

Triennial Torah Study – 5th Year 06/12/2014



sightedmoon.com /triennial-torah-study-5th-year-04042015 /

By Joseph F. Dumond

This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:

<https://sightedmoon.com/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf>

Ex 19	Isaiah 15-19	Ps 129-131	John 7
-------	--------------	------------	--------

Israel Arrives at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19)

God reiterated His covenant with Israel to His servant Moses. Moses called for the elders of Israel and repeated God's words to them. The elders then repeated the words to the people of Israel. This gives a clearer explanation of how Moses communicated with nearly three million people. Now we come to the point where God was planning to speak with Moses and all the people would be able to hear God's voice. But there were special instructions for the people to follow before they could approach the vicinity of God's holy presence. Boundaries were set about the mountain so the people would be restricted from touching it. The prohibition against touching the mountain was to teach them a sense of awe and respect toward the living God—and to demonstrate their need for a mediator. The people were to be clean, having their clothes washed. And on the day that God appeared to Moses on the mountain, married couples were to forego sexual relations. Wearing clean clothes and abstaining from marital relations were outward acts signifying that they had sanctified themselves before God spoke to them. This does not imply that lawful sexual relations are spiritually unclean. In the New Testament, Paul suggested that it is occasionally appropriate to refrain from marital relations *for a brief time*, when specially devoting that time to God through prayer and fasting (1 Corinthians 7:5). After Moses ascended the mountain, God had to send him back down because curiosity was getting the better of the people. After once again warning the people, Moses again ascended the mountain with Aaron.

The timing of all of this is very interesting. Jewish tradition asserts that the giving of the law occurred on the Feast of Firstfruits or Pentecost, which can occur no later than the 10th or 11th day of the third month of the Hebrew calendar, Sivan. Verse 1 does say that it was in the third month after leaving Egypt—but some interpret the phrase “on the same day” here to mean the same day of the month that the Israelites left Egypt. This, however, would mean that they arrived at Mount Sinai on the 15th of Sivan, with the law being given on the 17th (compare verses 10-11)—too late for Pentecost. However, if the phrase “on the same day” is understood to mean the same day that Jethro departed, as stated in the previous verse (18:27), then Pentecost can fit quite well. It could also be that the “same day” meant the same day of the *week* the Israelites

had left Egypt—which, again, would allow for the Ten Commandments to have been delivered on Pentecost.

Indeed, there are clear Pentecost themes to be found here: the consecration of Israel as the chosen people, i.e. “firstfruits”; the beginning of the Old Testament “assembly in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38 KJV), as Pentecost would mark the beginning of the New Testament Assembly (see Acts 2); the giving of the law, as God’s people would later be given the power to *keep* that law through the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (compare Luke 24:49; Romans 8:7); God descending on the mountain with great noise and trembling and “in fire” (Exodus 19:18), as His presence would later descend upon Christ’s disciples with great noise and in tongues of fire (Acts 2); the initiation of the Old Covenant, as Pentecost would later mark the giving of the “better promises” of the New Covenant, particularly the gift of the Holy Spirit (compare Hebrews 8:6). Though typical of the new relationship God wants with His people, the Old Covenant still involved separation from God, as the boundary markers so vividly picture. To see this even more, read Hebrews 12:18-28.

The contrast between the Old and New Covenants is vividly illustrated by comparing two scriptures. “You shall set bounds for the people all around” (Exodus 19:12) and “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:22). Through Yeshua’s sacrifice and intercession as our High Priest today, God has granted us liberty to come right before His very throne of grace (4:14-16).

Prophecy Against Damascus and Israel; The Invading Multitude; Message to Ethiopia (Isaiah 17-18)

As we saw in the prophecies of Isaiah to Ahaz (Isaiah 7), Syria and Israel were allies. Chapter 17 starts out as a prophecy against Damascus, the capital of Syria, but by verse 3 the subject is Ephraim and the rest of Israel more than it is Syria.

The dating of this prophecy is not certain. The Assyrians had, at the time of Israel’s first deportation in 732 B.C., also destroyed Damascus and taken its citizens captive north to Kir, thereby fulfilling, at least in part, a prophecy of Amos (2 Kings 16:9; Amos 1:3-5). Yet we know that the Assyrians later came against Damascus again, around 720 B.C., and retook it. For this reason, since the prophecy mentions the “remnant of Syria” (Isaiah 17:3), many date the prophecy to the early reign of Hezekiah—to between 729 and 722 B.C.—following the early deportations of Israel and Syria and yet prior to their later fall.

