The world would love to have us abandon the way of righteousness and join them in their wicked ways. The world, like Rabshakeh, believes that we are crazy to have faith and trust in God. It would have us leave the security of the Truth to “enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season”. How foolish we would be to do that! It is far better to choose:

“rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11v25).

But not only was there Rabshakeh’s evil counsel from without, there was evil counsel from within the Ecclesia as well. There were those who, when they saw the Assyrian Army encircling the city, said,

“let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die” (Isaiah 22v13).

It was the cry of the faithless. They had no faith for the fight. Their trust was not in God. By action they proclaimed that there were far more with the Assyrians than there were with them. But it wasn’t true. Unfortunately, such faithlessness is very infectious in ecclesial life.

Apart from those whose attitude was to live life to the full in what little time remained to them, there were those who advocated going down to Egypt for help (cf 2 Kings 18v21). That too was a great mistake. As history reveals, many that go down to Egypt don't escape with their lives.

There is an increasing trend today for people in the Truth to go down to Egypt for help when oftentimes the solution to the problems of life lie in another direction altogether. So help is sought, for example, in areas of marriage guidance and psychological advice, when the best help and the best advice is found in the pages of the spirit-word.

"Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help" (Psalm 146v3).

If God be for us who can be against us?

"For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Peter 3v12).

Unfortunately, from now to the coming of the Lord, there will continue to be those who do evil; who turn aside to "crooked ways".

Even when the Kingdom is established, and the Lord reigns in righteousness, there will still be those among the mortal population who will turn aside to "crooked ways".

Isaiah says that those who turn aside will hear the voice of correction saying,

"This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isaiah 30v21).

We would do well to heed those words NOW that we be not led forth to destruction with the workers of iniquity.

When the King of Righteousness returns he will say to those on his right hand,

"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25v34).

But to the workers of iniquity that turn aside to crooked ways he will say,

"Depart from me, ye cursed, . . . And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matthew 25v41, 46).

When the Kingdom, is established there will be "peace upon Israel". There will be peace because the Prince of Peace will reign in righteousness. You can't have peace without righteousness.

"Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment . . . And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isaiah 32v1, 17).

Our world will never have peace until it learns righteousness.

O, blessed hope! with this elate,
Let not our hearts be desolate;
But, strong in faith, in patience wait,
Until He come!

(Hymn 153)

Let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May the God of peace send the Prince of Peace so that indeed "peace shall be upon Israel". Then at last there will be blessing and peace in Zion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(1) Discuss these verses in relation to our own lives in the Truth.

(2) What must we do now, and until Christ comes, to ensure that we will be in the Kingdom to see lasting peace upon Israel?

STUDY No. 3

***Except Yahweh build
the house . . .***



STUDY No. 3

PSALMS 126, 127 & 128

PSALM 126 – A PSALM OF DISTRESS

INTRODUCTION

Although this Psalm depicts the great joy which was experienced by the inhabitants of Jerusalem when the armies of Sennacherib were destroyed, it is nevertheless a Psalm of DISTRESS as the Jerusalem Ecclesia remembered their brethren who were taken captive by the Assyrians. They were also DISTRESSED as they returned to their farms and found that they had been ravaged by the Assyrians. From this Psalm we learn the need to always rely upon God for deliverance from our own troubles and problems; that we must have an empathy with others who are suffering; and that we must respond in a positive way to the difficulties of life.

Psalm 126v1 ***“When Yahweh turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.”***

The expression “turned again the captivity”, (Hebrew — ‘shub shiybah’) means “those who return” — Gesenius. This is correctly translated by the Authorised Version margin, “returned the returning”.

While the Hebrew ‘shiybah’ occurs only here in the Old Testament, the root from which it is derived, ‘shub’, is the 12th most frequently used verb in the Old Testament. The “Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament” also says it occurs just over 1050 times. It is a word which expresses our responsibility in the process of repentance, and combines in itself the 2 requisites for repentance: turning from evil, and turning to good (cf Psalm 80v3). On many occasions it is used in the context of those in covenant relationship returning to God (in the sense of repentance), or turning away from evil (in the sense of renouncing and disowning sin).

So Hezekiah is referring to the SPIRITUAL RESTORATION of a remnant in Judah, who had survived the frightful experience of the Assyrian invasion. This experience had reformed them and caused them to TURN AGAIN (or return) to Yahweh, in the sense of repentance and conversion. When Yahweh’s purpose with the Assyrian invasion had wrought this response in Judah, He would return to them, and deliver them from the hand of the Assyrian. They had rested on Yahweh, and He had liberated them from the threatened captivity.

Here, then, is an expression of Divine etiquette which emphasises the principle that we must first return to God, then He will return to us. (2 Chronicles 30v6; Zechariah 1v3; Malachi 3v7; James 4v8).

With the removal of the Assyrian invaders from the land, great blessings then flowed into Jerusalem:

“And many brought gifts unto Yahweh to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth” (2 Chronicles 32v23).

It will be like this in the Coming Age. When the Russian host (the latter-day Assyrian) is destroyed on the mountains of Israel and the Lord Jesus Christ reigns in Jerusalem, many nations will bring gifts.

“The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts” (Psalm 72v10).

When the inhabitants of Jerusalem awoke on that fateful morning the Assyrians were slain. They could hardly believe their eyes. As Hezekiah expressed it in this Psalm “we were like them that dream”. (Sometimes, when we wake up suddenly after a dream it takes us a little while to determine what is real and what is not).

There are other occasions in Scripture when men were slow to see the hand of God in the circumstances of their lives — where they had difficulty coming to terms with the reality of that which was before them. After the resurrection of the Lord we are told that the disciples:

“believed not for joy, and wondered” (Luke 24v41).

When Peter was sleeping between two of Herod’s soldiers and bound with two chains in a prison cell, he was suddenly and miraculously released by the angel. He, too, was not sure if he was dreaming.

“And (he) wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision” (Acts 12v9).

The reality of the true situation rapidly dawned on both Peter and the disciples, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

This indeed was the work of God!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
 The inhabitants of Jerusalem were slow to see the hand of God in the destruction of the Assyrian army.

(1) Is it always possible to tell immediately which events are providential in our lives?

(2) Are we sometimes slow to recognise God's hand in the circumstances of our lives, and even when we do recognise it, do we sometimes resist it? Give examples of how we might do this.

Psalm 126v2-3 ***"Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, Yahweh hath done great things for them. Yahweh hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad."***

What wonderful words of hope and encouragement are contained in these two verses. "*Yahweh hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad*". They're glorious words! Joyous words! And very true words.

Who amongst us cannot repeat them now? When we comprehend the marvellous blessings that we have in the Truth, we can surely say "*Yahweh hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad*". We need to take time to count our blessings. We should remind ourselves often that there are billions and billions of the human race who live their lives without God, and die being:

"aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope . . ." (Ephesians 2v12).

When we think deeply about this, we should be better able to appreciate the great blessings that God has graciously given us in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is not just that we can "*rejoice in hope of the glory of God*" (Romans 5v2). That is a great blessing, but even NOW, despite the difficulties of the way, life in the Truth is so much better than life in the world.

Men and women of the world live in fear of the future. We know the future. Men and women of the world despair as to what will become of their children. Christadelphian children are blessed when they are raised in the fear and admonition of Yahweh. The world is becoming increasingly perplexed. We are becoming increasingly sure. The world bows its head in sadness. We lift up our head because our redemption draweth nigh. Men and women of the world are adrift amongst the storms of life. We have a sure anchor for our souls. And these are all additional blessings to the marvellous covering for our sins which comes through being baptised into the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Truly Yahweh hath done great things for us whereof we are glad.

It is not that the enemy won't oppress us from time to time. It will! The Assyrians, who swarmed over the land and surrounded and oppressed God's people in Jerusalem, were simply one manifestation of the power of Sin — the king who pays his slaves with death (Romans 5v21; 6v23). While God in Christ has given us the power of victory over sin, He has not promised that we will not be oppressed and afflicted from time to time.

But, as Paul says,

"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15v57-58).

We can imagine the joyous songs of gladsome praise that would have resounded from Jerusalem that day as the ecclesia contemplated the great things that God had done for them among the Assyrians. We can sing similar hymns today.

Oh, worship the King all glorious above,
And gratefully sing His power and His love;
OUR SHIELD AND DEFENDER, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilion'd in splendour, and girded with praise.
(Hymn 44).

Or, as we remember the blasphemous words of Rabshakeh, another hymn comes to mind:

Like floods the angry nations rise,
And aim their rage against the skies;
Vain floods, that aim their rage so high;
At His rebuke the billows die.
(Hymn 15).

We should not forget that God had done great things for Hezekiah personally. Probably at the very time that the Assyrians were slain, Hezekiah was healed of his disease of leprosy. This disease reminds us that we ourselves are under siege — we are mortal, dying because of sin. How Hezekiah would have rejoiced and lifted up his voice in praise to God and said that "Yahweh hath done great things for ME whereof I am glad".

We can imagine the joy, the happiness, and the relief that would have been evident in the fervent singing of their songs of praise. But God has done great things for us too. Why is it then that sometimes our hymns are sung with so little feeling, with so little fervour, with so little enthusiasm? Is it because we don't truly appreciate the great things that God has done for us in Christ Jesus our Lord?

And now, from the heights of joy, the Psalm plunges into the depths of DISTRESS.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Discuss the great blessings we have in the Truth:

(1) before we reach the age of responsibility.

(2) after we are baptised.

There is a need for us to express ourselves with more earnestness in prayer and praise.

(3) What steps can we take to improve our acknowledgement that Yahweh has done great things for us whereof we are glad?

Psalm 126v4 ***“Turn again our captivity, O Yahweh, as the streams in the south”***

Why does this Psalm go from great joy to great distress? It is a fundamental principle of our life in the Truth that we should love one

another (1 John 3v11); that we should bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6v2); that we should rejoice with them that rejoice, but weep with them that weep (Romans 12v15).

Now there was cause to weep. When Sennacherib came down he captured "all the fenced cities of Judah" (2 Kings 18v13). He recorded on his clay prism, which is now in the British Museum, that he took captive 200,150 Israelites. So the joy of the inhabitants of Jerusalem over their own deliverance was tempered by the thought of their brethren who were still in captivity.

This seems to be why the Psalm goes from great joy to great distress, as Hezekiah now prays that Yahweh will "turn again our captivity as the streams in the south".

The expression "turn again our captivity" (Hebrew 'shubah shebuth'), means a restoration of blessing. This meaning is established from what God did for Job.

"And Yahweh TURNED THE CAPTIVITY of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also Yahweh gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42v10).

The "streams in the south" which Hezekiah has in mind are the water-courses of the Negev — the south. Normally they are like the Negev itself — dry, barren, and waterless. But, today, when a traveller drives through the barren wilderness, he comes across road signs warning about the dangers of flash flooding. It all seems so incongruous that in the middle of a dry, barren, wilderness there could be such a danger.

The danger arises because, when it begins to rain in the Negev, the fine soil on the surface of the ground quickly congeals and becomes like glass. All the rain that falls thereafter, instead of soaking into the thirsty ground, simply runs off into these channels which are normally dry. These streams have very large catchment areas, so that even with very little rain, they become raging torrents. Tourists in the Negev have been drowned as they have been swept away in these flash floods, as a great wall of water moves with tremendous speed down these watercourses. It is this phenomenon that Hezekiah has in mind.

The Assyrian siege of Jerusalem had come to a sudden end. Now Hezekiah prays that Yahweh will move similarly to deliver Hezekiah's brethren who had been taken captive. He prays that Yahweh will again move with the speed and suddenness of a flash flood in the streams of the south.

There was another pressing problem that was causing distress as well. When Sennacherib invaded the land he appears to have adopted a plan of destruction and plunder. Not only did he raid their crops, but his presence prevented the sowing of new crops. Consequently there was going to be a severe food shortage for some time.

So the fact that many of their brethren were captives, and their crops were destroyed, seems to give rise to this cry "turn again our captivity, O Yahweh, as the streams in the south". It was a cry for speedy reparation.

