

Triennial Torah Study – 5th Year 13/12/2014



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| Ex 20 | Isaiah 20-23 | Ps 132-134 | John 8 |
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The Ten Commandments Spoken (Exodus 20)

Though they were already known before this, here is the first written record we have of all of God's Ten Commandments together—commandments that are founded on His most basic law of love (Mark 12:29-31). The first four show us how to have a loving relationship with God. The last six reveal how we can share a loving, respectful relationship with our fellow man. Though knowledge of God's laws was clearly available earlier (Genesis 26:5), it appears likely that most of the Israelites had forgotten His requirements during their generations of Egyptian bondage and had to have those laws revealed to them once again.

Many today believe that it was *Moses* who gave the Ten Commandments to ancient Israel. But the Bible clearly reveals otherwise. God Himself spoke them with His own voice from the thundercloud above Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:1). And later, God also *wrote* them Himself—*with His own finger*—on two “tablets of stone” (31:18; 24:12; Deuteronomy 5:22). Later still, He even *rewrote* them (Exodus 34:1). To further define who gave these commandments, we must realize that by Christ's day, centuries later, no one had ever heard God the Father's voice (John 5:37). The “Lord,” who spoke the commandments, is referred to in the Old Testament as the “Rock” (Deuteronomy 32:4, 15, 31; Psalm 18:2, 31, 46). And according to the New Testament, “that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4). Those who think that Yeshua did away with His Father's commandments are sorely mistaken. In His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), He “filled” the commandments by explaining their spiritual intent, in essence making them *even more* applicable to us (5:17-20). Indeed, *Christ* is the One who gave the commandments on the Father's behalf in the first place!

The giving of the law was such a tremendous event that the Israelites feared for their lives. They could not only hear but also feel the ground shaking due to the thunder and the sound of trumpets. There were brilliant flashes of lightning and the mountain smoked. God was exhibiting a fraction of His greatness and glory before His chosen people. This awesome display was not intended to terrorize the people, because God was not there to harm them. God's purpose was to teach them awe and respect for Him, so that they would not sin (verse 20). It should have

been a very humbling experience for the Israelites. But as God said: “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29). As we will read, the respect and obedience did not last long.

Babylon to Fall to the Medes and Persians (Isaiah 21)

Isaiah 21:1-10 is a prophecy addressed to the “Wilderness of the Sea” (verse 1)—wilderness meaning a desert but in the sense of a *deserted*, uninhabited region. As indicated by verse 9, this apparently refers to Babylon. Various explanations are given for the label. One source says it “may be a sarcastic parody of Babylon, whose southern region on the Persian Gulf was called the ‘Land of the Sea’” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 1).

Another states: “One Greek writer gave this name to the plain on which Babylon stood, as it was divided by lakes and marshy country” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on verse 1). In fact, the Chaldean rulers of Babylon were of the “Sealands” dynasty—this being the name of their district of marshlands to the south, which bordered on the Persian Gulf. Says another source: “The plain [stretching from Babylon south to Persia] was [originally] covered with the water of the Euphrates like a ‘sea’...until [the Babylonian queen] Semiramis raised great dams against it. Cyrus [of Persia, who conquered Babylon] removed these dykes, and so converted the whole country again into a vast desert[ed]-marsh” (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary*, note on verse 1). Indeed, this was mentioned in our highlights covering Isaiah 14:23.

The image of Babylon—and the pagan gentile empires following in its tradition—rising from the “sea” is one we find elsewhere in Scripture (Daniel 7; Revelation 13; 17). In Revelation 17 the waters—while probably representing actual waters on one level since ancient Babylon and its later successor, Rome, were both situated near the sea—are also shown to be symbolic of “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” from which Babylon and its successor kingdoms are formed (verse 15). Yet at the same time “Babylon” can signify false religion and man’s corrupt civilization sprung from there in general, and thus a figurative desert wilderness—a place of wandering in spiritual confusion, lacking in the much-needed truth of God.

It is interesting to consider that the prophecy in Isaiah 21 may have been given immediately after the fall of Ashdod mentioned in chapter 20. Notice what happened in the wake of the Philistine defeat: “After whipping his client states, possibly including Judah, back into line, Sargon returned to Assyria to deal once more with the intractable Marduk-apla-iddina [Merodach-Baladan] of the Sealands dynasty in Babylonia” (Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 409). Indeed, at this time, in 710 B.C., the Assyrians forced Merodach from power following a 10-year reign.

