

ASCENT TO ZION

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A study of

The Psalms of Degrees

(120-134)

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P R E F A C E

Surely, there must exist some tangible ultimate objectives for the Christian life beyond our daily blessings and our hope for a blissful eternity.

Most of my Christian life – about 67 years ago- I have spent in search of something real and meaningful and which satisfies the inner man. At age 8, when I surrendered my heart to the Lord Jesus, I experienced a genuine and lasting apprehension. My baptism in the Spirit was powerful. I felt as though my being was taken over by a mighty irresistible force.

I have pursued progressive sanctification, spiritual character and the gifts of the Spirit. In my lifetime, I have been privileged to live through two powerful visitations to His church. It has been an honor to preach the gospel for 54 years.

But, my heart still yearns for more. The scriptures always seem to speak of more than what I have experienced and the prophets, through the years, have proclaimed greater things. Thus, the search and waiting continue.

What I share in this booklet, in a sense, represents a personal testimony of a blessed and satisfying working of God. This ongoing experience comes from my participation in a precious local fellowship, where the creative hand of God is forming a “family.”

I am unwaveringly persuaded that one of God’s ultimate, yet present objectives is the building of His church. Wherever God is truly working, there is forward movement toward the formation of a corporate habitation for Him. I speak not of great numbers, programs or ministries, but of a spiritual work which bonds people together to form God’s dwelling place.

To many, this message is not new, but I trust that a measure of the quickening and enthusiasm I experienced in writing it will be imparted to those who read it.

May this study in the Psalms of Degrees bring renewed hope and vision to every wandering pilgrim, as well as strength and encouragement to all who labor in the building of the church.

ASCENT TO ZION

Psalms of Degrees 120-134

It is possible that the psalms of degrees (120-134) were sung by caravans of pilgrims making their journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the annual feasts of Israel. If this is so, their message becomes very meaningful, since our walk as believers can be likened unto a progressive journey.

When the Israelites were partaking of the Passover Lamb before their departure from Egypt, the Lord instructed them as follows: *“eat with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand.”* (Ex. 12:11) They were to eat in haste and be ready to begin a journey. The Lord had a path for them to follow and a destination for them to reach. After an appointment in Sinai, they were to proceed to Canaan, their land of destiny.

It is the same for the Christian. Our rescue from the world represents the beginning of a journey that has specific goals and a distinct destination.

Blessed are those who are running the race with patience, that divinely imparted determination to reach the goal.

The Predicament

“In my distress I cried unto the Lord...” (Ps. 120:1)

The opening scene is one of a soul in distress. He sojourns in “Mesech” and “Kedar,” and the reference here is not to a geographical location, for these two places are not adjacent. Rather, the allusion is to the tribal characteristics of fierce competitiveness, violent controversy, and constant unrest. The picture is one of nomadic tribes competing for water and pasture and embroiled in perpetual controversy over territorial rights.

How typical this is of the present evil world, where men argue, fight and kill to gain the advantage. Fallen man will stop at nothing to gain his desires, be they legitimate or not. The prevailing philosophy that drives unrighteous men today is, **“get ahead at any cost, by any means.”** Thus, the soul finds himself trapped in a social order marked by jealousy and competition, greed and covetousness, and hatred and violence.

The Cry For Help

“...from whence cometh my help?” (Ps. 121:1)

The distressed soul, deeply enmeshed in his dilemma, looks up in search of help. Indications are that he has struggled long with the problem. (Ps. 120:6) Isn't this the way most of take? We will try everything to change our situation. We strive, scheme,

and struggle and use every possible means. And the amazing thing is that God lets us do it, to bring us to the end of ourselves and to learn that, apart from him, there is failure.

This soul's every effort has come to naught. It is as though he is raising his arms in despair when he cries, "***From whence shall my help come?***"

Over and over again he has tried.
Nothing has changed.
He scans the horizon.
No help is forthcoming.

The Lord has waited for this moment. Impartation of light and truth come only when the time is ripe. When hopelessness and despair have set in, the spiritual ear begins to open. When the heart has been overwhelmed by life's predicament, it will soften to the Spirit's overtures.

God knows the way of human nature. We are proud. We will not readily ask for help. We will try everything possible. For most men, the last recourse is God. When all else has failed, a few will try Him. The great driving force in man is the determination to hold the reins himself. "Surrender" and "committal" are the last words a sinner wants to hear.

And so God waits for us
To come to the end of ourselves,
To fail utterly,
To lose hope,
To cry out for help.

The Beginning of the Journey

"My help cometh from the Lord..." (Ps. 121:2)

At this point, the soul makes his first giant step in a life-long journey. He acknowledges that his help must come from a power outside of and greater than himself. ***"My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth."***

What a great stride forward this represents!

This ravaged soul is experiencing deliverance from his evil environment and from his own self-efforts. He is being flooded with revelation knowledge about a God who will help him, a God who will guide his steps and preserve him. By the Spirit's revelation, he senses that this God can be entrusted with the keeping of every aspect of his life.

"The Lord is thy keeper..." (Ps. 121:5)

“The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil...” (Ps. 121:7)

Intuitively, he perceives that this God will not only keep him from harm, but will carry him forward to the fulfillment of a meaningful purpose.

This God is Jesus, the shepherd of the sheep.

Jesus knows each of His sheep by name and loves them to the point of laying down His life for them. His tender care and watchful eye are ever upon them. He never slumbers. Can there be anything more wonderful than constant care and unerring guidance to a proper destination? This is what Jesus provides for the soul who commits himself to Him.