On Yahweh's behalf the prophet Isaiah responds to the cry. He says,

“And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof. And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward” (2 Kings 19v29-30).

Psalm 126v5 *“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy”*

Here we have an echo of Isaiah 53 again. Hezekiah was:

“a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53v3).

His soul was in “travail” (Isaiah 53v11). Here the word travail means “wearing effort, toil”.

This verse (Psalm 126v5) is a verse which has wide application in our lives. For example, the idea of sowing in tears that we can reap in joy applies to prayer. Effectual, fervent prayer requires considerable effort. The apostle Paul spoke of the Romans *“striving together with him in prayer”* (Romans 15v30). The Greek word for “strive together”, ‘sunagonizomia’, means “to exert oneself, to strive very earnestly”. That is what we have to do in prayer.

So far as prayer is concerned, the Lord experienced what Hezekiah said about sowing in tears and reaping in joy. The apostle Paul said that the Lord Jesus Christ:

“in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with STRONG CRYING AND TEARS unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;” (Hebrews 5v7).

When God answered Hezekiah’s prayer He said,

“I have heard thy prayer, I HAVE SEEN THY TEARS: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of Yahweh. And I will add unto thy days 15 years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake” (2 Kings 20v5-6).

Psalm 126v6 *“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”*

In the days of Hezekiah there was of course literal seed to be sown that the land of Judah might become productive again. The heartbreak that the farmers would feel as they returned to their devastated farms is easy to imagine. The seed to be sown was indeed “precious” because there was little left after the Assyrian siege. So, in tears and great difficulty, they prepared the land, sowed the precious seed, and waited for Yahweh to bless the work, that they might in due time reap in joy. It was a work of tears, patience, persistence, and faith.

The same applies to sowing the precious GOSPEL seed. But then, occasionally, with God’s blessing, there is a harvest of joy, as we rejoice with the angels over one sinner who repents (Luke 15v10).

Using a similar illustration James builds an exhortation for all those who would be faithful in the Truth. He says,

“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5v7-8).



EASTERN SOWER

Again, so far as we are concerned, when we take up the Word of God, we have the precious seed in our hands (Luke 8v11). We are the soil in which it will grow. But the seed needs careful nurturing and tending, if it is to bring forth fruit in us.

Now, after a Psalm of distress in which Hezekiah appeals to Yahweh to turn again their captivity, he introduces us to a Psalm of TRUST.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Discuss the principle of sowing in tears and reaping in joy in relation to:

- (1) Praying;

(2) Preaching the gospel;

(3) Obtaining the Kingdom.

PSALM 127 – A PSALM OF TRUST

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 127 is a Psalm of Solomon which Hezekiah used because it was appropriate for his own circumstances. We know it is Solomon's Psalm from the superscription and the marginal rendering. Psalms 127 and 128 are really family Psalms. They have to do with raising children and grandchildren in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

As young people we need to recognise the point made in this Psalm.

We are an heritage which God has given to our parents to look after for Him. Seeing that we are GOD'S heritage this places responsibilities on us to respond in love to our parents' efforts to "train up a child in the way that he should go". Also in this Psalm we learn the great principle that our work in the Truth needs the Divine blessing if it is to prosper.

Psalm 127v1 ***"Except Yahweh build the house, they labour in vain that build it; except Yahweh keep the city, the watchmen waketh but in vain."***

There are 2 kinds of houses in view here. There is the temple which Solomon built — that's one type of house — a house of prayer. The other house is the family, and particularly the family, or house, of David.

Hezekiah was particularly concerned about the house, or family, of David. While the king of Assyria was besieging the gates of Jerusalem, King Hezekiah was on his death-bed. Without Divine intervention death was the inevitable outcome of the dreadful disease with which he was stricken.

"In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death" (Isaiah 38v1).

But there was a great problem troubling his mind. Not only was Sennacherib without the walls of the city, which constituted an international crisis for Hezekiah; not only was there faithlessness in the ecclesia, which constituted an ecclesial crisis for Hezekiah; not only was he sick unto death which was a great personal crisis; but, over and above all that, there was a FAMILY CRISIS.

Hezekiah had not married and he had not produced a seed to continue the House of David — the royal line that would eventually lead from David to the Lord Jesus Christ. See the section in the "Introductory Notes" headed "HEZEKIAH'S FAMILY CRISIS".

Hezekiah was critically ill upon his death-bed. What could he do about David's house — about David's family — in these circumstances? As far as Hezekiah was concerned, there was nothing that he could do. He was as good as dead. As Isaiah says of the Lord Jesus Christ,

"And who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living:" (Isaiah 53v8).

What could Hezekiah say in those circumstances? He said,

"Except Yahweh build the house, they labour in vain that build it:" (Psalm 127v1).

Yahweh was not about to let His promise to David fail. Yahweh was going to raise Hezekiah from his death-bed and build David's house. As Isaiah 53 says of Hezekiah and the Lord Jesus Christ,

"he SHALL SEE HIS SEED, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Yahweh shall prosper in his hand" (Isaiah 53v10).

No one knew better than Hezekiah that, except Yahweh build the house, they labour in vain that build it. But that does not mean that we do not have to play our part. If Hezekiah was to "see his seed" he would need to marry, and have faith and patience. In fact, it was not until 3 years after he recovered from his sickness that Manasseh was born to him. (15 years were added to Hezekiah's life and Manasseh was 12 years old when his father died. 2 Chronicles 33v1).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Discuss the need for God's blessing if our labour in the Truth is to prosper.

(1) How is that blessing to be sought?

(2) Will our work for God always prosper without setbacks? Provide scriptural examples.

Psalm 127v2 ***“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.”***

The phrase “so he giveth his beloved sleep” would better be rendered “so he giveth unto his beloved IN SLEEP”. This is the Revised Version (margin) translation. The Jerusalem Bible has “as they sleep”.

In the first instance “the beloved” refers to Solomon, because it is primarily his Psalm — his song. The name given to Solomon by God was Jedidiah (2 Samuel 12v24-25) which means “BELOVED of Yahweh”.

King Solomon had many wives (1 Kings 11v3) but scripture only records his ever having one son, although he had many children. This explains why Solomon would say “except Yahweh build the house, (the family name) they labour in vain that build it”.

Despite all his wives there was nothing that Solomon could do himself to guarantee the birth of a son or sons. That was a matter for Yahweh. It is not hard to see why Hezekiah was so attracted to this Psalm of Solomon. He desperately needed a son — an heir to David’s throne.

In life there are some things that we can do little or nothing about by ourselves. In those particular things it is pointless to rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows. It is pointless to take anxious care about such matters (Matthew 6v34 R.S.V.).

If we are faithful and do our part, and if we make it a matter of prayer, and if it is in accordance with the Father's will, then He will do what is necessary, even while His beloved sleep.

In fact, that is exactly what He did so far as the Assyrians were concerned. At night, while the Jerusalem Ecclesia were in their beds asleep, 185,000 Assyrians perished instantly.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In life, some things must be left entirely to God because there is nothing we can do about them ourselves. Discuss this and provide examples of things

(1) that must be left entirely to God.

(2) where we must co-operate with God by doing all that we can ourselves.

Psalm 127v3 "Lo, children are an heritage of Yahweh: and the fruit of the womb is his reward."

The word "children" in this verse should be rendered "sons" (R.S.V. and Jerusalem Bible). This is in keeping with the context. ALL children are an heritage from Yahweh. Both Solomon and Hezekiah needed a son who would continue the royal line of David. Hezekiah was obviously thrilled to receive Yahweh's message through Isaiah that he would be raised from his death-bed (Isaiah 38v5) and see his seed (Isaiah 53v10).

While that is the particular emphasis of the Psalm, nevertheless ALL children are given to their parents by God. Jacob told Esau that his family were:

“The children which God hath graciously given thy servant” (Genesis 33v5).

However, when children are misbehaving and exhibiting lust of flesh, lust of eyes and pride of life — when they are being little “devils” — parents may not always think of it like that. Nevertheless, the reality is that children are an heritage which God has graciously given to parents.

If someone kindly gives a person an inheritance — a heritage — there are sometimes conditions attached to receiving it. Conditions like how and when the inheritance may be used, and the maintenance which must be carried out etc. It is very dishonouring and disrespectful to the person who has given the inheritance, if someone accepts it, and then does not fulfil the conditions attached to it.

God has given parents the inheritance of children conditionally. He has said that, having received the inheritance, parents shall:

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22v6).

As Christadelphian young people who know that principle of the Word of God, we have a responsibility to help our parents to discharge their obligations faithfully. We should do nothing that makes our parents' task of training us in Godly ways harder. As the Lord willingly co-operated with the wishes of his Heavenly Father so we should faithfully submit to the requirements which our parents set for us.

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right” (Ephesians 6v1).

For those who never marry, or who do marry but are not blessed with the heritage of children, they too have the responsibility of being fathers (cf 2 Kings 2v12) and mothers (cf Judges 5v7) IN ISRAEL. The Lord never married, yet he saw “his seed” (Isaiah 53v10). His seed are those who have been brought to spiritual birth by his sacrifice and the power of his word. When he comes again one of his great titles will be:

“The everlasting FATHER” (Isaiah 9v6).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In view of the fact that we are God's heritage that He has given to our parents, discuss how this should impact:

(1) our attitude to our parents;

(2) our response to the Truth;

(3) the example that we should set for others:

(a) in the ecclesia;

(b) at school;

(c) at work.

Psalm 127v4 *“As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.”*

The Revised Standard Version translation is: *“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one’s youth”*.

At this time Hezekiah would have been 39 years old. He was to be 42 years old before his son was born. He was in the midst of a number of great crises which weighed heavily upon him. As he thought about it, how he must have wished that he had sons in his youth, and brought them up as straight arrows; i.e. brought them up in the way that they should go. If he had done that, he might then have had straight arrows to assist him in his great fight of faith.



But this verse has a greater than Solomon and a greater than Hezekiah in view. It has in view the “beloved” of God, even His only begotten and beloved son — the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 3v7). He is really the “mighty man” of this verse. The Hebrew word for “mighty man” is ‘gibbor’. It means “mighty, powerful, and by implication a warrior” (see Rotherham and the R.S.V.). The “children” or “sons” are those begotten by his death, burial, and resurrection. When he comes again he will be revealed to the world initially as the ‘Gibbor’ — the Mighty Warrior, and the saints will be his arrows to smite the nations which fight at Jerusalem even as God smote the Assyrians (Zechariah 9v13-14; Revelation 19v11-15).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (1) Discuss the implication of arrows that have straight or crooked shafts, and what that teaches us.

(2) What will be the work that the saints will do as they assist Christ to subdue the world?

(3) In view of the abhorrence on the part of some to being involved in the destruction of human life, what must we do so that we will be at one with the work of Christ in the battle of Armageddon?

Psalm 127v5 "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate."

In Hezekiah's day Rabshakeh was at the very gate of the city. How Hezekiah longed for sons who might have faithfully dealt with this blaspheming Assyrian. He longed to have his quiver full of straight arrows — faithful sons — who, with their trust in God, would face those from within and without the ecclesia who opposed the Truth.

Whether the enemy was found in the gates of the city (2 Chronicles 32v6), or the gates of the ecclesia, or the gates of the grave (Isaiah 38v10), Hezekiah saw great virtue in having a faithful seed who would fight the good fight of faith and not be ashamed.

But there was a far greater man who would have dearly loved to see "his seed" speak with the enemy in the gate and not be ashamed. That man was the Lord Jesus Christ. As he faced his blasphemous false accusers "in the gate" — in the place of judgment — his disciples forsook him and fled. They were ashamed. We should learn from their mistake and pray that we might be a faithful seed who will not be ashamed to speak with the enemies in the gate.