Yet the prophecy of chapter 21 may also have come following events in 703 B.C. The Assyrian emperor Sargon II “suffered an invasion by the Cimmerians of the north [i.e., captive Israelites]

in 706. It is possible that he died in the following year as a result of these hostilities” (p. 409). Following his son Sennacherib replacing him in 705, revolts broke out around the empire.

Sennacherib “had barely come to power when he was faced with a rebellion in Babylonia led by the perennial foe of Assyria, Marduk-apla-iddina [Merodach-Baladan]. This leader of the Aramean Sealands dynasty had just returned from exile imposed upon him by Sargon, but with characteristic tenacity gained support for Babylonian independence from such widely scattered sources as Elam [vc_column_text][vc_column][vc_row]

[or Persia] to the east and the

Aramean

[or Syrian]

states to the west... In any case, [after a brief reign by Merodach in Babylon in 703 B.C.] Sennacherib prevailed, took the city of Babylon, and reasserted Assyrian authority. He also undertook a systematic subjugation of the entire Sealands area” (pp. 413-414).

So was Isaiah referring to one of these episodes? There may have at least been a lesson in them. In the previous chapter, Isaiah warned the people of Judah not to put their trust in Egypt to deliver them because it would fall. The only other likely option, then, for relief from Assyria would seem to have been Babylonian revolt. Yet Isaiah was essentially telling the Jews not to put their trust in Babylon either—because it would likewise fall.

However, as in Isaiah 13, chapter 21 presents us with Babylon being overthrown not by Assyria but by Media—and chapter 21 now mentions Elam or Persia as bringing Babylon down too. Yet in Isaiah’s day the Medes and Persians were allied with the Babylonians against the Assyrian yoke. It was not until around 170 years later (in 539 B.C.) that the Neo-Babylonian Empire—ascendant after the fall of Assyria—fell to the Medes and Persians. Not surprisingly, because of this fact, many try to postdate this prophecy to after Babylon’s fall. Significant in this regard is the fact that Isaiah used the word Elam and not Persia: “The name ‘Persia’ was not in use until the captivity; it means a ‘horseman’; Cyrus first trained the Persians in horsemanship. It is a mark of authenticity that the name is not found before Daniel and Ezekiel” (*JFB Commentary*, note on verse 2).

Yet while this prophecy did find partial fulfillment in the events of 539 B.C., we should view it, as with so many other prophecies in this section, as an end-time prophecy. Supporting this likelihood is the cry “Babylon is fallen, is fallen!” in verse 9, which is repeated in Revelation 14:8 and 18:2 as applying to the end of this present, evil age.

Yet that would seem to indicate that modern Medes and Persians will be involved in the overthrow of the final Babylon. Who, then, are the Medes and Persians today? No doubt many still live in their ancient homeland of Iran. The name Iran apparently derives from “Aryan”—Indo-European people ranging from India to Europe. That some Persians later migrated eastward is

well attested to by the existence of the Parsis (Parsees) in India. But to see the Persians' northern and westward migration, we should perhaps consider the Medes first.

The first-century Roman scholar Pliny the Elder wrote in his *Natural History* of "the river Don [north of the Black Sea], where the inhabitants are said to be descended from the Medes" (Book 6, sec. 11). The Caucasus Mountains between the Black and Caspian Seas formed the northern border of the Median Empire. When conquered by Alexander the Great, many evidently fled north through the Caucasus, following the migration pattern of the Israelites and Assyrians before them. Thus, the Medes today would appear to refer to people dwelling in northwest Iran, southwest Russia and the Ukraine.

Many of the Elamites or Persians appear to have followed essentially the same course, though traveling along the *south* coast of the Black Sea as well (through northern Turkey) and going even farther into Europe. The Greeks used the term Elimaei to designate Elam near Babylon. Yet they also stated that the Elimaei lived northwest of them in the area of southern Yugoslavia ("Elimea," *Smith's Classical Dictionary*).

Strabo, the first-century-B.C. Greco-Roman geographer, referred to the people of Yugoslavia on the Adriatic Sea as the Eneti—from Paphlagonia in Asia Minor or Turkey (*Geography of Strabo*, p. 227). Thus the Latin word for these people was Eneti (or Veneti)—and the Germans referred to them and the other Slavic peoples in Eastern Europe as Wends. The Elamites had actually named the most famous mountain of their homeland Elwend (George Rawlinson, *Seven Great Monarchies*, chap. 1: Media)—of which Wend seems a reasonable shortening. In the Persian conquest of the Babylonian Empire, the River Orontes in northern Syria was renamed Elwend. Indeed, it appears that Persians migrated here and into Asia Minor when they ruled the area. Upon Alexander's takeover, these appear to have continued on westward, eventually migrating into Eastern Europe.