This troubled soul is experiencing something glorious. He is embracing the Lord as His shepherd and becoming committed to Him. It is both a life-long and an eternal commitment. His testimony is:

“...from this time forth and even forever more.” (Ps. 121:8)

This is salvation

Men will try

self-reformation, religion, education, psychology, philosophy, wealth, power.

But none holds the answer, for in them is no power to bring change inwardly. Only Christ has the answer to life's predicament. Only He can transform and empower the human life. With a committal of ourselves to Him, **He will do it.**

The soul in distress has been birthed into a dimension of faith and hope. He is entrusting the keeping and guiding of his life to the Lord, **forever!**

Something has happened inwardly. In his heart he has made a decision. He is turning over the reins of his life to another. He is acknowledging that Jesus Christ is and shall be Lord of his life.

Yes, this is true salvation.

But it's only the beginning.

The Pilgrim Meets a People

“I was glad when they said unto me...” (Ps. 122:1)

After we have committed the keeping of our souls to our faithful shepherd, we must watch carefully the way he leads. He is now in charge, and will control every circumstance. From here on, nothing happens by chance.

The pilgrim now comes in contact with a **people**. It is a caravan journeying toward some destination. They seem to be a joyful group, for they fill the air with songs. Although there is evidence they have come a long distance, their steps are steady. They appear to be enthusiastic and determined. A sense of meaningful purpose exudes from them.

In our Christian life, it is imperative that we meet the right people and allow our lives to interact with them. We cannot experience the full outworking of our call and destiny by an independent walk. A life of isolation is not consistent with God's prescribed way. We are not saved to walk alone. Once apprehended, we are now called to be

a sheep in a flock,
a member of a body,
a stone in a building.

An intimate personal relationship with the Lord, though extremely vital, is not to be used to serve only individual needs but to help us fulfill our calling in a corporate body. Have you been apprehended by the Lord in salvation? **If so, you can be sure you will meet a people. Make sure it is the right people.**

You won't have a "sense of belonging" in the wrong flock.

You will feel out of joint in the wrong body.

You won't fit in the wrong building.

A People With A Message

"... the house of the Lord...Jerusalem is builded...the tribes go up...to give thanks...thrones of judgment...peace be within thy walls...and prosperity..." (Ps. 122:1-7)

These people have a unique message. The spirit within you will bear witness. "I was glad..." It is the Lord's word for you. In it you will sense God's call. It will be very critical whether you respond or not. With this message is the hand of the Shepherd leading you into the right path for you.

YOUR DECISION WILL DETERMINE THE DIRECTION OF THE WHOLE REST OF YOUR LIFE!

Will you wander aimlessly?

Or, will you take God's ordained pathway?

How will you know?

In the message you must hear the voice of the Shepherd. A deep inner witness of the Spirit, accompanied by a sense of peace, must be present. Some things about this caravan will be unattractive. Not every person will appeal to you. There will be many questions and reasons for not joining them.

But, deep within you there will be an unexplainable "knowing." You will not be able to ignore or eliminate the drawing power exercised on your being. Inwardly, you sense that their message is somehow connected with your deep heart cry. Yes, you must join yourself to them. It's a moment of destiny and you don't want to miss it.

I am not here speaking of just any Christian group or any Christian message. Not every message is to be followed and not every group is to be joined. But though difficult to find, there is in the earth that particular word and working of the Spirit that will bring you to fulfillment. Somewhere, there is a people that are **your** people. They represent your "other parts." It is they who will bring to you a sense of wholeness.

God will be faithful to lead you to them.

A People On A Journey

"Let us go into the house of the Lord." (Ps. 122:1)

This people are on a journey. They move forward with enthusiasm and expectation. It is clear they have a definite objective. Their destination is *the house of the Lord*.

The church world today is basically at a standstill. One may see many encampments, each flying a banner. Some are encamped around the "new birth." Their main theme is "to save souls and get them ready for heaven." Salvation is their banner and their song. In this camp, there is not much more to look forward to but to bring others in. The main goal of this camp is numbers, numbers and more numbers.

Then there is the "Charismatic-Pentecostal camp." They claim to have discovered something more and make the Holy Ghost baptism their rallying point. They have a new form of worship and a few spiritual gifts operating. This camp feels they have reached the highest level and call it the "Full Gospel."

Many more diverse camps may be found, but in few, if in any, can there be found a sense of **progression**, a forward movement in revelation and experience. In most camps, the hungry heart asks the question,

“Is this all there is?”

How blessed indeed is the pilgrim who finds a people on a journey, who “are going some place in God.”

Where are they going? Unto the house of the Lord. This doesn’t sound like anything new or revolutionary. But let me explain.

The *house of the Lord* is not a church building. God does not in this age dwell in a building of wood and stone. Human hearts and lives are His dwelling place.

But, neither is the *house of the Lord* just any church gathering. Just as a pile of stones is not a building, neither is a collection of people the *house of the Lord*.

The house of the Lord is not a religious denomination or organization of any type. It is a **living organism**, a place where God can be found **dwelling in fullness**.

We can have beautiful form and ritual, impressive programs, charismatic personalities, talented choirs and orchestras, drama, entertainment, large crowds and much appeal, but none of these guarantees the formation of God’s house.