Let none that wait on Thee
 Be put to shame at all;
 But those who without cause transgress,
 Let shame upon them fall.
 (Hymn 35; Psalm 25v3)

★ ★ ★

Onward! brethren, onward go!
 Help the war, and face the foe;
 Will ye flee in danger's hour?
 Know ye not your Captain's power?
 Onward then, in battle move!
 More than conq'rors ye shall prove;
 Though opposed by many a foe,
 Christ's true soldiers, onward go!
 (Hymn 203)

★ ★ ★

PSALM 128 – BLESSING & PEACE IN ZION

INTRODUCTION:

Psalm 128 is the second of the family Psalms in the Songs of the Degrees. It sets out principles by which families can be happy as they wait patiently for Christ's coming. These same principles form the basis for happy ecclesias because the ecclesia is God's FAMILY on earth, and ecclesias are made up of family units. To be happy and truly successful a family must fear Yahweh, and co-operate together for the good of all the family members.

Psalm 128v1 ***"Blessed is every one that feareth Yahweh; that walketh in his ways."***

The word "blessed" (Hebrew 'esher') means "happy". A better translation of the opening phrase would be "*How happy is everyone that feareth Yahweh*". We live in a world where many people are very unhappy. For many families there is no happiness, only unhappiness. Even in the Truth we sometimes find families unhappy and disintegrating. They are torn apart and unhappy because the reverential fear of Yahweh, that could bring them happiness, is missing; and the way of God has been replaced by the ways of man.

"Blessed (happy) is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of Yahweh; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1v1-2).

This is the secret for success in life. It is the secret for true happiness for individuals, families and ecclesias.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

What does it mean to “fear Yahweh”, and how should this be seen in our:

(a) service;

(b) behaviour;

(c) dress;

(d) language;

(e) respect for parents;

(f) respect for other family members;

(g) conduct in all our ecclesial duties and activities?

Psalm 128v2 ***"For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee."***

This verse presents a great contrast to the principles which are practised in our world today. Our world rewards the smart operator, the takeover merchant. The person who labours with his hands and sees the fruit of his labour is not usually the kind of person that gets ahead in today's world. The person who gets ahead in material terms is the person who is able to buy up someone else's work and effort at a cheap price.

Because of the social security systems which the world has in place, man's dependence on God's blessing on the work of his hands is remarkably diminished. In most people's lives, the State (i.e. the Government) has replaced God as the great provider in times of need. Not only has the State replaced God in this way, but it has instituted systems which foster the very evils which cause breakdown in society — a breakdown in families. For example, it is relatively easy for a wife to leave her husband and obtain a DESERTED wife's benefit even though she is the one who has left.

But God's system was not like that. When people obeyed God, when they feared or revered Him, they found that there was a blessing of their labours.

"And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of Yahweh thy God . . . And Yahweh shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground . . ." (Deuteronomy 28v2, 11).

Disobedience to God brought a cursing of their work (Deuteronomy 25v15, 16), and, consequently, families learned to fear God. When they did, God blessed their efforts and they were happy indeed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In view of the fact that social security systems tend to take away our reliance upon God, what should be our attitude to:

(1) the dole;

(2) other forms of Government benefits?

Psalm 128v3 *“Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.”*

Again our world has largely abandoned living by the principles of this verse. The verse presents a picture of a wife, a mother, who stays at home and works INSIDE her house. The Revised Version translates the first part of this verse as *“Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine, in the INNERMOST parts of thine house . . .”*. The Revised Standard Version has *“WITHIN your house”*. Rotherham has *“WITHIN the recesses of thy house”*.

Such a wife is one who stays at home and cares for her family. She is not out in the world working while someone else looks after her children. Nor is she out in the world engaged in idle chatter. Her place if she wants a happy family is INSIDE the home. That is where she works.

Such a faithful wife and mother is likened to a vine. A vine is a plant that needs support. The wife needs the support of a faithful and caring husband — a husband who reveres God, and lives by the principles of the Truth. If a faithful wife receives that loving support from her husband, then her household will bring forth fruit to God. She will indeed be *“as a fruitful vine in the innermost parts of thine house”*. And the fruit — the bunches of grapes representing her children — will develop well and cling to the vine. They won't discard their parents in the Truth, and live in a flat etc. out in the world. So that's the first picture presented to us by the verse.



In the second picture children are likened to olive plants round the table in the family home. The olive tree in scripture symbolises the Hope of Israel. Paul says that the branches of the natural olive tree were broken off that we (Gentiles) might be grafted in. We have been made partakers of the root and fatness of the olive tree (Romans 11v17). It is another way of saying that, having been grafted into the good olive tree, the Hope of Israel is now ours. So the olive tree represents the Hope of Israel.

Children who are brought up in a godly household are like little olive plants (or "shoots" — R.S.V.). Rotherham says "Like plantings of olive trees". They have the potential, with proper spiritual care and nurturing, to grow up to embrace the Hope of Israel themselves. Notice how the verse says that the children are like olive plants "round about thy table". It almost gives the impression that the Psalmist means "under the parents' feet". In nature this is where the little olive trees grow. Little olive plants shoot up from the roots (the feet) of the parent tree. Here we have a picture of family contentment, as the little olive trees gradually grow up under the protection of the parent tree. As they grow they come to take on the character of the parent tree.

Again we are reminded of Isaiah 53. In speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ and his subjection to his Heavenly Father it says,

"For he shall grow up before him as a TENDER PLANT, and as a ROOT out of a dry ground" (Isaiah 53v2).



The Psalmist also says of himself,

"I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever" (Psalm 52v8).

Olive trees produce the olive berries from which the oil (symbolic of the word of God) is obtained. If the parent olive tree is fruitful in the word then there is a better chance that the same characteristic will be manifested in its offspring as well.

There is one other thing that we should note about olive trees. They do not mature quickly. Very often they are more than 30 years of age before they produce their best fruit. Rarely do they produce any harvest before they are 10 years of age.

There are great lessons here for us. If parents are prepared to ignore the wisdom of the world, and raise their children to both know and LOVE the truth, then there is a far greater potential for genuine family happiness, even in this life.

As young people we need to acknowledge the importance of the matters set out in these verses. If we have parents who themselves are faithful in these things, then we are blessed indeed. But in the end, no matter what our family circumstances, we must work out our own salvation, and consequently we should determine to live by the Divine principles set out in these verses. That is the way to ensure happiness for ourselves and our families.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Discuss the problem of working mothers:

(1) In view of the clear teaching of this verse, how can the problem of working mothers be avoided? Provided practical suggestions.

(2) What work should mothers do inside the home to provide materially and **SPIRITUALLY** for their families' welfare?

(3) Discuss the attributes of the vine and fig tree that make them fit symbols for a faithful mother.

(4) What lessons do we learn about our own development from these symbols?

(5) There is a difference between "knowing" the Truth and "knowing and loving" the Truth. What can we do that will help us **KNOW AND LOVE** the Truth better?

Psalm 128v4 ***“Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth Yahweh.”***

The Hebrew word for “blessed” in this verse is different to that which we noticed in Psalm 128v1. Here it is ‘barak’, a primary root word meaning “to kneel”. It is also used of God when He bestows a blessing on a person, causing him to prosper. It is as if God stoops down to help.

The point of the verse is that people who truly fear Yahweh themselves will receive goodness at the hand of God. The blessing will be felt in many ways but the ultimate blessing will come out of Zion in the Age to Come.

Psalm 128v5 ***“Yahweh shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life.”***

We will see “the good of Jerusalem” when it becomes the city of the great King — when it becomes the centre of Divine worship in the Kingdom.

Yahweh will bless us out of Zion when He appears there in the person of His glorious son.

“When Yahweh shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory” (Psalm 102v16).

Psalm 128v6 ***“Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel.”***

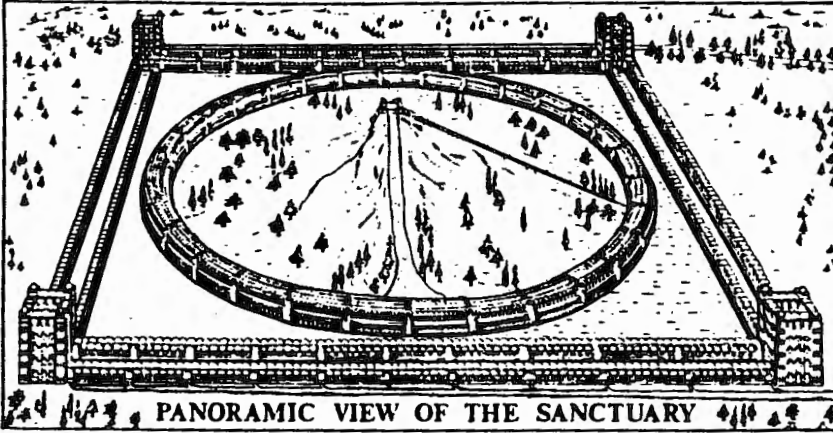
Our children’s children are of course our grandchildren. How delightful it will be for parents to see the children that they have raised, in the fear and admonition of Yahweh, in the Kingdom. How doubly delightful it will be for parents to see that process continued in the families of their children so that their “children’s children” will likewise attain the Kingdom.

Then the great blessing of having raised children to know and love the Truth will be abundantly evident. There will be great happiness out of Zion as family members who are found worthy will be able to enjoy the sweet communion of immortal fellowship in the Kingdom of God.

Not only will that be a great blessing, but if we are found worthy at Christ’s coming we will be privileged to see peace upon Israel as well. The situation then will be totally different to that which prevails today. The temple will be open and mortal men and women will say to the Jews,

“We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you” (Zechariah 8v23).

It will be a glorious time of blessing and peace in Zion — a time when peace shall be upon Israel.



DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Express in your own words the blessing that we can enjoy now and in the future, if we fear Yahweh.

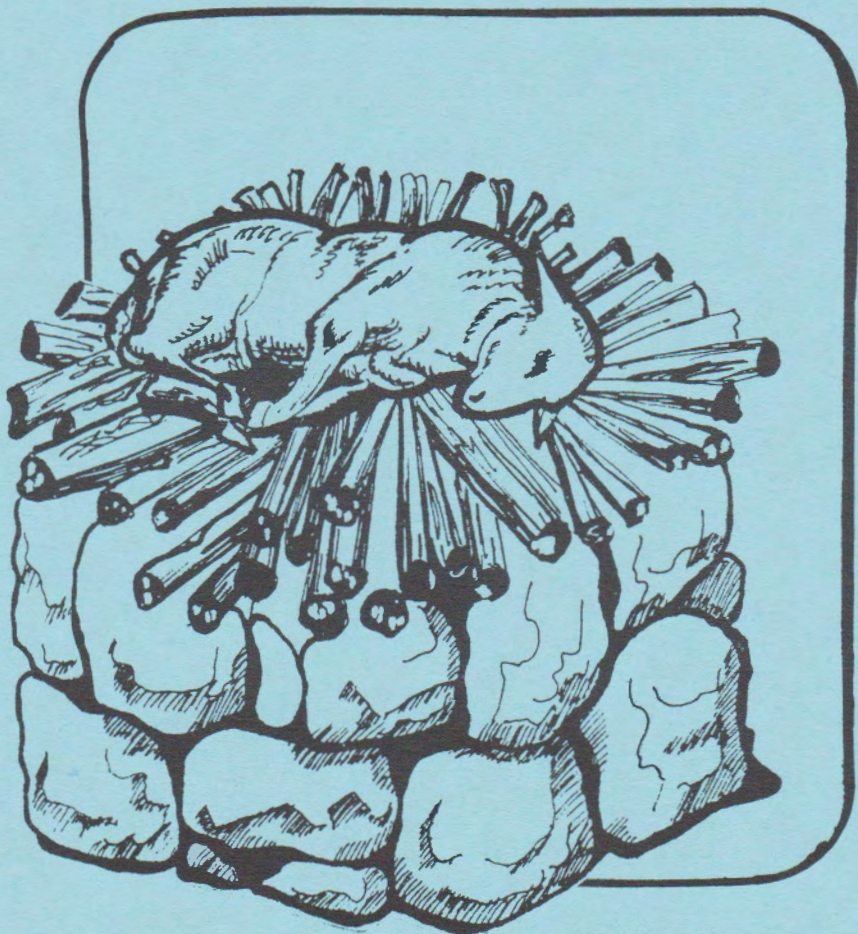
CONCLUSION

But why does Hezekiah include these 2 family Psalms (127 and 128) in his Songs of the Degrees? In these Psalms, he is contemplating the responsibilities and joys of parenthood, as Yahweh saved him from death and promised that he would “see his seed” (Isaiah 53v10). Isaiah 38 records Hezekiah’s thoughts as he was healed of his sickness and looked forward to having a son. He said,

“The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: THE FATHER TO THE CHILDREN SHALL MAKE KNOWN THY TRUTH” (Isaiah 38v19).