However, Isaiah 17:12-18:7, which contains a message to Ethiopia (Hebrew *Cush*), seems to be part of the same prophecy or “burden” as the early part of Isaiah 17. And there is reason for dating this section to around 715 B.C. At that time, around the death of Ahaz, “a Cushite dynasty took over Egypt...and probably sent ambassadors to Jerusalem” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 18:1). This is a reference to “Shabako, the Nubian successor to Osorkon [IV],” the latter, apparently known also as King So (2 Kings 17:4), having been defeated by Sargon II of Assyria in 716 (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 1987, pp. 412-

413). Thus, as our previous few readings have borne some relation at least to 715 B.C.—and our next reading will refer to an event dated to 713-712 B.C.—this dating seems likely. And the first part of Isaiah 17 seems to date from the same time since, as mentioned, Isaiah 17-18 appears to be a single prophecy.

If that is so, here we have a prophecy of Israel and Syria's fall given after Israel has already fallen. This makes it most likely an end-time prophecy. Supporting this conclusion is the repeated phrase "in that day" (17:4, 7, 9), which often refers to events surrounding the coming of the Messiah to reign over the nations (compare 2:11, 17, 20; 4:1-2; 11:10-11; 12:1, 4). Following Israel's ancient captivity, its people journeyed, over the centuries, to northwest Europe—and are now represented, in large part, by the American and British peoples.

An end-time prophecy of Damascus and Syria could apply to those living in the nation of Syria today. Or it could also refer to Aramaean peoples who were, in ancient days, deported by the Assyrians to Kir, just south of the Caucasus Mountains. Some of these people became the Armenians. And others probably migrated through the Caucasus and into Europe along with the Israelites. Besides Amos 1:3-5, additional prophecies against Damascus can be found in Jeremiah 49:23-27 and Zechariah 9:1.

The Israelites, we are told in Isaiah 17:7-8, will finally turn to God in the midst of the destruction that comes upon them. Then, following more details of that destruction in verses 9-11, the prophecy changes focus. We are told of a massive invasion force that God will punish. "The connection of this fragment with what precedes is: notwithstanding the calamities coming upon Israel, the people of God shall not be utterly destroyed...[and] the Assyrian spoilers shall perish" (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary*, note on 17:12-18:7). Some have connected Isaiah 17:14 to the overnight destruction of the Assyrian army of Sennacherib that would occur in the days of Hezekiah (see Isaiah 37:36). While a likely forerunner, this is still predominantly an end-time prophecy.

Notice what the *JFB Commentary* says regarding the next section addressed to Ethiopia: "Isaiah announces the overthrow of Sennacherib's hosts and desires the Ethiopian ambassadors, now in Jerusalem, to bring word of it to their own nation; and he calls the whole world to witness the event (vs. 3). As ch. 17:12-14 announced the presence of the foe, so ch. 18 foretells his overthrow. The heading in [the] *English Version*, 'God will destroy the Ethiopians,' is a mistake arising from the wrong rendering 'Woe,' whereas the *Hebrew* does not express a threat, but is an *appeal* calling attention (ch. 55:1; Zech. 2:6): 'Ho.' He is not speaking *against* but *to* the Ethiopians, calling on them to hear his prophetic announcement as to the destruction of their enemies" (note on Isaiah 18).

Indeed, in the end time too, the ruler of Assyria—the "king of the North"—will be an enemy of Ethiopia, as we elsewhere see him bringing the Ethiopians as well as the Egyptians under his subjection (see Daniel 11:42-43). This is another reason we may view the defeat of the enemy force in Isaiah 18 in an end-time context. Also, compare verse 6 with Revelation 19:17-18.

Finally, mention is made of a “present” being brought from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. This is stated in Zephaniah 3:10 as well: “From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering.”

These verses also appear related to Psalm 68, where David says to God: “Because of Your temple at Jerusalem, kings will bring presents to you... Envoys will come out of Egypt; Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God” (verses 29-31). Yet Isaiah and Zephaniah appear to indicate a *particular* present or offering—*singular*. As to what all of this might mean we can only speculate.