We may rise above that and have powerful preaching, beautiful worship, and accurate gifts working. These things represent a step out of bondage and have proven to be a blessing and a refreshing, but the formation of the house of the Lord requires something more.

Destination: Jerusalem

“Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together.” (Ps. 122:3)

God’s habitation becomes a reality only when saints are “builded together” and “grow together” in a spirit of love and unity. (Eph. 2:21,22)

The world has yet to see and principalities have yet to taste the glory that is to be manifest from God’s habitation. And, in turn, the church has, in this day, yet to experience the type of bonding together that will make her God’s habitation.

The message found in Eph. 2:21, 22 holds depths and revelation most have overlooked or misinterpreted. The church speaks in terms of “being saved and filled with the Spirit.” And there is not too much beyond that in her experience.

Why is that not enough, we may ask.

The experiences of salvation and the Spirit's infilling, glorious though they be, are individualistic in nature. They are experienced on a personal basis, each believer having his own unique and diverse encounter with God.

But the language of Ephesians is different. It speaks about a relationship and an interaction **among** believers. The vision given is that of the formation of something **corporate**. Various translations are enlightening:

*“We who believe are carefully joined together with Christ, as parts of a beautiful **CONSTANTLY GROWING** temple of God.*

*And you also are joined with Him, and **WITH EACH OTHER** by the Spirit, and are part of this dwelling place of God.”* (Living Bible)

*In Him (Christ) the whole building is bonded together, and **GROWS INTO A HOLY TEMPLE** in the Lord.*

In Him you too are being built with all the rest into a spiritual dwelling for God.” (New English)

Notice, becoming the habitation of God is a corporate matter. It requires a bonding together of believers. This initiates some dealings and workings of the Spirit which sometimes can be painful. Our individualism must be dealt with. The rough edges will have to be removed. Self-centeredness must be eliminated. Competition, jealousy, ambition, and rebellion to authority will all be purged out. Every member must yield to the “placing” of God in the body.

The house of the Lord will be built as each member offers Himself to the Lord as a *living stone* to be processed as He sees fit and to be placed in the building according to His design.

We live in a day when the church world applauds individual performances, when men are “gung-ho” on personal kingdom-building, and when competition among ministries and churches is at an all-time high. On the basis of outward evidence, one could conclude, *“The building of His church is impossible!”*

Nevertheless, HE IS DOING IT. It is like an underground movement. Among the poor and lowly, the despised and insignificant, the twos are threes and the small gatherings, the house of the Lord is slowly rising.

Pilgrim, have you found the right people? Are you in a place where the work of building His house is a reality?

A High Calling

“For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.” (Ps. 122:5)

The pilgrims’ message seems to allude to some rather profound things, ***“thrones of judgment.”*** Although the intellect is staggered by such terminology, the Spirit bears witness.

This term is not inconsistent with the finished work of Jesus on the cross. For in Him we died, we were buried, we were raised, and we were made to sit together in heavenly places. The rightful legal position for Christ’s Bride, the Church, is indeed sharing His throne with Him.

Thrones speak of the exercise of authority. It is God’s intention that the full scope of His government find expression through His Church, the *“ecclesia,”* or *“called out ones.”* (It is interesting to note that the term, *“ecclesia”* was used for the elders of a city who were *“called out”* to govern at the gates.)

Thrones of judgment!

“Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; to execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them THE JUDGMENT WRITTEN; this honor have all his saints.” (Ps. 149:6-9)

“Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?...Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” (I Co. 6:2,3)

As the pilgrim proceeds on his journey, excitement grows. A great sense of awe begins to grow within. What a calling! What a destination! The city of God! Thrones of judgment! Who is sufficient for these things?

But, yes, pilgrim, you are on the right path. Other great ones have walked this way before:

“For he (Abraham) looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Heb. 11:10)

“But now they (the heroes of faith) desire a better country, that is, an heavenly, wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city.” (He.11:16)

There is yet more.

A Radical Change

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee.” (Ps. 122:6)

The newly apprehended pilgrim may not fully realize what is happening, but he is on the verge of a revolution in his life. The Lord has caught him up in something that will bring about a change in focus.

The theme of his companions' song is: "*Pray for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem.*" Strangely absent is any focus on his need or prayer for himself. Rather, the exhortation is to pray for the welfare of the city.

Even though we have at the very core of the Christian faith our Savior's denial of self and laying down his life, the majority of Christians live for the welfare and preservation of "self." Their prayer life abounds with "I", "me", and "my" terms. Their vocabulary is replete with such phrases as

My problem...my need...my condition...my pain...my experience...my ministry...

As with the distressed soul in Ps. 120:5, the self-centered Christian's basic note is "**Woe is me!**"

And, sad to say, the majority of the great and popular ministries of our day are geared to meeting individual needs and keeping people self-centered.

The message sounded forth by this group begins to cut deep. It is revolutionary! They advocate prayer and intercession for the corporate. The strange implication is that the pilgrim's well-being will depend on his intercession for others in the city. "***They shall prosper that love thee.***" (Ps. 122:6)

He is getting involved. Inwardly, there is a turning from himself. What a revolutionary change! He is joining in their song:

"For my brethren and companions' sake, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good." (Ps. 122:8, 9)

He is enlisting in the company of others who have walked this way.