This is a great responsibility. So he sets forth in Psalm 127 and 128 the principles by which families can be happy and united in the bonds of the Truth, as they sojourn in the midst of a crooked and degenerate age, and wait to be blessed out of Zion in the Age to Come.

STUDY No. 4



STUDY No. 4

PSALMS 129, 130 & 131

PSALM 129 – A PSALM OF DISTRESS

INTRODUCTION

In Psalm 129 we are again in a Psalm of DISTRESS. Hezekiah would have composed this Psalm as the Assyrians swept into the land, over-ran 46 fenced cities of Judah, and took captive some 200,000 Israelites, and then surrounded the city of Jerusalem.

One of the things we have to understand as we walk to the Kingdom of God is that often the wicked seem to prosper while the righteous suffer. This can be a great trial in life. The Psalmist, Asaph, describes how this apparent anomaly almost led to his undoing. He says,

“But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious . . . when I saw the prosperity of the wicked . . . They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men . . . Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning . . . When I thought to know this it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end” (Psalm 73v2-3, 5, 13-14, 16-17).

So the Psalmist came to understand that, while the wicked seemed to prosper, and the righteous suffer, that is not how it will be IN THE END. As Moses knew, it is better

“rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11v25).

Whatever the wicked may get in this life, their prosperity is short-lived, as was Sennacherib's. His army was destroyed, and he returned home in shame. When he went into the temple of his pagan god, two of his own sons assassinated him (2 Chronicles 32v21).

Even if men are not struck down in the midst of their prosperity, the grave finally puts an end to it all for them. But our hope lies beyond the grave. For us, mortal life is but a period of probation. We look to hear the glorious words from our gracious Lord:

“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you” (Matthew 25v34).

Then we will have riches beyond comparison with anything that mortal man can have in this life.

But for us the cross must come before the crown. In Psalm 129 Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem are bearing their cross.

Psalm 129v1-2 ***“Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: Yet they have not prevailed against me”.***

The nation of Israel was God’s firstborn national son. Their experiences as a nation in many ways were to be the experience of His only begotten son — even the Lord Jesus Christ. Like the nation of Hezekiah’s day the Lord was to be oppressed and afflicted (Isaiah 53v7).

The national son was afflicted from his youth. He was in bondage in the land of Egypt, from which place God called His son (Hosea 11v1). He has been afflicted many times subsequently.

God’s only begotten son was likewise afflicted from his youth. To escape the oppression of Herod, Mary and Joseph had to take him to Egypt, from whence God called him (Matthew 2v15). But, during his life, like the nation, he was under great pressure. He said,

“I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12v50).

In Psalm 34 David says,

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but Yahweh delivereth him out of them all” (Psalm 34v19).

That was the experience of Hezekiah. It was to be the experience of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was to be the experience of Paul. And it can be our experience as well.

But for the moment the nation felt like Hezekiah on his sick-bed. They were as:

“a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53v3).

Yet despite all the afflictions the nation has suffered over millennia, it has survived. Their persecutors have disappeared but the nation of Israel has remained. They have not survived because they have been righteous, but God has preserved them for His holy name’s sake (Ezekiel 36v22).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Life in the Truth can be difficult at times.

(1) What is the purpose of suffering?

(2) Why must the cross come before the crown?

(3) What can we do to ensure that we are not overwhelmed by difficulties and afflictions?

Psalm 129v3 ***“The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.”***

This verse presents a graphic picture of excruciating pain as oppression and torture are practised to the full. A similar picture is painted in Isaiah 51:

“But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou has laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over” (Isaiah 51v23).

The pain which the nation felt, was like the pain which a person would feel if they lay on the ground and let a ploughman run over them with a plough. The Assyrian ploughman treated the inhabitants of the land as if they were a field to be ploughed.

But again the experience of the nation was to be the experience of God’s only begotten son. Isaiah, in one of his servant prophecies, said of the Lord:

“I gave my back to the smiters” (Isaiah 50v6).

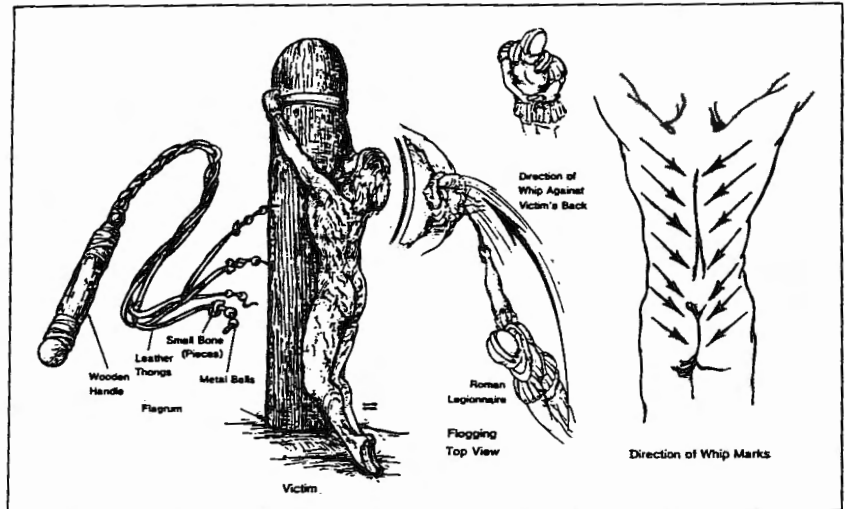
Matthew records that:

“when he had SCOURGED Jesus, he (Pilate) delivered him to be crucified” (Matthew 27v26).

The scourging was inflicted with a whip which had attached to it pieces of bone to tear open the flesh. The scourging of the Lord left massive open wounds in his flesh like furrows in the ground. By this graphic picture we come to feel more forcibly the power of Peter’s exhortation to us when he said,

“that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: BY WHOSE STRIPES ye were healed” (1 Peter 2v24).

In our mind’s eye we can see the stripes — we can see the furrows inflicted by the scourge.



Scourging. Left, Short whip (flagrum) with lead balls and sheep bones tied into leather thongs. Center left, victim tied to flogging post. Deep stripelike lacerations were usually associated with considerable blood loss. Centre right, view from above, showing position of lictors. Right, Inferomedial direction of wounds.

But as a type of what would happen to the Lord, both Hezekiah, and the nation were in agony as the oppressing Assyrian ploughmen “made long their furrows”.

We also live in an evil and oppressing world, so we should not expect to escape affliction. Paul was able to say,

“I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus” (Galatians 6v17).

The saints have been persecuted by one means or another in almost every age. Many suffered:

“trial of cruel mockings and scourgings” (Hebrews 11v36).

Today our afflictions are not so much physical as mental. We should be appalled at the things that happen in the world. We should experience the revulsion that “just Lot” did when he was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.

“For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds” (2 Peter 2v8).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Our world is increasingly a place of violence, immorality, and blasphemy.

(1) Have we become complacent about this — do we now just regard it as normal?

(2) Do we hate it as we should?

(3) Do we see it as God sees it?

(4) In what way are we in affliction?

(5) Why did Christ have to suffer that we might be healed?

(6) In what way are we healed?

Psalm 129v4 ***“Yahweh is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.”***

The Assyrian invaders had Judah in a stranglehold. Judah, like Hezekiah himself, was almost at the point where life had been extinguished. The nation, too, “was sick unto death”.

But Hezekiah and the nation were going to experience a kind of resurrection. Because Yahweh is righteous, He cut asunder the cords of the wicked.

In the days of the Lord the “wicked” (Acts 2v23) came and bound him with cords in Gethsemane (John 18v12). There was to be no escape until “the third day” when he burst the BONDS of death as God raised him from the grave.

“The first-begotten from the dead”,
Lo! Jesus ris’n, His people’s Head,
To make their life secure:
Though they like Him may yield their breath,
Like Him, they’ll BURST THE BONDS of death;
Their resurrection sure.

(Hymn 105)

Our righteous God released the nation, Hezekiah, and the Lord, by cutting asunder the cords that had them bound. God has accomplished our release through our Lord Jesus Christ.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus HATH MADE ME FREE from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8v1-2).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
 Yahweh is righteous, and, whenever He acts, His righteousness is upheld. Discuss this in relation to:

(1) God’s dealings with Israel;

(2) Our appearance at the Judgment Seat of Christ;

(3) The sacrifice of Christ.

Psalm 129v5 *“Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion.”*

Through the prophet Isaiah, Yahweh promised that He would turn back the Assyrian aggressor that hated Zion. Yahweh said to the aggressor,

“Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult, is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will TURN THEE BACK by the way by which thou camest” (Isaiah 37v29).

So the king of Assyria was “confounded” and forced to return to his own land.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

This verse applies in the first instance to Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah.

Discuss the principles of this verse in their application to Russia’s coming invasion of Israel.

Psalm 129v6-7 *“Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up: Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom.”*

Here Hezekiah prays that the oppressor might become the oppressed. Hezekiah wanted Sennacherib to be like the grass that grows on the housetop. But for the moment it was Sennacherib who regarded Judah as grass.

“Therefore their inhabitants were of small power (before the Assyrians), they were dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the GRASS ON THE HOUSE TOPS, and as corn blasted before it be grown up” (2 Kings 19v26).

In the face of the Assyrian attack the cities of Judah were of small power. They were like grass upon the housetop, which grew in the very shallow soil, namely, dust which accumulated there over the years. Such grass has no strength. Because it has poor roots, the heat of the day causes it to wither. This is what Judah was like in the face of the Assyrian invasion.

In this Psalm Hezekiah prays for the tables to be turned, and the Assyrians become like grass on the housetops. Hezekiah knew that the Assyrians were of “small power” when compared to the power of the mighty God of Jacob, so he prays that God will intervene; that the Assyrians might be cut off in their prime; that they might be like stalks of corn which never grow up to produce grain. The picture is of stalks that grow so sparsely that one swing of the reaper’s blade does not cut enough to fill the hand; and when the reaping is completed, there are not enough stalks to form a sheaf.

In effect, Hezekiah’s prayer is that Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem might be a fruitless exercise.

David says,

For evil-doers fret thou not
Thyself unquietly,
Nor do thou envy bear to those
That work iniquity.

For even LIKE UNTO THE GRASS,
Soon be cut down shall they;
And, like the green and tender herb,
They wither shall away.

Set thou thy trust upon the Lord,
And be thou doing good;
And so thou in the land shalt dwell,
And verily have food.

(Hymn 6, Psalm 37).

Psalm 129v8 ***“Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of Yahweh be upon you: we bless you in the name of Yahweh.”***

When a crop grew well, and the harvest was plenteous, the husbandman in Israel would greet his workers with a blessing something like *“The blessing of Yahweh be upon you”*. The workers would respond with words like *“We bless you in the name of Yahweh”* (Ruth 2v4).

So Hezekiah prays that the Assyrian would never hear such a blessing. It is a prayer that the Assyrians’ attempt to plough and crop THE NATION of Israel would produce no fruit. Hezekiah’s prayer was heard and answered. The Assyrians were to lose 185,000 soldiers and be forced to return home in shame, after which Sennacherib himself was assassinated. For the Assyrians it truly was a fruitless exercise.

As the Lord was to say later,

“For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matthew 7v2).

And so it was in the case of the Assyrians.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (1) Sennacherib had been harsh in his treatment of Judah and was repaid in kind. What does that teach us about our judgment of others?

- (2) How do we understand “Judge not that ye be not judged” (Matthew 7v1)?