Interestingly, many Ethiopians practiced the Jewish religion before the days of Christ. (Note the eunuch of the Ethiopian royal court who was in Jerusalem to worship—see Acts 8:27.) In the Ethiopian national epic, the Kebra Nagast (“The Glory of Kings”), written down in the 13th century, it is claimed that this tradition goes back to the Queen of Sheba at the time of Solomon. Indeed, it states that Solomon fathered a son by her named Menelik, who then founded the dynasty of Ethiopian rulers.

Whether or not this is true is unconfirmed, as the Bible is silent on it. However, history does tell us of a number of later Jewish colonies in Egypt that eventually disappeared—and there is reason to believe that refugees from these colonies were forced south and resettled in Ethiopia. Surprisingly, Ethiopians are today actually permitted to settle in the state of Israel under the Jewish law of return. While these people are black, it is possible that many are indeed descendants of Jews who intermarried with the native population.

The Kebra Nagast, it should be mentioned in this context, prominently mentions the Ark of the Covenant, the gilded chest built in Moses’ day to hold the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. This most sacred of Israelite relics was lost at some point between the days of Solomon and Ezra, though we don’t know when, where or how. According to the Kebra Nagast, Menelik, to safeguard it from Solomon’s growing apostasy, secretly took the ark with him to Ethiopia, leaving behind a replica that he had asked the faithful priests to make. While this sounds rather unlikely, it is nevertheless widely believed among Ethiopians today that their nation is in actual possession of the Ark of the Covenant—that it sits guarded and unapproachable in an old congregation in the city of Aksum in northern Ethiopia. In fact, each congregation in Ethiopia has its own Tabot, or representation of the ark, to memorialize that conviction.

British journalist Graham Hancock, in his book *The Sign and the Seal: The Quest for the Lost Ark of the Covenant*, 1992, actually gives a more plausible explanation, different from the Kebra Nagast, as to how the ark might actually have ended up in Ethiopia. He speculates that the ark was taken out of Judah by the Levites to protect it from the apostasy of Hezekiah’s son Manasseh—that when Josiah later told the Levites to put the ark back into the temple (2 Chronicles 35:3) this was never done, as it had supposedly already been moved to a new temple at a Jewish colony in Aswan in southern Egypt. Historically, as mentioned above, these Jewish

colonists were later forced to flee from the Egyptians, and Hancock provides some evidence that they migrated south into Ethiopia—*with*, he maintains, the Ark of the Covenant.

This hypothesis is also explored in a 2002 book titled *In Search of the Lost Ark of the Covenant* by Robert Cornuke and David Halbrook. Author Grant Jeffrey, in *Armageddon: Appointment with Destiny*, 1990, while embracing the Kebra Nagast version of events, lends some support to the ark's residing in Ethiopia today (pp. 108-122, 229-233). Still, there are other theories about the ark's whereabouts that also appear credible—including the possibility that Jeremiah hid it or took it with him at the time of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. The apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees (2:1-8) says he hid it in a cave on Mount Nebo. (Realize, however, that while the apocryphal books can be useful historical sources like many other secular writings, they are not inspired Scripture and often contain errors.) Many others believe the ark was hidden in a chamber under the Temple Mount. There is, of course, also a very strong possibility that God allowed it to be destroyed by the Babylonians along with its precious contents.

Nonetheless, given what we've seen, a number of people have suggested that the particular present the Ethiopians bring in the last days might be the actual Ark of the Covenant containing the Ten Commandments. Jeremiah says that sometime into the peaceful reign of Yeshua, people will no longer talk about or think about the ark (Jeremiah 3:16-17)—but this would seem to imply that it will be an issue immediately before then. There is simply no way to be sure.

Finally, while such matters are certainly interesting, we should avoid getting caught up in them to the exclusion of more important spiritual study.

Egypt's Judgment and Deliverance; Israel One of Three With Egypt and Assyria (Isaiah 19:1-20:6)

In Isaiah 19, Isaiah delivers this “burden against Egypt.” Set as it is between Isaiah 18 and 20, the prophecy would appear to have been written between 715 and 709 B.C. After a period of infighting and anarchy (19:2), Egypt is to come under the dominance of an oppressive foreign power (verse 4). Historically, such oppression came a number of times—from Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Seleucid Syria, Rome and later conquerors.