So Abraham prayed unto God, and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants, and they bare children...AND THE LORD VISITED SARAH AS HE HAD SAID..." (Gen. 20:17; 21:1)

"And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends..."
(Job 42:10)

A New Mentality: God's Family

“Have mercy on us, O, Lord...” (Ps. 123:3)

Several years ago, I sustained a rather serious back injury, which ultimately required two operations. The pain was constant and the agony indescribable. The months passed by with no improvement. Finally, despair and self-pity took me over, and, unconsciously, I demanded that my condition become the top priority of my wife, my family and my church. What dimensions of self-centeredness surfaced in those days!

The Lord spoke a short and cutting word to my heart, *“Pray for others.”* In my obsession over my own condition, I had abandoned my prayer life for others. What a rectification! The “I” element was struck a blow and I emerged with a renewed burden for the needs of others and God’s purpose for the corporate. O, how deeply rooted is the individualistic element, and what a great hindrance it can be to the fulfillment of God’s plan for His church!

It is this deliverance from self-centeredness that the pilgrim is now experiencing. A new mentality is being formed. Previously, his cry had been, ***“Woe is me...,”*** but now it is, ***“Have mercy on us, Lord.”*** In psalms 123-125, more than 20 times the prayer language of the pilgrim uses the plural pronoun:

“...our eyes wait upon the Lord...” (123:2)

“If it had not been that the Lord was on our side...” (124:2)

“Our help is in the name of the Lord...” 124:8)

As the pilgrim continues in the fellowship of this people, his focus is changing. His vision and burden are now for the corporate. With each passing day, he is becoming more knit together with others. His own soul is coming out of prison. He senses an expansion taking place. A feeling of belonging is growing. He is aware of something good happening. Those deeply rooted and long unanswered questions of

Who am I?

What is my place in life?

What am I to be doing?

are gradually disappearing. He is beginning to experience

an awareness of identity,

a feeling of self-worth,

a sense of belonging,

a new focus, God’s family,

a new basis for joy.

It will not happen by sitting in a huge crowd once a week to be entertained or to observe a religious program.

It will happen by

worshipping together in oneness of spirit,
sharing each other's burdens and joys,
pursuing a common vision and common goals,
losing yourself in a corporate purpose.

Vision for Zion's Establishment

“When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.”
(Ps. 126:1)

“Turn again our captivity, O, Lord...” (Ps. 126:4)

Vision is indispensable to spiritual existence. A loss of vision results in a loss of vitality. Great zeal and fervor are present where clear vision exists. Jesus declared, “Zeal for my house hath consume me!” What a healthy and blessed state it is

to be linked with the Father's purposes,
to live for something greater than yourself,
to be committed to something with eternal implications.

In Psalm 126, a vision for the establishment of Zion has gripped our traveler's spirit, and he is enthused! As he envisions God's habitation becoming a reality, joy and singing fill his being. The song will become one of the great themes of the prophets:

“And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads...” (Is. 35:10)

“Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord...for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow.” (Jer. 31:12,13)

By the Spirit, the pilgrim is carried forward in time to hear the testimony of the heathen: ***The Lord hath done great things for them.***” (Ps. 126:2) Little did the anguished soul at first realize what great things the Lord would do! Most who associate with God adopt the “blessing mentality.” The altars are full of “loaves and fishes” seekers. But one of the greatest blessings that can occur in a believer's life is finding a local expression of Zion and becoming a part of it.

The glorious work that God will do is establish His habitation among men!

“Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it...” (Ps. 127:1)

The impartation of vision and understanding of God's purposes not only quickens the spirit, but touches the soul as well. The emotions are naturally affected, and the life

that has come alive in what God is doing is at first filled with enthusiasm. In this, a danger arises since the soul and the flesh are capable of moving independently.

Remember Peter on the Mount? The glory revealed there inspired activity in his soul. He cried out, ***“Let us build three tabernacles here...”*** (not knowing what he said). It’s very easy for the flesh to become involved in God’s work.

- Cain offered the fruit of his own labor.
- Abraham produced a son by the flesh.
- Moses began a deliverance campaign in his own strength.
- Saul relied on his own ideas.

It is in wisdom that the Spirit brings a word of caution and discipline in the midst of the exuberance of revelation: ***“Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it...”*** The vision is necessary and very inspiring, but it must be harnessed to the Lord’s ways and to His timetable.

The church scene today is characterized by many great programs and promotions. Much is done on a big scale and with much man-made hype. People are constantly being stirred to become involved and to support a multitude of “worthy” causes. It is the day of man. Ishmaels abound.

Man is doing much for God and in the name of God. There is a vast difference between man working for God and man working with God. That which is done for God is often done in man’s strength, in man’s own way, and for man’s glory. Jesus said,

“I can of mine own self do nothing...” (Jo. 5:30)

“...the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works.” (Jo. 14:10)

While the innocent mind may see nothing wrong because of the apparent “good” that results, the matter is quite serious. Those that work in the flesh and use His name and gifts apart from His directive stand in danger of becoming disqualified from the kingdom. To these lawless workers the Father will say, ***“I never knew you (or approved you): depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*** (Ma. 7:23)

We see that the pilgrim is beginning to learn more valuable lessons along the way. He is learning

discipline in his soul life,
dependency upon the Lord,
a Father-son relationship.

Attack On the Corporate

“Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say...”
(Ps. 129:1)

The utterance of Jesus which the enemy hates most is: ***“I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH AND THE GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT.”*** (Ma. 16:18)

All the powers of hell are arrayed against the building of the church, both on the local and the universal level. The enemy well understands that the means of his conquest will be a corporate instrument. Although it is true that the enemy harasses every individual believer, behind every maneuver is the intent to destroy the church. Down through history, the enemy’s opposition to God’s many-membered instruments has been constant.