PSALM 130 – A PSALM OF TRUST

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 129 is Hezekiah’s prayer for deliverance from the DISTRESS caused by Sennacherib’s invasion. But Psalm 130 is also a prayer for deliverance. It takes us to the sick-bed of Hezekiah, and outlines his TRUST in God and his great hope that God would redeem his body from the power of the grave.

This Psalm brings us very beautifully to the redemptive work of Christ. He required redemption from mortality, as represented here by the disease of leprosy. This is further explained below. All, apart from Christ, share Hezekiah’s position: *“If thou, Yahweh, shouldest mark iniquities, O Yahweh, who shall stand?” (v3).* We can only stand because there is forgiveness with God through the glorious work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalm 130v1-2 *“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Yahweh. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.”*

Here Hezekiah was in great trouble. Leprosy had brought him to the point of death. All had forsaken him and fled (cf Matthew 26v56). He was shut up in his room like an outcast (cf. Leviticus 13v4), and many in Jerusalem would have said *“there is no help for him in God”* (cf Psalm 3v2). There, in his room in Jerusalem, the waves of despair swept over him as he now considered himself as good as dead.

But make no mistake. Hezekiah was like the Lord Jesus Christ. He was not worried about himself. His concern was that he had produced no seed to continue the royal line of David.

Isaiah 53 shows that the cutting off of the Lord was related to leprosy:

“For the transgression of my people was he stricken” (Isaiah 53v8).

The Hebrew word for “stricken” is the word normally associated with being stricken with leprosy (see Strong’s concordance, and also the section in the Introduction to these notes entitled “What was Hezekiah’s Illness?”). The Lord was mortal because of Adam’s sin. He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Hebrews 4v15). All who are mortal have bodies that need redemption (Romans 8v23). Both Hezekiah and the Lord knew that only too well. This fact was plainly taught by scripture and experience.

EDITOR’S NOTE:

While it is true that the moral condition of the nation was represented by the physical condition of Hezekiah, extreme care must be taken not to force the comparison between Hezekiah and Christ.

Hezekiah did foreshadow Christ, but remember that a shadow is always a very poor and incomplete representation of that which casts it.

There are certain things concerning leprosy and the use of words related to it in Isaiah 53 that must be understood.

Under the Law of Moses the presence of leprosy was determined by outward signs (Leviticus chapters 13 & 14). Likewise, that which it foreshadowed, i.e. man’s sinning sin-prone mortal nature, is manifested in corrupt conduct. Leprosy is a disease which produces death.

The words, “we did esteem him stricken”, in Isaiah 53v4 are saying that Israel ASSUMED he (Jesus Christ) had the outward evidence of being a sinner, and thus deserved the death he suffered. But, as verse 5 points out, it was to heal THEM of THEIR leprosy that he died. When verse 8 says, “for the transgression of my people was he stricken” it is declaring:

- 1) that the outward evidence is in the people;
- 2) as Christ shared their sin-prone nature, it was his responsibility to destroy the base of the disease of sin.

When Hezekiah was in great distress upon his sick-bed, he cried unto God. So did the Lord. The apostle Paul says of Christ,

“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had OFFERED UP PRAYERS and SUPPLICATIONS with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to SAVE HIM FROM DEATH, and was heard in that he feared” (Hebrews 5v7).

That is the experience of Hezekiah as well. He was heard in that he feared. So out of the depths of his mortality he cries unto God.

Psalm 130v3 ***“If thou, Yahweh, shouldest mark iniquities, O Yahweh, who shall stand?”***

Hezekiah was only too painfully aware of his own failings, and those of the nation. He knew that if God were not merciful and forgiving, no one except the Lord Jesus Christ could stand before Him.

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3v23).

Our sins would be a monumental burden if Yahweh were to “mark iniquity” in the sense that He “watched narrowly” for them (Hebrew ‘shamar’; see Strong’s). The same word is rendered “watch” in verse 6. Note the contrast in use between these two verses.

As Hezekiah lay burdened down with leprosy, he could not help but be forcibly reminded that his loathsome disease was an apt symbol of Adamic nature and the sin which it produces. Hezekiah was NOT sick because he was a great sinner. Indeed, he was a good king (2 Chronicles 29v2; 2 Kings 18v5). In that regard he stood in great contrast to most of the nation about him. While he certainly had sinned, the lesson is that the body which produced the leprous boil, is the same body which produces sin. Hezekiah required curing, as we require forgiveness for our sins and the redemption of the body out of which sin arises (Romans 8v23).

Here Hezekiah is a representative of his people. As Isaiah says of the Lord Jesus Christ,

“we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53v4).

Hezekiah’s terrible sickness was typical of the great sin of the nation. This sin arose because of the sin-prone nature which they all had in common with him.

ALL (apart from the Lord Jesus Christ) stand in need of the forgiveness of the sins of omission and commission in which they have been involved.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(1) In what way is leprosy a type?

(2) How could the Lord be said to be "stricken"?

(3) Why do we have bodies that need to be redeemed?

(4) On what basis will that redemption come?

(5) How is the Lord Jesus Christ our representative?

Psalm 130v4 *“But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”*

Without the forgiveness which God has provided in the Lord Jesus Christ we would be in a totally hopeless state. As Hezekiah knew only too well, sin brings death. Without the forgiveness of sin there is no hope beyond the grave. Unless our sins are forgiven our bodies will never be redeemed. But as Hezekiah says there is forgiveness with God, and that is a wonderful blessing. It is difficult to find words to describe how great that blessing is. But our deep appreciation of God’s goodness to us in this matter should make us revere Him. Both Rotherham and the Jerusalem Bible have “revered” or “revere” rather than “feared”.

Because God is so merciful in forgiving our sins, thereby redeeming us from a totally hopeless situation, we are duty-bound to honour Him by giving Him our utmost respect, obedience, devotion and praise. That is how we revere Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
Seeing we have a wonderfully merciful God who will forgive us our sins;

(1) Does this mean that it doesn’t matter if we sin?

(2) How does God forgive us for Christ’s sake (Ephesians 4v32)?

(3) How does this marvellous forgiveness assist us to revere God more?

Psalm 130:5 *“I wait for Yahweh, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.”*

We can imagine Hezekiah on his death-bed racked with pain; in a high fever; deserted by his friends; his condition critical. He believes he is almost at the point of death. As he says, he thought that his life was cut off (Isaiah 38v10-11). Whilst in that state he waits with his hope in Yahweh.

The “word” in which he hopes is God’s word (God’s promise) to David, that he would:

“set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels”
(2 Samuel 7v12).

Hezekiah believed that, for the royal line to continue, he would have to “see his seed”. This was remarkable faith on the part of Hezekiah. Despite being at the point of death, his belief in God’s word — God’s promise — is unwavering. Somewhat like the Lord Jesus Christ, Hezekiah’s faith is tested virtually to the point of death itself.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Hezekiah’s faith was sustained because he had an extremely clear understanding of God’s promises to David.

What does this teach us about the clearness and depth of understanding we need, if we are to have a faith like Hezekiah’s?

Psalm 130v6 *“My soul waiteth for Yahweh more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.”*

In the temple which Hezekiah loved, and from which he was now cut off, there were priests whose duty was to watch through the night until the morning came. As the first rays of the sun lit the morning sky, the priests would blow 3 blasts on their silver trumpets to herald the beginning of a new day of service. The gates of the temple would swing open and the daily services would begin.

The priests who watched through the night would very keenly look for the morning.

Psalm 130v7-8 ***“Let Israel hope in Yahweh: for with Yahweh there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”***

Truly Hezekiah could proclaim with great feeling that with Yahweh there is great mercy, and plenteous redemption. No wonder he wanted to praise God by singing his songs to the stringed instruments all the days of his life in the house of Yahweh (Isaiah 38v20).

Because there is great mercy and plenteous redemption with God, we, too, hope that in the future age, having received the “redemption of our body”, we will be able to praise God by singing such songs as these, and the song of Moses and the Lamb (Revelation 15v3-4).

Praise the Lord! for He is glorious;
 Never shall His promise fail;
 God shall make his Saints victorious,
 Sin and death shall not prevail.
 Praise the God of our Salvation;
 Hosts on high, His power proclaim;
 Heav'n and earth, and all creation,
 Laud and magnify His Name!
 (Hymn 69).

PSALM 131 – BLESSING & PEACE IN ZION

INTRODUCTION

In Psalm 131 Hezekiah finds a Psalm of David by which he could express his great humility before God. That it is a Psalm of David is clear from the superscription. Certainly it is a Psalm about humility.

Sometimes when a person is the recipient of great benefits, they come to imagine that they must be great. A sense of pride and importance comes flooding into their breasts, so they think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. Truly:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17v9).

After Hezekiah had been redeemed from death, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem were redeemed from the hand of the Assyrian, their hearts became lifted up in pride.

“In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto Yahweh: and he spake unto him, and he gave him a sign. But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; FOR HIS HEART WAS LIFTED UP: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 32v24-25).

This teaches us that it is not just the redemption of our bodies that we need, but the redemption of our minds as well. This is clear from the following texts.

Colossians 1v21	<i>"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind . . . now hath he reconciled"</i> .
Romans 12v2	<i>"Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind"</i> .
Ephesians 4v23	<i>"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind"</i> .
Philippians 2v5	<i>"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"</i> .

Hezekiah was to find out just how deceitful and desperately wicked his heart would be. Following his escape from the Assyrian siege:

"many brought . . . presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations" (2 Chronicles 32v23).

Hezekiah took the ambassadors of the nations which brought him presents

"and shewed them the house of his precious things, the silver and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not" (Isaiah 39v2).

Then Isaiah came to Hezekiah and said,

"Hear the word of Yahweh of hosts: Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith Yahweh" (Isaiah 39v5-6).

Hezekiah then realised his mistake:

"Hezekiah HUMBLLED HIMSELF for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of Yahweh came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah" (2 Chronicles 32v26).

This is the background of Hezekiah's use of this Psalm of David.

But it is still David's Psalm. Under what circumstances might David have written it? David had been the recipient of God's great blessings many times in his life. Certainly his marvellous defeat of Goliath could well have been a time when, in lesser mortals, pride might have swelled their chest. This might have been particularly so for David, because the defeat of Goliath came on top of other blessings. Jesse's 7 older sons had all been rejected, and Samuel, at Yahweh's command, had anointed David to be the next king in due time. (1 Samuel 16v1, 10-12). Then David was given the privileged position of being Saul's armourbearer and musician (1 Samuel 16v18-22). On top of this came the matter of the Philistines. Jesse sent David to the battle front with provisions for his eldest three sons. David, as a man of faith, could not understand how the Philistine giant could defy the armies of the living God.

“And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17v26).

The reaction of David’s brethren was to say that he was a young fool whose heart was lifted up in pride.

“And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab’s anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know THY PRIDE, AND THE NAUGHTINESS OF THINE HEART; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle” (1 Samuel 17v28).

But Eliab was wrong. It wasn’t true. David’s brethren hated him without a cause. David, who was a man of faith, was on a mission for his father. God had “provided” him (1 Samuel 16v1). When he faced the Philistine, he did so “in the name of Yahweh of Armies” (1 Samuel 17v45). He was victorious by faith! He slew the giant Goliath who represented King Sin. He knew the source of the strength by which he overcame. He wasn’t proud! His brethren were wrong!

David answers his brother’s charge in this Psalm. He says, “My heart is not haughty”. Hezekiah, whose heart had been lifted up by his own victory over death and by Sennacherib’s demise, now humbles himself. He sees in David, as he has seen so often before, a man to emulate. He now takes David’s Psalm as a very appropriate expression of his own heart now that he has realised his mistake and humbled himself.

There is a great lesson here for us, young people. We are not nearly as great as David, or Hezekiah, to say nothing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently there is absolutely nothing for us to be proud of or boast about. God is only interested in people who empty themselves and act in sincerity out of a genuinely humble heart.

Psalm 131v1 ***“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.”***

This is also a very appropriate way for us to feel as well. It was how David felt as he examined his heart after his brothers falsely accused him of pride. It was how Hezekiah felt after Isaiah had reproved him. But over and above that, it reminds us of the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, although he was the son of God, he made himself of no reputation. He saw his role as that of a lowly faithful servant. This was a humble role which, in obedience, took him to the cross (Philippians 2v6-8).