(Alexander the Great was welcomed as Egypt's *deliverer* from Persia and some identify him with the savior of verse 20—and they see the peace between Israel, Egypt and Assyria at the end of the chapter as representative of the stability within Alexander's brief empire. But this is clearly not what is meant at all.)

The fact that Egypt is reconciled with *Assyria* at the end of the chapter shows that Assyria is most likely the “cruel master” mentioned *earlier* in the chapter (verse 4). The prophecy, therefore, might have had some fulfillment in what would begin around 45 years later—the conquest and assimilation of Egypt by the Assyrian Empire under Esarhaddon and then Ashurbanipal. These kings took over from Egypt's ruling Ethiopian dynasty.

However the entire chapter, particularly the way it ends, reveals that this prophecy mainly concerns the end time. As was mentioned in the highlights for our previous reading, the endtime ruler of Assyria—the “king of the North” of Daniel and the Beast of Revelation—will invade and oppress Egypt and Ethiopia in the years just prior to Christ’s return (Daniel 11:42-43). This means that the “Savior and Mighty One” to deliver the Egyptians (verse 20) is the returning Yeshua, who will crush their Assyrian oppressors. (It should also be considered that Assyria of the last days is apparently the dominant power within a resurrected Babylon and Rome—so Egypt’s ancient conquests by these and related empires would also appear to serve as forerunners of the coming end-time oppression.)

Verse 17 says that the land of Judah will initially be terrifying to the Egyptians. This did not happen in Isaiah’s day. The reference is, again, to the last days. However, it is unclear whom the Egyptians fear. It could possibly be the resurgent Jews at Christ’s return (see Zechariah 12:6; 14:14). Then again, perhaps it is the Egyptians’ oppressor, the Assyro-Babylonian Beast power, that terrifies them. Its ruling dictator, the king of the North, will have set up his headquarters in Jerusalem (Daniel 11:45, KJV). But most likely it is the awesome power of the returning Christ that they fear. Perhaps they will not understand who He is. And for those who do, they may still be afraid—as they will have been enemies of the believers before this. They might imagine terrible retribution. Yet Christ has come to rescue them as well.

Ultimately Egypt will come under His loving dominion (verses 18-22). Verse 19 points out that Egypt will one day have its own altar to God, providing us a glimpse into how God will be worshiped when more nations than Israel come under His rule. Historically, not all altars were built for the purpose of offering incense or sacrifices (compare Joshua 22). However, Isaiah 19:21 does mention sacrifice and offering (the Hebrew apparently denoting peace offering and grain offering respectively), which might be offered on that altar.

Malachi 1:11 confirms that other nations will be permitted to have centers of worship at which to offer incense to God as well as offerings (again probably grain offerings, as indicated by the Hebrew here). There is evidently no mention of burnt or sin offerings in these verses, so whether or not these will also be offered at satellite places of worship is not clear.

Nevertheless, the nations—Egypt included—will still be expected to attend the feasts of God in Jerusalem or they will be disciplined by such divine measures as the removal of rainfall (Zechariah 14:16-19). God’s striking of Egypt in Isaiah 19:22 may refer to these same disciplinary actions, although it could simply refer to the Assyrian oppression.

Eventually, Egypt will reconcile with God, with the people of Israel and with the Assyrians, and will become one of the leading nations in a world of peace (verses 23-25). The highway between Assyria and Egypt must necessarily run through Israel, which lies between them geographically. It is evidently the same route of return taken previously by the returning Israelite exiles from both lands (see Isaiah 11:11, 16). In this case, “the highway symbolizes good will and understanding, free and speedy access. The word, used as an image by Isaiah, indicates the close relationship between once hostile nations forged by a shared commitment to the God of the Jews. When

God can say of Egypt and Assyria as well as of Israel, ‘my people’ (19:25), the world will have peace and blessing at last” (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader’s Companion*, 1991, note on 19:23).

Further prophecies concerning Egypt can be found in Jeremiah 46 and Ezekiel 29-32.

Sign Against the South (Isaiah 19:1-20:6)

Isaiah 20:1 is the only place that the Assyrian king Sargon II is actually mentioned in the Bible by name. His name here, and the defeat of Ashdod, enables us to date this episode. “Tartan”—the New King James margin has “or *the Commander in Chief*”—refers to one of the three chief officers of the Assyrian Empire (see 2 Kings 18:17).