The First Target: Natural Israel

The history of Israel – a type of the church – is most vivid proof of the enemy’s determination to destroy God’s select corporate man. From the time of Abraham, when God began to form a governmental family, satan has continually warred against the establishment of a corporate entity in the earth.

Let us recall a few examples:

- The Philistines threatened the survival of Isaac and his family by contending for their water supply. (Genesis 26)
- Egypt’s Pharaoh commanded that all the Israelite male children be killed in order to halt their phenomenal growth. (Exodus 1)
- Balak, king of Moab, contrived with Balaam to have the Israelites cursed. (Numbers 22, 23, 24)
- Goliath threatened to enslave Israel forever. (1 Samuel 1:17)
- Haman plotted to literally annihilate all the Jews from the earth. (Book of Esther)

To this day, this same spirit is strong and extremely active in the earth. Since 1948, when Israel again became a nation, this spirit has remained embittered against God’s natural people. There has been no peace in the Middle East. Terrorism has been widespread. Skirmishes have been numerous, and the threat of war incessant. Those with spiritual understanding know it has been God’s intervention which has preserved Israel. (According to Romans 11, God has a remnant among the Jews who will have a part in His end-time program.)

The Present Target: The Church

Our main concern in this study is the church. I sigh and cry for every true local body of believers and for the Church at large. Wake up, Christian, we cannot afford to remain in ignorance of Satan's strategy. We are at war. The outcome of this war will determine the success of the building of the church.

Satan says, *"I will destroy the church."*

God says, *"I will build my church."*

One of the enemy's chief weapon is division. Where he divides, he conquers. He aims to set wives against husbands, children against parents, believers against other believers. He loves to sow discord among brethren. A special source of enjoyment to him is the disruption of rank and the undermining of authority. Denominational walls are a delight to him, and he totally supports all debates over doctrine.

In over fifty years of ministry, I have never seen such vicious infighting in church circles and so many "splits" as in recent years. Church denominations are poles apart, and compete with each other just as do the world's corporations. Christian leaders publicly degrade each other and sue one another in courts. The once powerful bond of *love of the brethren* is today being given only lip service.

Today, every local church group is under pressure. Satan's all-out warfare against the corporate threatens the existence and continuation of every body of true believers. Spirits of independent individualism threaten to destroy what has been built up over many years. Competition, clamor for recognition, jealousies, and accusing spirits are all tools of the enemy employed to neutralize the impact and testimony of the church.

Many who have resisted the most overt tactics of the enemy are in danger of becoming preoccupied with earthly, natural involvements, which can equally interfere with the building up of the church. Quite often it is people's engrossment in eating and drinking, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, building and planting that become substitutes for prayer, fellowship with others, and church attendance.

God and His prophets have not been unaware of the enemy's evil intention. His wicked conspiracy was unmistakably discerned and voiced by the Spirit in passages of scripture such as Psalm 83:2-5:

"For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult; and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones, They have said, Come, and LET US CUT THEM OFF FROM BEING A NATION; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. For they have consulted together with one consent; they are confederate against thee."

Every move of the enemy is designed to frustrate the building of the church corporately. There is no such thing as an isolated personal or private matter. The sin of Achan weakened the entire camp and turned God against His people. The quality of our

individual behavior and the status of our relationships one with another VITALLY affect the condition of the church. The principle is simple: The whole cannot be better than any of its parts.

When two individuals in the Corinthian church were involved with incest, the Spirit through Paul made the church responsible. *“It is reported commonly that there is fornication AMONG YOU...”* (I Co. 5:1). It was not an individual condition alone; it was a corporate condition. *“Purge out therefore the old leaven, THAT YE MAY BE A NEW LUMP...”* (I Co. 5:7).

Fornication in two members of the church brings fornication into the church. Rebellion in only one member brings rebellion into the church, etc. Each attempt of satan to defile the individual is actually a design to weaken and destroy the church. Every maneuver to destroy the relationship between any two believers is actually an attack on the status of the church. His primary objective always is to prevent the church from becoming the habitation of God in fullness.

Spiritual Warfare

As the pilgrim journeys on, his vision and understanding are broadened. He begins to realize that his course will not be a simple “cakewalk.” As the caravan continues in song, the mood is more serious, yet also victorious. They repeat:

“Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me” (Psalm 129:2)

“The Lord is righteous; he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.” (Psalm 129:4)

The group’s song intensifies into a crescendo. The spirit becomes militant. Their words are as arrows shot at the enemy:

“Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion, Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up.” (Ps. 129:5, 6)

SPIRITUAL WARFARE!

What a challenge to the church! We do not see here a half-dead decrepit bunch of people repeating a set of pre-programmed phrases. Their song is inspired and militant, and empowered by the Spirit. It pierces the heavens. Somewhere up there, the enemy is hit. He is bound and his activity is hampered.

The pilgrims are intent, for they know that their very survival is at stake! A spirit of travail and intercession begins to rest upon them. Their songs are also prayers, supplications for the preservation and establishment of God’s beloved Zion.

A Positive Posture: Waiting and Hoping

“My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning.” (Ps. 130:6)

“Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and forever.” (Ps. 131:3)

For many of the Israelites, the journey up to Jerusalem was long. Their destination was not easily reached.