The Lord, having set such a wonderful example in his own life, is able to exhort his followers to

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek AND LOWLY IN HEART” (Matthew 11v29).

We must realise that we will not always understand the things that may happen to us in life under divine providence. We do not understand why God has called us to know Him as we do. David did not understand why he personally should have been the man for that moment in history. Nor did Hezekiah. But whatever happens to us, we should never imagine that it is because we are important, or better than somebody else. All we can do is proclaim with Paul,

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”
(Romans 11v23).

Let us be careful in this matter of pride. Hezekiah learnt by his own experience the great truth of the proverb which says,

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”
(Proverbs 16v18).

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Pride is one of the failings of the flesh. How can pride be conquered?

Psalm 131v2 *“Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.”*

After the initial lifting up of Hezekiah’s heart he says that he quieted himself: *“I am like a weaned child upon its mother’s breasts”*. To understand the picture presented here we need to be aware of the fact that in those days children were not weaned until much later than they are today. A child might have been between 2 and 5 years old before it was fully weaned. So the Psalmist says that he is like a weaned child — not like an unweaned child who cries and exerts itself and struggles upon its mother’s breast until it commences to get the nourishment it seeks. Hezekiah had learned to humble himself and lie quietly, as a fully weaned child will lie quietly and contentedly.



As Peter says, let us adorn ourselves with:

“the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of a great price” (1 Peter 3v4).

We see that humble spirit in the life of the Lord, and in the life of David as well. Many lesser men than David would have let the frustration of handling Saul goad them into wrong action. David could have slain Saul in the cave at Engedi. But with a meek and quiet spirit he said,

“I will not put forth mine hand against my lord: for he is Yahweh’s anointed” (1 Samuel 24v10).

His attitude was to wait patiently upon God, for his expectation was from Him (Psalm 62v5).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

A meek and quiet spirit is something with which we must adorn ourselves.

(1) How can this be accomplished?

(2) How are we to respond in the face of opposition?

If we are to wait patiently upon God, God must be a reality in our lives.

(3) How can we become more aware that we are always in the presence of God?

Psalm 131v3 *“Let Israel hope in Yahweh from henceforth and for ever.”*

David’s hope always lay in God. He could not have delivered Israel from the hand of Goliath by himself. For Hezekiah, there was no solution to the invasion of Sennacherib apart from that which lay in God. There was no cure for Hezekiah’s leprosy apart from the miracle that occurred.

It is an age-old principle that no man can by any means redeem his brother (Psalm 49v7). Nor can he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave (Psalm 89v48). But with God there is mercy and plenteous redemption (Psalm 130v7).

So it was with David! So it was with Hezekiah! So it was with Israel! So it is with us! *“Let Israel HOPE IN YAHWEH from henceforth and for ever”*.

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in Yahweh for ever: for in Yah, Yahweh, is everlasting strength” (Isaiah 26v3-4).

O that Israel had learned from David and Hezekiah, and trusted in Yahweh from that day forward. But they did not. And through their fall salvation has come to the Gentiles (Romans 11v11).

“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Hebrews 4v1-2).

Will the word preached profit us?

Let spiritual Israel hope in Yahweh, from henceforth, even for ever. This will bring us blessing and peace in Zion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In view of Israel's failure to trust in Yahweh,

(1) What hope is there for us to do better?

(2) How can we succeed where they failed?

STUDY No. 5



STUDY No. 5

PSALMS 132, 133 & 134

PSALM 132 – A PSALM OF DISTRESS

INTRODUCTION

As Hezekiah lay dying, he was in DISTRESS because he was at a loss to understand how God's promise to David could be fulfilled — the promise that David should never want for a man to reign upon his throne (Jeremiah 33v21).

So, in humility, Hezekiah pleads David's cause, not his own. He appeals to Yahweh to save him FOR DAVID'S SAKE, that through him God's promise to David might ultimately be fulfilled.

This is obvious from verses 10 and 11.

Psalm 132v1-5 *“Yahweh, remember David, and all his afflictions: How he swore unto Yahweh, 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 Yahweh, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.”*

Hezekiah, like David, is in great affliction. Although he has faithfully served his God he is “*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*” (Isaiah 53v3). Like the Lord as he surveyed the city of Jerusalem just before his death he weeps with great weeping (Isaiah 38v3 [margin]; cf Luke 19v41).

Many a man in Hezekiah's situation would have longed for death, but not Hezekiah. He is like David. Things did not go smoothly for David as he laboured to serve his God. In this Psalm Hezekiah calls to mind David's great difficulty in bringing the ark to Zion. David's first attempt ended in tragedy and Uzzah died because, despite David's best intentions, insufficient attention had been given to the Law of God.

David had acted with the very best motive. It was a worthwhile project. He had a great zeal for God and for Zion. His heart was right. But his attempt at service in this matter was rejected by God. When his attempt to bring the ark to Zion ended in failure, David did not initially know what to do. He was afflicted and distressed. This was how Hezekiah felt because he couldn't understand the reason for his plight.



We don't know the exact circumstances under which David wrote Psalm 22. But at some time like the failed attempt to bring the ark to Zion, he cried unto God, and said,

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" (Psalm 22v1).

Hezekiah has a fellowship with David in "all his afflictions", just as the Lord Jesus Christ did later. Yahweh delivered David out of his afflictions. Hezekiah's hope was that Yahweh would deliver him FOR DAVID'S SAKE.

In verse 2 and 5 of this Psalm we have a little-used, but very beautiful title of our God. Hezekiah says that David vowed to "THE MIGHTY GOD OF JACOB", and that he longed to find a habitation for "THE MIGHTY GOD OF JACOB". This is a very interesting title of God. Its use in scripture seems to be restricted to appeals to God for help in times of trouble.

In fact, the word "God" should not be in the title at all. You will notice that it is in italics. It would be better rendered "THE MIGHTY ONE OF JACOB" — "the abiyr (Hebrew pronounced 'aw-beer') of Jacob". The word 'abiyr' is derived from the Hebrew 'abar' meaning "to be strong, to soar with the idea of looking over or above something". So Yahweh is likened to a strong, soaring, hovering eagle, that cares for its offspring and looks down from above to discern the minutest detail of their affliction. At the same time, because of its elevation, the hovering eagle can look away into the distance, just as God can see the future, enabling Him to act for man's eternal welfare.

But why the "Abiy of JACOB"? Why Jacob? If one looks at the life of Jacob, the answer becomes clear. Yahweh overlooked Jacob's life from the cradle to the grave. Jacob was often in trouble, out of which God delivered him. He watched over him and saved him out of all his afflictions. God used the circumstances of life to mould Jacob's character for the Kingdom. To Jacob, God proved to be the 'Abiy' — the Mighty One whose all-seeing eye not only saw Jacob in his afflictions but also saw what was in Jacob's best interest eternally, and acted accordingly.

David and Hezekiah knew the character of God as revealed in the title "the Abiy of Jacob". They knew it from experience, and, in their affliction, they, too, appealed to the Mighty One of Jacob. Despite the afflictions, difficulties, and disappointments; despite the fact that things happened to them which they did not understand; they maintained a burning zeal for the Truth and a resolute trust in God.

They were faithful men who set themselves a goal in their service to God and then laboured tirelessly until, with God's blessing, it was finally accomplished. As David said in this Psalm,

"I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, Until I find out a place for Yahweh, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob" (Psalm 132v4-5).

There is a great lesson here for us. Too often we give up in our service to God when things seem to go wrong. Lesser men than David might have given up after the tragedy of Uzzah's death. It required great faith on the part of David to continue with the project.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Our motives do not make any difference if we are wrong (as shown by David's failed first attempt to bring the ark to Zion). Discuss this in relation to:

(1) Doctrine;

(2) The position in which it places the churches of Christendom;

(3) Our service to God.

Describe the characteristics of the eagle that make it a fit symbol of our marvellous God and His Spirit power.

The title, "The Abiy of Jacob", is a glorious title of God.

(1) What is your own favourite title of God? — give your reasons.

(2) If you don't have a favourite title be prepared to give information on one of God's titles, and, if possible, one with which other young people may be less familiar.

When things go wrong in our service to God (as they did for David in his first attempt to bring the ark to Zion), what should we do?

So far as the commencement of the project to bring the ark to Zion was concerned, he said,

Psalm 132v6 ***“Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood.”***

There are 2 possible meanings of the phrase “Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah”. Probably, David is saying that he heard of the ark while he was growing up in Ephratah, his father being of Bethlehem EPHRATAH (1 Samuel 17v12; cf also Micah 5v2). The other possibility is that he is saying that he heard that the ark was in Ephratah, although the scripture is elsewhere silent about that. Whatever the case, the ark was basically lost. That is why this verse says “We FOUND it”. It was found at Kirjath-jearim where it had been for 20 years (1 Samuel 7v2). Kirjath-jearim means “City of Forests”. The Jerusalem Bible translates the expression “fields of the wood” in Psalm 132v6 as “Fields-of-the-FOREST”.

Now one would imagine that the work of bringing the ark from Kirjath-jearim to Zion would be blessed by God. Just as David was in affliction as he laboured in that great work, so was Hezekiah at this time, and so was our Lord as he laboured in the great work of redemption.

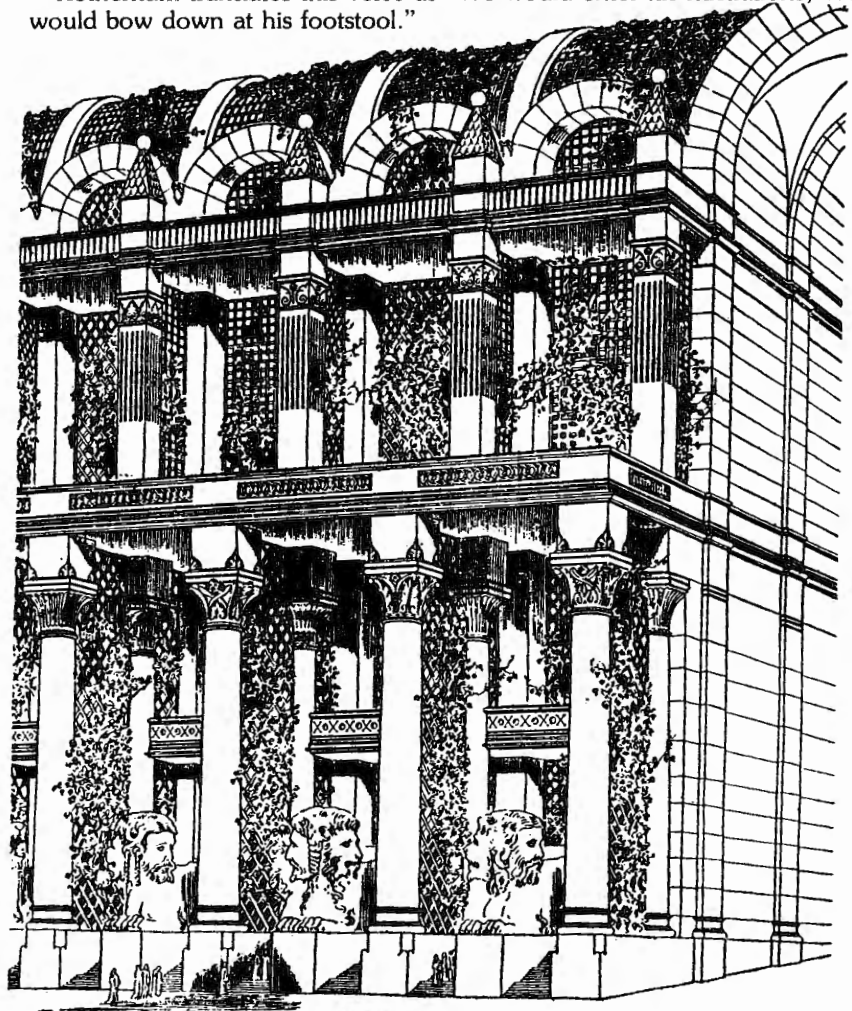
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (1) Do trial and tribulation always mean that our work is not blessed by God?