One source describes the period this way: “Unrest in the Holy Land did not cease...and in 713/712 B.C. the Assyrians had to put down additional rebellions in Ashdod. The revolt in 712 B.C. was supported by the Ethiopian pharaoh, founder of the twenty-fifth dynasty in Egypt (Isaiah 20). According to Sargon’s inscriptions, Judah, Edom, and Moab were also involved in the revolt, though they surrendered—evidently quickly, and most of the Assyrian wrath was vented upon Ashdod. In a campaign against Ashdod and its port Asdudimmu (Ashdod-yam), Sargon also conquered Gibbethon, Ekron, and Gath. From the informative description of the capture of [the Jewish city of] Azekah ‘lying on a mountain ridge like the edge of a sword,’ it appears that this campaign was directed against Judah as well” (Yohanan Aharoni and Michael AviYonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 1977, p. 97).

It would seem, however, that Hezekiah did not participate in the actual rebellion. Perhaps he was about to and Isaiah’s urgings prevented him from going through with it—thus saving him and his kingdom from Sargon’s full wrath. *The New Bible Commentary* explains the same events this way: “The Philistine city of Ashdod had revolted against Assyria, which promptly deposed its king [Azuri in 713]. A new ringleader, Yamani, carried on the struggle, with pledged support from Egypt and Ethiopia, and had also approached Judah. Isaiah’s powerful dissuasion turned out to be fully justified: Egypt failed to fight, Ashdod was subjugated [in 712], and Yamani, who had fled to Ethiopia, was handed over [by the fearful Egyptians] to the Assyrians’ *tender mercies*... The year was 711” (note on 20:1-6).

In any case, neither Isaiah “nor other biblical or extrabiblical sources reveal the outcome where Hezekiah is concerned. One can only surmise that Sargon’s malevolent objectives remained unfulfilled [that is, if he had intended major action against Judah], though at least one Assyrian text refers to Judah as a tribute state, thus implying that Hezekiah was, temporarily at least, subject to Sargon” (Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 413).

God told Isaiah to walk around barefoot and naked for three years as a sign of Assyria taking the Egyptians and Ethiopians captive. The term “naked” might still have allowed for a loincloth. Probably, “Isaiah’s symbolical action did not continue all this time [of three years], but *at*

intervals, to keep it before the people's mind during that period" (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary*, note on verse 3). The three years themselves are probably 713 through 711—from the initial defeat of Ashdod to the end of the rebellion. (The three years might not mean three full years but a time stretching across three calendar years.)

The prophecy of verses 3-4 is likely a reference to the Assyrian conquest of Ethiopian-led Egypt under Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. However, as with the other prophecies of this section, it probably also applies to the end-time subjugation of Egypt and Ethiopia by the final Assyrian Beast power.

The "they" in verse 5 are those who are looking to Egypt for deliverance from Assyria, which would have included Judah at the time Isaiah wrote. However, if the prophecy was specific to his time it would make more sense to have said "you" if referring to Judah. In the last days, Judah will *not* be looking to *Egypt* for its deliverance—as this would require the Jewish state of Israel to be looking to the Arab world for deliverance, which is extremely unlikely. So the "they" likely refers to other end-time nations looking to Egypt or its Muslim allies for help. And the "inhabitants of this territory" who look to Egypt for aid (verse 6) would seem to be the modern Palestinians. Just as Egypt, they will not escape conquest by the end-time Assyrian Beast.

Plea for Zion's enemies to be put to shame (Psalms 129)

As the first song of ascents in the fourth set of three (of the five sets of three), **Psalm 129** is set in the context of distress, recalling those who have hated and abused God's people and pronouncing consequences on them.

The afflicted "me" in verses 1-2, as this is to be declared by all Israel-per the formula "Let Israel now say" (verse 1; compare 118:2; 124:1)-refers to the nation collectively and to all its citizens individually. As for their enemies here, the people of Israel throughout their history often suffered under the brutality of foreign oppressors-and even from other Israelites who were not classed with them here as part of Israel, these being disobedient to God's covenant. (Consider that faithful Israelites often suffered at the hands of their own countrymen.)