My own quest for a glorious church indwelt by God’s fullness has been a life-long proposition. Well do I remember the excitement that attended the incoming of revelation, the deliverance from the bondage of religious systems, the joining with other companions in the way, and the anticipation of a rapid fulfillment of the vision.

But the years have passed.

We have had to experience the futility of our own efforts and learn dependency upon the Lord. We have had to learn to discern the counterfeit and to avoid many types of pitfalls. The reality of hell’s violent determination to resist God and His people has ever been with us.

But, by sovereign grace we find ourselves today in a particular inward posture which holds us to the path, a posture of WAITING and HOPING.

The pilgrims’ waiting and hoping does not represent a passive stance. Their waiting is with clear and joyful expectation and involves a rest of soul and spirit that comes from a developed faith. The repeated utterance of their objectives and the constant mention of their glorious destination have produced a faith that can wait and hope. In their faith is a substance that enables them to endure and go forward. Caleb, with a sure word implanted in his heart, survived the tests of time and temptation and ultimately declared, *“The Lord has kept me alive.”*

This posture is like that of Habakkuk, God’s prophet. In the watchtower of his spirit, he has heard the message and seen the vision. In the fellowship of his companions the vision has been made plain. It may be for “an appointed time,” but deep in his heart he knows “it shall speak and not lie.” He is convinced, that though it tarry, *“He will wait for it.”*

The journey may seem long at times.

Weariness may increase without relief.

Your destination may appear unattainable.

But, weary soul, I encourage you to WAIT and HOPE.

Something For the Lord

“I will not give sleep to mine eyes,...until I find...a place for the Lord...” (Ps. 132:4, 5)

Visualize the pilgrims drawing closer to Jerusalem. Having stopped for the night, they now break up camp and are on their way again. Suddenly, the singing begins. Each day it has been like this. Songs have filled their journey and served to inspire and strengthen them. Though weariness has threatened to overcome them at times, their spirit has remained buoyed by the song.

These are a singing people, a praising people. There is nothing routine about their singing. It is alive and vibrant. Life and energy are imparted at the sound of it.

God is restoring his song to the church. The song carries a vital message. Its message is gripping and compelling. One may be tempted to turn back, but when the song begins, the apprehension resurges.

But this day, the song is different. A new message is coming. The pilgrims are singing about David. The song has to do with a revelation he received and a desire that gripped him. Listen to the words:

“Lord, remember David...how he swore unto the Lord...and vowed unto the mighty God...Surely, I will not come into the tabernacle of my house...nor go up into my bed...I will not give sleep unto my eyes, UNTIL...I HAVE FOUND...A PLACE FOR THE LORD, AN HABITATION FOR THE MIGHTY GOD OF JACOB.” (Ps. 132:1-5)

Our pilgrim who began his journey with this people but a few days ago is aware of an inward quickening, which means that God is moving afresh. He has been already overwhelmed by the way God has led him thus far. Aware of the great deliverance and the wondrous work God has done, he has daily offered up prayers and thanksgiving. What emancipation has taken place! Looking back, he reflects on the ugliness and perverseness of the self-centered life he had lived. How good God has been to bring him unto a higher plateau of living where he is a part of

...the lives of others,
...a meaningful journey,
...a greater purpose.

But today, there is definitely something new and different.

The song continues:

“Arise, O, Lord into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength...” (Ps. 132:8)

“For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation...” (Ps. 132:13)

“This is my rest forever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it...” (Ps. 132:14)

The song has to do with SOMETHING FOR THE LORD! The burden is to satisfy HIS DESIRE!

The pilgrims are awakened to something. The focus is again changing. Illumination is coming.

...The Lord has a need.

...He has been waiting for something.

...We can provide something for Him.

A Higher Plateau

Herein we begin to ascend to an even higher plateau. We have lived in the narrowness and bondage of (1) self-centeredness and (2) man-centeredness. Until now, the essence of our theology has been that in redemption there is “SOMETHING FOR ME” and “SOMETHING FOR MANKIND.”

The prevailing mentality has been either

my need, my problem, my trouble,
my circumstances, my future,
or

the needs are great, the world is lost,
we must evangelize, humanity is suffering.

IS THERE ANYTHING IN REDEMPTION FOR GOD?

When Adam sinned, God

...lost fellowship
...lost His habitation
...lost His dominion man.

He then could no longer

...express Himself through a human instrument
or
...fulfill His purpose in the universe.

If we travel the right road in redemption's journey, we will ultimately identify with David's burden. We will graduate from the dimension of

“SOMETHING FOR ME”

to the dimension of

“SOMETHING FOR OTHERS”

and ultimately arrive at the plateau of

“SOMETHING FOR GOD”

God's Desire

What are God's desires? What is He longing for?

He is awaiting a corporate habitation. Only Jesus could contain and manifest all that God is as a single individual. None of us can do it individually regardless of our gifts.

When God commissioned Adam, He said, “...*Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion...*” (Ge. 1:28) Thus, Adam and Eve were to reproduce and become a “*family of sons*” who would govern the earth and become an expression of God. Adam would not be able to do it by himself. It would require also something more than Adam and Eve together. God's purpose and desire was to have a family, a many-membered organism or body.

Throughout the Old Testament time, God continued to move in the direction of forming a corporate entity. When He called Abram, God indicated that his seed would multiply and become as the sand of the sea. O, the struggle to even begin this family! O, the agony of Jacob to establish and preserve this chosen little band.