(2) What part do trial and tribulation play in preparing us for the Kingdom?

Psalm 132v7 ***"We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at his footstool."***

Rotherham translates this verse as "We would enter his habitations, We would bow down at his footstool."



EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE INNER TEMPLE

The fact that the word “tabernacles” or “habitations” is in the plural here indicates that David has the glorious Kingdom age in view as well. There had been the original tabernacle that housed the ark, and when David brought the ark to Zion he erected one (2 Samuel 6v17). Yet another will be erected at Mt. Zion in the future.

The inner circle of buildings in the future “House of Prayer for all Nations” is described as a tabernacle in Ezekiel 41v1. (For further explanation of this verse, see *The Temple of Ezekiel’s Prophecy* by Bro. Henry Sulley, page 94).

It was the future tabernacle that was the real point of David’s hope. He knew that, after he slept with his fathers, his seed (Christ) would be born, and that, in due time, God would establish his kingdom. David knew that he would be resurrected to see “the house” (or tabernacle) that the Lord Jesus Christ will build at Zion, and to worship there in immortal glory (2 Samuel 7v12-16).

It was the future tabernacle that David desired above all else.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:
 In what way can the inner circle of buildings in the Temple of the Future Age be described as a tabernacle?

Psalm 132v8 “Arise, O Yahweh, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength.”

After much distress, when David finally brought the ark to Zion the glorious pronouncement of this verse was made — “*Arise, O Yahweh, into thy resting place; Thou, and the ark of thy strength*” (Revised Version). See comments on God’s “resting place” in verse 14.

This was not a new pronouncement. Similar words were used by Moses as the children of Israel marched through the wilderness towards their inheritance.

“And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Yahweh, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Yahweh, unto the many thousands of Israel” (Numbers 10v35-36).

Hezekiah must have longed for a fulfilment of the words, “*Rise up, Yahweh, and let thine enemies be scattered*”, when, at this very time, Jerusalem was surrounded by enemies, and he lay struck down by that great “enemy” death (cf 1 Corinthians 15v26). How Hezekiah longed for God to “return” to him in his affliction, that he might be raised from his bed of illness.

After David used the words when the ark was conveyed to its resting place in Zion, Solomon used them when the ark was finally installed in the Temple which he had built (see 2 Chronicles 6v41-42).

Before the ark finally came to Zion, as it was commencing its journey, David said,

“Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him” (Psalm 68v1).

Hezekiah would have had echoes of all those passages in his mind as he composed Psalm 132. Particularly would he have been mindful of other words of Psalm 68:

“God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains:” (Psalm 68v6).

This is exactly what God did for Hezekiah as He broke the chains of death, and gave him a family, that the promise that David would “never want (for) a man” might not fail.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

In what way is Zion Yahweh’s resting place?

Psalm 132v9-11 *“Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy. For thy servant David’s sake turn not away the face of thine anointed. Yahweh hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.”*

This promise to David was the basis of Hezekiah’s hope as it is of ours. It was a promise that there would be a royal line from David to Christ, and that, in due time, Christ would sit on David’s throne. But Isaiah had come to childless Hezekiah and said,

“Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live” (Isaiah 38v1).

What could Hezekiah do but appeal to God on the basis of His promise to David?

Hezekiah himself is the “anointed” of verse 10.

Psalm 132v12 *“If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore.”*

Hezekiah had indeed kept God’s covenant and His testimony. He had walked before God in truth with all his heart and soul. So now he appeals to God to fulfil His promise that there should not fail to be a man on the throne of Israel (see 1 Kings 2v4).

For our own time this verse provides great encouragement for both parents and children. It provides a picture of a faithful family — the parents with their children, and their grandchildren being raised in the fear and admonition of Yahweh, and thereby having the potential to inherit the Kingdom for ever.

There can be no more important work for parents than to raise their children to be faithful in the Truth. It is not just a matter of children knowing the truth; they have to learn to love the Truth — to have a zeal for it, as did David and Hezekiah. They must walk before God with all their heart and all their soul (1 Kings 2v4).

If we know and love the Truth, then, despite the times of difficulty and distress that might be our lot in life, we will put our trust in the “Abiyr of Jacob”, and find deliverance and a place in the Kingdom of God in the end.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(1) What does it mean to walk before God with all our heart and all our soul?

(2) What degree of dedication is implied by that expression?

(3) How is such dedication to be achieved?

Psalm 132v13-14 *“For Yahweh hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.”*

The reference here is back to Deuteronomy 12:

“But unto the place which Yahweh your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come:” (Deuteronomy 12v5).

This emphasises that it was to HIS habitation that the nation should SEEK to COME. In bringing the ark to Zion David was endeavouring to re-establish the ideals of Divine worship in his kingdom. With the ark in Zion, David was hoping that the nation would realise that God was in their midst, and consequently “seek” Him, and “come” to His habitation that they might worship before Him in sincerity and truth.

While God certainly chose Zion as His earthly resting place in the past, the real fulfilment awaits the future. Then Yahweh will not come to Zion dwelling between the cherubim on an ark made of wood and metal. He will come in glorious manifestation in the form of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the immortalised saints upon whom will be written the name of God (Acts 15v14; Revelation 3v12).

That this is the real meaning is made clearer by the Revised Version which translates verse 14 as:

“This is my RESTING PLACE FOR EVER: Here will I dwell; for I have desired it.”

Notice that the Revised Version has “resting place” instead of “rest”.

God’s “resting place”, His dwelling place, will be in all the redeemed. It is His dwelling place even now. But it will be far more so in the glorious future.

“Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will DWELL IN THEM, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Corinthians 6v16).

So God's resting place will be in all the redeemed. They won't just be in one place. The redeemed will go forth into all the earth bearing God's glory (Romans 5v2). His power, and His name.

Revelation 11v19 encapsulates the idea:

"And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail."

The verse is, of course, symbolic. The "heaven" refers to the political heaven of the Kingdom of God. The reference to "the temple" is to the nave or Most Holy, because the ark is seen in it. The Most Holy was symbolic of the immortal state. The ark was Yahweh's throne in Israel (Exodus 25v22). It was where He dwelt. In this passage the "ark of the testament" (or covenant) speaks figuratively of God dwelling in Christ and the immortal saints in glory. (For further information on Revelation 11v19 see *The Apocalypse Epitomised* by Bro. H.P. Mansfield, Logos Publications).

So here in Revelation 11v19 we have the outworking of that which David typified when he brought the ark to Zion. Finally God will be manifested in Christ and the saints, and there will be an awesome display of Divine power, represented in Revelation 11v19 by *"lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail"*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(1) How can it be said that God's dwelling place at present is in us?

(2) What is the difference between God's dwelling in us now, and His dwelling in us in the glorious state of immortality?

Psalm 132v15 *“I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread.”*

In Hezekiah’s own day there was a typical fulfilment of these words.

“And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such as groweth of itself; and the second year that which springeth of the same: and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof” (Isaiah 37v30).

The “bread” is a symbol of spiritual food (John 6v33-35). God provides even now spiritual food in abundance for those who are poor and of a contrite spirit and tremble at His word (Isaiah 66v2).

In the Kingdom Age there will be an abundance of spiritual and natural food for the mortal population.

*“Grain everywhere in the country,
even on the mountain tops,
abundant as Lebanon its harvest,
luxuriant as common grass!”
(Psalm 72v16 Jerusalem Bible).*

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Describe the blessings of the Kingdom Age which will be enjoyed by the MORTAL population that survives Armageddon.

Psalm 132v16 *“I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.”*

God’s promise in this verse had a typical fulfilment in Hezekiah’s own day. Sennacherib’s army was slain and the enemy clothed with shame (Psalm 132v18), while the priests in Jerusalem were figuratively clothed with salvation and shouted for joy.

Nevertheless the real fulfilment awaits the future when the king-priests will be clothed with salvation and will shout aloud with a joy we can now only partly comprehend, as they sing the great song of Moses and the Lamb.

Psalm 132v17 *“There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed.”*

The Jerusalem Bible and the Revised Standard Version translate the word “bud” as “sprout”. David’s horn (or power) did sprout during Hezekiah’s extension to life when a son was born to him. But the real reference is to the righteous SPROUT — the righteous Branch that God was going to raise unto David, who will save both Judah and Israel.

“Behold, the days come, saith Yahweh, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, YAHWEH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jeremiah 23v5-6).

Isaiah 53v2 says,

“For he shall grow up before him as a TENDER PLANT, and as a root out of a dry ground.”

The “lamp” set before David was the symbol of the covenant that God made with him — the covenant that in due time He would set Christ upon his throne.

“Howbeit Yahweh would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he made with David, and as he promised to give a LAMP to him and to his sons for ever” (2 Chronicles 21v7 margin).

That “lamp” burned on and on until it was finally paled by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He is the SUN of righteousness (Malachi 4v2), the great Light of John chapter 1:

“(John the Baptist) came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He (John) was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light” (John 1v7-8).



The Light was the Lord Jesus Christ. The word “Light” in John 1v7-8 is from the Greek word ‘phos’ which means “to shine as the sun or shine by rays”.

Now, Christ is the “light of the world” and we are able to walk in the “light of life” (John 8v12).

Psalm 132v18 *“His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish.”*

See notes on verse 16 above. The Russians, like the Assyrians, will be clothed with shame in the day that Yahweh pleads against them, and thus magnifies Himself in the eyes of the nations (Ezekiel 38v22-23).

So, in Psalm 132, we learn that the promises to David were to bring great blessings FOR Zion. In Psalm 133 we will find a great blessing IN Zion.

PSALM 133 – A PSALM OF TRUST

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 133 is a Psalm of David. It is another one of those Psalms which Hezekiah took to himself as an appropriate expression of his own experiences and circumstances. Here we have the blessing of a truly united ecclesia outlined. As well, there is David's TRUST that Yahweh will bless him with life for evermore in the Coming Age.

Psalm 133v1 *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”*

How did David come to write these words? After the death of Saul, David was firstly anointed king in Hebron by the tribe of Judah only (2 Samuel 2v3-4). This anointing was followed by a long period of hostility between the house of Saul and the house of David.

“Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker” (2 Samuel 3v1).

Finally, after a period of great difficulty and bloodshed, ALL THE TRIBES of Israel came to David in Hebron and said,

“Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh . . . So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before Yahweh: and they anointed David king OVER ISRAEL . . . In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over ALL ISRAEL AND JUDAH” (2 Samuel 5v1-5).

The tribes were united again — they were united to David as one man. These are the circumstances in which David wrote this Psalm.

In Hezekiah's day there were two periods of unity when all the nation, which was now divided into two kingdoms, came together as one. The first of these was at the beginning of his reign when all the tribes of Israel and Judah were invited to come up to the House of Yahweh in Jerusalem to keep the passover (2 Chronicles 30v1-20). While not all came, many out of the northern tribes did come to keep the feast.

“Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem. Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them ONE HEART to do the commandment of the king . . .” (2 Chronicles 30v11-12).

The second period of great unity in Hezekiah’s day was more intimately connected with the Songs of the Degrees. After the slaying of the Assyrians there was again opportunity for all Israel to make their way up to the House of Yahweh in Jerusalem to worship there. They could come again to serve and praise God, and rejoice in the great deliverance which the Creator of heaven and earth had wrought in destroying the Assyrians.

So Hezekiah, in this Psalm of David, finds expressions which are appropriate to his own circumstances, and so he incorporates it into the Songs of the Degrees.

By a series of similes the Psalmist gives expression to the wonderful joy, and the great benefit which ensues when God’s ecclesia is genuinely united together as one.

Psalm 133v2 *“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;”*

Unity is likened to the anointing oil which was poured upon the head of the high priest at the time of his consecration (Exodus 29v7; 30v23-25). The oil which was poured on his head ran down (or descended) his hair and beard to the top of his garment. It didn’t go right to the bottom of the garment. The word “skirts” is from the Hebrew word ‘peh’ and means the mouth or edge. The Jerusalem Bible translates it here as “collar” while Rotherham has “opening”. The reference is to the collar or neck of the garment.