The striking imagery of plowers having plowed on Israel's back in long furrows in verse 3 probably combines different metaphors. The obvious meaning here is that of the lash cutting into the people's backs, creating bleeding furrows or stripes-as, for example, the Messiah was prophesied to experience (see Isaiah 50:6; 53:5). Yet it should be noted that God foretold Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians in terms of plowing: "Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruin" (Jeremiah 26:18). The furrows in this case would be paths of destruction through the land. And this was on the back of the people in the sense of their bearing it as a burden.

Yet because the Lord is righteous, the enemies of Israel have never ultimately prevailed (Psalm 129:2). God has always at some point delivered His people, intervening to "cut in pieces the

cords of the wicked” (verse 4)-that is, the figurative cords they have used to bind God’s people and to scourge them. God’s past deliverance is the basis of faith in His future intervention.

Verses 5-8, the second stanza of the psalm, then declare an imprecation or curse on the wicked oppressors, expressing God’s judgment. The psalmist asks that all who hate Zion and what it represents-God, His laws, His covenant nation, His People, His Kingdom-“be turned back in shame” (verse 5, NIV). And “consistent with the agricultural language of the psalm, the people pray that the wicked may wither like ‘grass on the roof’ (v. 6 [NIV]; 2 Kings 19:26; Isa 37:27). Roofs were flat; and during periods of moisture or precipitation, grassy weeds might sprout and grow in the shallow dirt. However, the plants soon withered when deprived of moisture (cf. Matt 13:5-6). The grass may grow, but it is so useless that a reaper need not cut it down with a scythe nor bind it into sheaves ([Psalm 129] v. 7). It is a wasted growth. So it will be with the wicked” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on verses 5-8).

In verse 8, the righteous are reminded to not inadvertently pronounce a blessing on those who are cursed through a typical greeting or bidding of farewell using God’s name (compare 2 John 9-11).

In an ultimate sense, this song of ascents looks forward to the fulfillment of the fall festivals in the return of the Messiah, Yeshua, when Israel-meaning both God’s physical nation and His spiritual people -are delivered from their bondage in this world, their oppressors being both human and, primarily, demonic. The cords of Satan and sin will be broken, God’s people will at last be set free, and Satan and his followers will be brought to shame.

Waiting on God’s redemption (Psalms 130)

Though Psalm 130 begins in the depths of despair, it rises, as the second song of ascents in the fourth set of three, to a primary focus of confident hope and trust in God-in His faithfulness to forgive and redeem. In its acknowledgment of sin and need for forgiveness, the song is classed as a penitential psalm. “It’s placement following a psalm of imprecation (Ps. 129) is fitting. After all, a person might take such joy [or comfort] in the destruction of the wicked that he or she no longer would consider his or her own heart before the Lord” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Psalm 130). The pilgrims may have sung this psalm in the manner of a group confessional, seeking God’s forgiveness in preparation for keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. In this sense, it would seem related to the Day of Atonement, concerned with humbling oneself and seeking reconciliation with God just before the joyful celebration of Tabernacles.

The psalm opens with the picture of one who is drowning in sorrow over his sins, calling to God for help, referring to Him throughout as both ” Lord ” (*Yhwh* , Eternal One) and “Lord” (Master). The psalmist knows that he, representative of all God’s people, has failed in obedience to the Master. Yet he also knows that God has made provision for this failure.

Verse 3 rhetorically asks who could stand if God were to mark iniquities-that is, if a running tally of our sins was His means of judging us. The answer is none of us-for all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and the ultimate penalty of sin is death (6:23). Ezra expressed wonder at God's people standing in His presence despite their sins: "O Lord God of Israel, you are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day [though deserving of complete destruction]. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before you because of this!" (Ezra 9:15). This is possible because God, in His love for humanity, instituted an alternate means of satisfying justice, whereby mercy could be granted instead. This alternate means was the sacrifice of Yeshua-who bore the penalty of our sins in His suffering and crucifixion foreshadowed in the sacrificial system of ancient Israel.

The psalmist looks to God for forgiveness (Psalm 130:4), knowing that God is willing to forgive (see Exodus 34:7). It is instructive to note that God offers forgiveness that He "may be feared" (Psalm 130:4). This does not mean that God's forgiveness is something to be feared. Solomon similarly prayed in his prayer at the dedication of the temple for God to forgive His people when they repented "so they will fear you all the time they live in the land you gave our fathers" (1 Kings 8:40). The point is that God's willingness to forgive is what encourages people to enter into a relationship with Him-to committing their lives to obeying Him from then on in proper fear. We should especially consider that forgiveness is not intended to lead to careless abandon but to careful obedience. God does not offer a cheap grace where He continually forgives us without real repentance. He requires a change of life, though this too is possible only through Him.