Then you have all the threats of extinction, famines, curses, wars. You have Pharaoh, Balaam, Goliath, Jezebel, Haman. In addition, God had to deal with His own people's persistent tendencies to disobey, to rebel and to go into idolatry.

But God has always intervened or started over if He had to. O, how many times God has had to start over! O, the patience and longsuffering of God! It is all because of His commitment to the purpose of expressing Himself through a corporate man!

Israel finally departed from Him and rejected His Son, but His purpose remained. The church then came on the scene! In Christ, He began to form another NEW MAN. Paul heralded the “mystery of Christ,” both Jew and Gentile coming now on the basis of faith to be joined together in a many-membered body. James confirmed God's purpose when He declared that God was restoring the tabernacle of David which had fallen. (Acts

15:16) A careful reading of this passage reveals that the “tabernacle of David” is indeed God’s house composed of both Jew and Gentile believers.

What is God looking for? Not a superman. Not a single individual endowed with all the gifts and offices.

But, He is looking for a many-membered habitation!

The Destination Reached

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity...”

“It is like the precious ointment upon the head...”

“...for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” (Ps. 133)

I would like to think that on the last day of their journey, the pilgrims sang David’s prayer over and over again.

“...a place for the Lord...”

“Arise, O, Lord, into thy rest...”

“This is my rest forever, here will I dwell; for I have desired it.”

The more we go on in God, the more we become captivated by His will and purpose. Jesus sought nothing for Himself. This is one of the ultimate objectives. *Nothing for ourselves; all for Him.* When we begin the journey, we are focused almost entirely on self. But, slowly deliverance comes, until in our final steps, we live no longer for self, but for Him. It usually takes a life-time to reach this goal, but we proceed with confidence, for we have a promise: *“...He which that begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”* (Ph. 1:6)

Our pilgrim is inwardly exuberant. The destination is near. From every direction, the roads are lined with pilgrims making their way toward the city. The “song” is one of joy and triumph, for the walls of the city have come into view.

At last, Jerusalem! The place where He dwells! The nation has come together. Unity of thought and purpose pervades the whole atmosphere. There are no diverse currents. All have left their natural lives behind. Forgotten are their houses and lands, their businesses, their differences. **THEY FIND THEMSELVES ONE!**

DWELLING TOGETHER IN UNITY! BEHOLD HOW GOOD AND HOW PLEASANT!

We speak now about one of the great objectives of our Christian journey. How blessed are those who have found such a state. A life of wandering and isolation is now buried in your past. You have found your dwelling place, and your “other parts.” You sense that you fit in here. This is where you belong and where you want to be. Only those who have arrived know the sense of peace and well being that fills your heart.

O, hungry and weary pilgrim, there is a pathway that leads to this glorious destination. The ecumenical movement is offering a counterfeit, a man-made unity which sounds good. But beware! What we speak of here is a sovereign working of the Holy Spirit to bring us together into a dimension of love and unity where God dwells in His fullness.

Is this possible? Consider that Paul spoke this challenge to a divided carnal Corinthian church and set it before them as a realistic objective:

“Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ...that ye all speak the same thing, ...that there be no divisions among you, ...that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (I Co. 1:10)

I remind you of Eph. 2:19-22 (Amp.)

v.19: *“...ye are no longer outsiders...”*

“...but you now share citizenship with God’s saints...”

“...and you belong to God’s household.”

v.20: *“...you are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets...”*

“...Christ himself the Chief cornerstone...”

v.21: *“...the whole structure is joined (welded) together harmoniously...”*

“...it continues to rise (grow) into an holy temple in the Lord...”

v.22: *“...in Him (and in fellowship with one another) you are being built up into this structure with the rest...”*

“...TO FORM A FIXED ABODE (DWELLING PLACE) FOR GOD BY THE SPIRIT.”

Our goal is to experience the outworking of this in reality on a local level. If we see only the “universal” church, it remains but a theory. It is easy to relegate scriptures to the mystical, universal body of Christ and go on in our independent individualism. God wants a real habitation that will exist in a local

setting, a dwelling place whose composition and ministry will be seen and felt both by needy humanity and by principalities and powers.

Personally, I speak from both revelation and experience. After many years of laboring, searching, and waiting, God has brought me together with a people. They represent the most precious group with whom I have ever been associated. Love, bonding, unity, worship, and commitment are growing realities among us. His presence is increasing. His fullness is coming!

The church has had its revivals. We have seen souls saved and bodies healed. We have experienced “Pentecost,” been taught about the gifts and learned about worship (supposedly). The great faith healers have come and gone. Various winds of doctrine such as faith and prosperity, demonology, five-fold ministry, personal prophecy, deeper life, have brought temporary stirrings and excitement. **BUT ARE WE SATISFIED? WHAT NOW?**

It is time to return unto Zion to build the house of the Lord. God is drawing us. The “time to favor her has come.” Only when we are found dwelling in the fullness of His presence shall we be satisfied.