This is a wonderful picture of oil descending from the top of the head, and running down the beard until the oil unites head and body. That, says the Psalmist, is a picture of true unity.

It is the oil of the word which unites the head to the body. Christ is the head, and the body is the ecclesia (Ephesians 1v22-23). When the word of God is properly understood and faithfully applied in

our lives there is a unity, or fellowship between Christ and his followers.

We should notice the order of things. The oil descended from the top of the head to the region of the heart. This order teaches us that, if there is true unity in the body of Christ, there must be right thinking, followed by the involvement of the heart.

All too often when men seek unity they try to achieve it by the reverse order. They seek unity on the basis of establishing a warm feeling in the heart, thinking that will affect the head. That is a prescription for achieving union, but not unity.

The Bible teaches that peace, and therefore unity, is THE WORK of righteousness.

“And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever” (Isaiah 32v17).

Unity springs from right thinking followed by heartfelt action. People who think alike, who fervently believe the same things, are able to develop strong bonds of feeling and fellowship for one another within the great hope that they share.

James has a similar message about how to achieve and maintain unity. He says

“But the wisdom that is FROM ABOVE (and therefore descends) is FIRST PURE, then peaceable . . .” (James 3v17).

He knew that there could be no peace without purity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(1) How is true unity to be achieved in our families and in our ecclesias?

(2) Why does wrong doctrine destroy unity in ecclesial life?

(3) What part should prayer play in seeking unity in our families and ecclesias? Is prayer the only way that unity descends from above?

(4) Can we be one with God and Christ if we are doctrinally astray?

Psalm 133v3 ***“As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there Yahweh commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”***

Now the Psalmist uses another simile to liken unity to the dew which falls on two mountains. They are Hermon, which was situated in the far north of the land of Israel, and Mt. Zion at Jerusalem. Hermon was in Israel among the tribes. Mt. Zion was in the territory of Judah. This is the idea behind David's use of this simile.

When ALL THE TRIBES came eventually to make David king, there was a unity of thought and purpose throughout all the people of the land. Hermon and Zion were united as it were, by the dew (the common thought and purpose) to make David their king.

Moses says,

“My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall DISTIL AS THE DEW . . .” (Deuteronomy 32v2).

David's point in this Psalm is that the dew which descends from above is the same dew that falls in both places. It comes down on Hermon and on Zion. It has one source, and this creates unity.

So Hezekiah sent posts to all Israel and Judah to invite them to come to Jerusalem to keep the passover (2 Chronicles 30v6). Many of the people of like mind came. After the destruction of Sennacherib's army many came again from north, south, east, and west to enjoy the unity of fellowship in Zion.

Dew is formed in the calm of night when the soil is warm and the air is cool and moist. But if there is a wind, there will be no dew. The lesson is that when unity of thought is disturbed by the winds of wrong doctrine (Ephesians 4v14), then it becomes difficult to maintain unity, because the conditions which allow the dew to form simply do not exist.

In Israel, a major factor in keeping the air moist as far south as Zion is the snow which melts on Mt. Hermon. From some angles Mt Hermon resembles the shape of a high priest's head, with the white snow forming his hair and beard. As the snow melts on Hermon it "runs down" to the skirts of the land of Israel. It flows into the Jordan and "descends", uniting the north and the south of the land.



MOUNT HERMON

Unity is something which must be sought. It is a Divine blessing which "descends" from above. The Lord Jesus Christ knew this, so he prayed for this blessing for his disciples, and for all those who believe on him.

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they ALL MAY BE ONE; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be ONE in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17v20-21).

The fact that unity is something which “descends” is emphasised three times in this short Psalm. So, in verse 2, the oil “RAN DOWN” the beard. It “WENT DOWN” the garment. And then in verse 3 we read of the dew that “DESCENDED”. In all three places it is the same Hebrew word, which Rotherham consistently translates as “descending” or “descended”.

Dew is normally seen just as the sun rises. In scripture dew is not only the symbol of doctrine, but also of resurrection. Isaiah says,

*“Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise.
Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: FOR THY DEW is as the dew
of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead” (Isaiah 26v19).*

The dead, like the dew, shall be seen when the Sun of Righteousness arises (Malachi 4v2). Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake to everlasting life (Daniel 12v2).

David, having been made king by ALL ISRAEL, came and dwelt in Zion and there was peace and unity because Yahweh had given him rest from all his enemies (2 Samuel 7v1, 11). In this wonderful atmosphere a COMMAND came to Nathan the prophet “IN ZION”. He had to go to David to tell him that God would set up his seed after him; that Yahweh would establish the throne of his kingdom for ever (2 Samuel 7v12-13); and that his kingdom would be established FOR EVER BEFORE HIM (2 Samuel 7v16). For David, this meant that he would be raised from the dead and live for evermore. So there, in Zion, Yahweh gave a commandment that had the wonderful blessing “even life for evermore” attached to it.

If we have been baptised into Christ we can participate in that glorious blessing, because, in him, we have come figuratively unto Mt. Zion and the (conditional) promise of life for evermore.

*“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living
God . . .” (Hebrews 12v22).*

Behold, how good a thing it is,
And how becoming well,
Together such as brethren are
In unity to dwell.

Like precious ointment on the head
That down the beard did flow,
E'en Aaron's beard, and to the skirts
Did of his garments go.

As Hermon's dew, the dew that doth
On Sion's hill descend;
For there the blessing God commands,
Life that shall never end.

(Hymn 4)

So, in Psalm 133 there is blessing IN Zion, and in Psalm 134 there is blessing FROM Zion.

PSALM 134 – BLESSING AND PEACE FROM ZION

This final Psalm of the Songs of the Degrees may well constitute Hezekiah's last exhortation to those whose duty it was to labour at night in the Temple, because it is the 15th Song of the Degrees, which corresponds to the 15th year which was added to his life.

Be that as it may, it certainly is an appropriate exhortation for us as we labour in the darkness of the Gentile night in the spiritual house of the living God.

Psalm 134v1-2 ***“Behold, bless ye Yahweh, all ye servants of Yahweh, which by night stand in the house of Yahweh. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless Yahweh.”***

Hezekiah knew how easy it was to fall asleep as we watch for the morning. Many exhortations in scripture are built upon this theme. We have already seen the theme earlier in the Songs of the Degrees — Psalm 130v5-6. It was a theme which was dear to the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ as well.

“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come . . . Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24v42-44).

Again, in Revelation 16, the Lord says,

“Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame” (Revelation 16v15).

This exhortation is based on the custom of the Captain of the temple guard (Acts 4v1). At unexpected times, he would make his rounds of the temple. Any guard who was found asleep had his garments set on fire; thus rendering him naked and ashamed.

So, in the spirit, later manifested in Christ, Hezekiah exhorts these servant watchmen to bless Yahweh as they stand at night in the house of Yahweh. Although it was night it was not a time for inactivity in God's service. There was much for these temple guards to do as they went about their duties and watched and waited for the new day to dawn. They certainly had a grand opportunity to think about their God and bless Him.

A person who “stands” is a person who is awake, alert, and ready to take any action which may be necessary to secure the temple against attack or intrusion.

Stephen said, at the end of his trial, that he saw:

“the glory of God, and Jesus STANDING on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man STANDING on the right hand of God” (Acts 7v55-56).

The fact that Stephen saw the Lord “standing” rather than sitting was indicative of the fact that he was about to come and intervene in the affairs of the Jewish nation, as he did in A.D.70. So “standing” indicates an attitude of keen interest and action.

Today we have a duty to wait with this attitude of keen interest and action as we stand in the spiritual house of God (1 Peter 2v5). As the darkness of the Gentile world deepens about us, we have a duty to be awake and watching, lest the Captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2v10) come upon us unawares. Like the night watchmen in the temple we have much to praise God for, as the signs intensify that the Sun of Righteousness will soon appear.

We should heed Hezekiah’s exhortation to bless Yahweh. As individuals and as a community we do not seem to bless Yahweh sufficiently. How can we bless God? The word “bless” comes from the Hebrew word ‘barak’. Its basic meaning is “to kneel”. When we bless God, it implies that we adore, reverence, and praise Him for His greatness and exceeding goodness unto them.

One simple way to bless God, is by singing the words of our hymns of praise with sincerity and feeling. We have some wonderful hymns with which we can “bless God”. For example:

Glory and blessing be
 Ever ascribed to Thee;
 Uncreate unity,
 Father of all.
 Angelic spirits bright
 Gaze on Thy living light,
 Veiled from our mortal sight,
 And prostrate fall.
 Holy of holies, we
 Worship and bow the knee,
 Uncreate unity,
 Spirit divine.
 Ancient of endless days,
 Remember Zion’s ways,
 And for her children’s praise,
 Arise and shine.

(Hymn 60).

Another way in which we can bless God is by the “lifting up of our hands in the sanctuary”. The lifting up of hands was the symbol of reaching out to God in prayer.

It is through the lifting up of our hands in prayer that the enemy can be defeated. That was wonderfully demonstrated in Moses’ victory over Amalek.

“And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed”
 (Exodus 17v11).

That was Hezekiah’s own experience. He was successful over his enemies through the power of prayer.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

(1) In what ways can we best serve God in the midst of the darkness of the Gentile night?

(2) As we continue to wait for his coming, it is easy to fall asleep. What can we do to maintain our interest and ensure that we stay awake and alert?

(3) What part can prayer and praise play in keeping us alert as we stand in the temple of our God?

(4) How near are we to Christ's coming?

Psalm 134v3 *“Yahweh that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.”*

In these words there is an echo of the great blessing which Yahweh instructed Aaron and his sons to bestow on the children of Israel.

“Yahweh bless thee, and keep thee: Yahweh make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: Yahweh lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Numbers 6v24-26).

Hezekiah’s blessing has two additional features. He said, *“Yahweh THAT MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH bless thee”*. Yahweh had indeed blessed them. The Creator of heaven and earth, whose power is seen in all the creation about us, had used His marvellous power and removed the enemy from them. He had answered the blasphemy of Sennacherib who had said,

“Do not let your God on whom you are relying deceive you, when he says: Jerusalem shall not fall into the power of the king of Assyria” (2 Kings 19v10 Jerusalem Bible).

Yahweh, the Creator of heaven and earth, will bless Israel again when He sends “an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone” against Russia — the latter-day Assyrian (Ezekiel 38v22).

In that great day through the power of the Creator of heaven and earth, Zion will be elevated (Psalm 48v2 R.V.). Then the Temple will be built there. In this special way people will be blessed out of Zion.

This is the second additional feature of Hezekiah’s blessing — Yahweh “bless thee OUT OF ZION”. They will say in that glorious day,

“Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob; . . . for OUT OF ZION shall go forth the law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2v3).

Then they will acknowledge the truth of the words which Sennacherib and Rabshakeh denied, that *“He that keepeth Israel, shall neither slumber nor sleep”* (Psalm 121v4). In the House of Prayer in the Coming Age they will lift up their hands and bless Yahweh.

In a special sense, the immortal saints will thrill to the worship of that place. In joyous immortality they will be able to lift up their heads, hearts, and hands in prayer and praise. Truly they will be able to say *“Yahweh hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad”* (Psalm 126v3).

Most glorious things are spoken,
 Jerusalem, of thee,
 To all God’s saints the token
 Of love and liberty.
 Who shall thy hill ascending,
 From pain and sorrow free;
 From sin and death’s contending,
 The living glory be?

Who shall receive the pebble,
The raiment pure and white:
The holy name of ALL,
The change to Spirit light?
He who has hands of cleanness,
Whose heart abides in truth;
Whose soul abhors to leanness,
The vanities of youth.

He shall receive the blessing
Of Yahweh's saving grace:
And, righteousness possessing,
Shall see Him face to face.
Yes, wondrous things are spoken,
Jerusalem, of thee:
The oath cannot be broken,
And we its joys shall see.

(Hymn 240)

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

How will Yahweh bless us out of Zion?