Confident in God's forgiveness, the psalmist waits in assured hope of God's promises (Psalm 130:5)-hopes and watches even more than "watchmen wait for the morning" (verse 6, NIV). The psalmist may refer here to guards who watched over the city at night-who looked forward to their shift ending and getting some rest. Others suggest that the watchers were Levite priests observing the first signs of dawn to begin preparation for the morning sacrifices. Perhaps the figure concerns longing for the darkness of night to end with the dawning of days representative of longing for some present trial brought on by sin to end or of Israel's national history of trials to end with the dawning of the coming day of God.

In verse 7 the psalm exhorts the nation to the same confident hope: "O Israel, hope in the Lord "- words also found in the conclusion of the next psalm (131:3), serving to link these songs. For with God, 130:7 continues, there is *hesed* -steadfast, loyal love and mercy. He had done so much to redeem them already-delivering them from Egypt, giving them a land, rescuing them from enemies time and again. God would redeem them in an ultimate sense in time to come from their sins and its consequences through the Messiah, who would die for their sins and rescue them from all foes, physical and spiritual (see verses 7-8). This redemption was on the minds of pilgrims as they made their way to God's feasts-just as it should be on our minds today.

Childlike hope in God (Psalms 131)

Psalm 131 is the third of four psalms of David among the songs of ascents. As the third song of ascents in the fourth set of three, we would expect its theme to be blessing and peace in Zion- and this does fit with the mention of David, the king in Jerusalem, having a calmed and quieted soul and of Israel living in the hope of God forever (verses 2-3). The same exhortation for Israel to hope in God in Psalms 130:7 and 131:3 serves to link these two psalms thematically-as does proximity and the continued mood of humility before God.

In light of his accomplishments, David could have been proud. Yet he presents himself to the Lord as a humble man. At heart he is not arrogant or filled with self-importance, nor does he have aspirations for personal greatness (verse 1). He does not deem himself more capable than he is, recognizing his limitations (same verse).

He is at peace and content in God's presence, like a weaned child who no longer frets and cries for milk from his mother's breast (verse 2). A breastfeeding baby can be satisfied-but only temporarily. Note furthermore that this does not mean David views himself as independent of God and no longer in need of His provision. Indeed, a weaned child must still be taken care of and fed by his or her mother. Certainly God will continue to provide and care for all His people- and they should look to Him in confident hope for the present and for eternity to come (verse 3).

Thus, humility, maturity to a point of settled and ongoing contentment, and faith in God's promises are important focuses to maintain in observing God's festivals and in living godly lives generally in the lifelong march to His Kingdom.

John 7

This portion begins with Yeshua at His home in Galil with His brothers and the time of the Festival of Booths was very near. His brothers were mocking Him, concerning His works and testimony for even they did not believe. Yeshua knew He could not openly attend the festival for He knew by now that the Yehudim were seeking to kill Him. Therefore, He went up to Jerusalem later, after His brothers, and in secret.

The people, especially the Priests and scribes, were already actively looking for Him at the feast and all the people were contending amongst themselves concerning Him... whether He was the Messiah or whether He was instigating trouble among the people. But all the talk was surely about The Master.

About the middle of the festival of booths He went into the city, into the Set – Apart Place and was teaching. The learned ones marveled at Him, at His knowledge and understanding even though He was not taught. Yeshua gives all the honor to the Father and spoke to them of how all He says and does is from the Father and is righteous. The Scribes and Priests are supposed to teach the Torah, but they neither teach it nor “do it” Yeshua let it be known that He knows they want to kill Him and of course, they said He was mad for thinking this although it was true. They accused Him of having a demon.

Many were believing in Yeshua as the sent Messiah from heaven and the Pharisees were even more determined to seize Him but they were not able because His time was not yet come for these things to happen. On the last day of the feast, Yeshua stood and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me, and let him who believes in Me drink.' Many professed that He was The Messiah. Many others stumbled in the fact that they knew where Yeshua came from, by birth, in Galil and His parents – Miriam and Yoseph and so they stumbled upon Him.