The Last ‘Jehovah-name’

Throughout the Old Testament, we find various “Jehovah” names of God, each of which reveals a particular aspect of God’s redemptive plan. It is of great interest for us to notice the progression represented in these names. Let us list them in the order in which they appear and briefly note their meaning:

1. Jehovah-Jireh, (Gen. 22:14) ***“The Lord will provide.”***
2. Jehovah-Rapha, (Ex. 15:26) ***“The Lord that healeth thee.”***
3. Jehovah-Nissi, (Ex. 17:15) ***“The Lord my banner or victory.”***
4. Jehovah-Mekaddshkem, (Ex. 31:13) ***“The Lord that doth sanctify you.”***
5. Jehovah-Shalom, (Ju. 6:24) ***“The Lord our peace.”***
6. Jehovah-Roi, (Ps. 23:1) ***“The Lord my shepherd.”***
7. Jehovah-Zidkenu, (Jer. 23:6) ***“The Lord our righteousness.”***
8. Jehovah-Shammah, Ez. 48:35) ***“THE LORD IS THERE AND HE REIGNETH!”***

Notice the first seven names listed have to do with names of God which represent something we can experience individually. Most certainly, every revelation and experience represented here is vital and precious to every believer. Each must be incorporated into the Christian’s foundation, for no real progress can be made without them.

But the last-mentioned “Jehovah-name” is something corporate. The reference is to the city of God. The prophet has seen the contamination of the Lord’s house and

the departure of His glory. He has been used to “show the house to the house of Israel” and to reaffirm that the law of the house would be holiness. Then, he has outlined the pattern for the reconstruction of both the house and the city.

Finally, he announces: **“...and the name of the city from that day shall be (JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH), The Lord is there!”** What a beautiful and clear prophetic picture of what God has designed to do in the progression of his purposes!

A Place of Fullness

“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the FULLNESS OF CHRIST.” (Eph. 4:13)

We have seen and tasted of that which is “in-part.” We have known “in-part” and we have prophesied “in-part.” We have followed ministries, which proclaimed to be the highest and the best, but were left dissatisfied. Like children, we have been tossed about with every wind of doctrine, from one camp to another, searching for the fullness of His glory and presence. With the two disciples who followed Jesus we ask, **“Where dwellest thou?”** As then, His response to us is: **“Come and see.”**

I am convinced: HIS FULLNESS CAN ONLY BE EXPERIENCED IN HIS CHURCH CORPORATE.

In Psalm 132 we have the promise. God said He has chosen Zion and desired it for His habitation. Zion is a people. It is His church. God has purposed to deposit the fullness of Himself into His church. He said of Zion, the church, **“This is my rest forever, here will I dwell...”** (Ps. 132:14)

Paul got an understanding of it in Eph. 1:23 when the Spirit declared, **“For the church is His body, and in that body lives fully the one who fills the whole wide universe.”** (Phillips)

John, the apostle, saw it in vision in its most highly developed state in Rev. 21:3 **“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people and God himself shall be with them and they shall be his people and God himself shall be with them and be their God.”**

God will never again deposit his glory in a house of stone. What John saw was the Bride, the Lamb’s wife, not a literal city. The most precious and significant work that God is doing today is that of preparing His precious stones, under heat and pressure, and bringing them together to be formed into a habitation for Him to dwell in.

A Place of Outflow

“I will abundantly bless her provision, I will satisfy her poor with bread.” (Ps. 132:15)

“The Lord...bless thee out of Zion...” (Ps 134:3)

“...then said they among the heathen, the Lord hath done great things...for us”
(Ps.126:2,3)

Every spirit entity requires a proper body to dwell in and to find expression. God also, who is Spirit, has the basic need of a dwelling place and the longing to express Himself. His need can only be met by a many-membered organism which is properly related to Him.

Through this organism will come a manifestation of all God's blessings, virtues, and power. Those who dwell in Zion will be able to draw from its river of life all that is necessary to meet the needs of spirit, soul and body. In referring to Canaan land, God indicated that His people would “lack nothing.” He also promised to take away sickness from their midst. This suggests that the church will be a place where its inhabitants will be blessed with spiritual wholeness, emotional stability and divine health.

But, God's habitation will do more than bless and keep its inhabitants. God has purposed that out of Zion there shall be a flow of blessing, power and glory that will touch the ends of the earth! The psalmist, a prophet, spoke of Zion's destiny when he made these various proclamations:

“When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory.” (Ps. 102:16)

“Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion...” (Ps. 48:2)

“Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.” (Ps. 50:2)

Later, the prophet Isaiah would speak further about the rising of the church and her widespread influence in the earth:

***“And many people shall go and say, Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob;
...and he will teach us of his ways,
...and we will walk in His paths,
...FOR OUT OF ZION SHALL GO FORTH THE LAW,
...and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”*** (Is. 2:3)

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee, and the Gentiles (the nations) shall come to thy light, and they shall call thee, The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel” (Is. 60:1, 3, 14)

Thus, Zion's destiny is clearly depicted. When she is completely formed and indwelt by the fullness of God she will

...fully meet the needs of her inhabitants
...bless the ends of the earth
...dethrone principalities and powers
...delight the heart of God.

It is no wonder that God is jealous for Zion. We can understand why all the efforts of the Godhead are directed toward the establishment of Zion in the earth. This is truly the Father's purpose, the Spirit's intercession, and the Son's anticipation.

Listen, as God's burden and heart-beat are expressed by the prophet:

“For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth;...” (Is. 62:1, 2)

“...give Him no rest, till He establish and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” (Is. 62:7)

And so it is, weary pilgrim. Don't let up in your quest. His eye is upon you and His voice will guide you. Soon the city will come into view and you will pass through its gates.

Ahead of you lies joy and fulfillment.