Interestingly, a tribal territory of ancient Elam was named Kashu (*Encyclopaedia Biblica*, map, p. 4845) and in Poland we find a language called Kashubian named after a people known as the Kashub (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., "Lekhitic languages"; 11th ed., "Kashubes," on-line at 25.1911encyclopedia.org/K/KA/KASHUBES.htm).

Thus, Elam today would seem to be many of the Iranians, a small minority of India, and many of the Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe.

According to Ezekiel 38-39, the people of eastern Eurasia will be allied together at the beginning of the Kingdom age—shortly after the return of Yeshua. It is likely that this alliance will have come together prior to His arrival—and that some of the various national leaders of the eastern regions constitute the "kings from the east" mentioned in Revelation 16:12. While some of these nationalities will initially participate in the end-time Babylonian or Tyrian system (Ezekiel 27; Revelation 18), they will later come *against* end-time Babylon. Thus, in the end, Media and Persia appear to again play a role in Babylon's downfall.

Proclamations Against Edom and Arabia (Isaiah 21)

In verses 11-12, a prophecy is given against “Dumah.” Seir, also mentioned here, is a reference to Edom (compare 34:5-17; Genesis 32:3; Ezekiel 35), either the people or the land of Idumea in what is now southern Jordan. Concerning Dumah, it was apparently an actual place “located at the intersection of the east-west trade route between Babylon and Edom and the north-south route between Palmyra (in Syria) and Edom. Dumah played a vital military and economic role in the relationship between Mesopotamia and Edom, and its fate greatly affected Edom” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 11). Dumah may also be used for all of Edom here because its name meant “silence” in Hebrew, thus implying that Edom would “soon be reduced to silence or destruction” (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary*, note on verse 11). Indeed, the NIV margin states that Dumah is actually a word play on the name Edom.

The Edomite asks, “What of the night?” (verse 11)—or, rather, “How much of the night is left?” The watchman, Isaiah, answers that “morning comes, and also the night” (verse 12). This is interpreted in various ways. One way is that things will get better for the Edomites before again turning bad. Another way is that things will turn better for God’s people yet turn worse for Edom (see *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary*, notes on verses 11-12).

Either way, this would seem to refer in part to ancient events. Edom was about to come out from Assyrian domination for a while—only to come under Judah’s dominion. And later, Edom would be subjugated by the Babylonians. Yet the prophecy may also have end-time parallels. Edom will escape out of the hand of the latter-day king of the North (Daniel 11:41). But then, when Israel and Judah are delivered at Christ’s return, Edom will be destroyed (see Obadiah). The only way to escape punishment, Isaiah explains, is to “return” (Isaiah 21:12)—the Old Testament term for “repent.”

Isaiah then follows with a prophecy against Arabia. Place references are Tema, modern Tayma about 200 miles southeast of Dumah in northwest Arabia, and Dedan, about 90 miles southwest of Tema. However, it is also possible that the name Tema is the origin of the name for the western coastal plain of Arabia, Thiamah, where Mecca sits (see “Arabia,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1985, Vol. 13, map on p. 872). This entire area, the Hejaz, is extremely holy to Muslims.

Reference is also made to Kedar, a son of Ishmael (compare Genesis 25:13). “The tribe seems to have been one of the most conspicuous of all the Ishmaelite tribes, and hence the rabbis call the Arabians universally by this name” (“Kedar,” *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*, 1986).

The year reference in verse 16 is not clear. Sargon did invade Arabia in 715 B.C. If this is what’s meant then Isaiah’s prophecy would be dated 716 B.C., out of order from surrounding chapters (chapter 20 being dated to 711 B.C.). Perhaps, more likely, the prophecy refers to the Simeonite attack on Edom in the days of Hezekiah about which we will soon read: “Those of the far south, Tema and Dedan, will have to succour their more exposed brother tribe of Kedar. This could

mean that the trading caravans will have blundered into war-ravaged parts and returned empty-handed and starving” (*New Bible Commentary*, note on verses 13-17). This seems to have occurred before Sennacherib’s invasion, thus dating this prophecy to shortly before 703 or so.

Yet it is perhaps most likely that the year prior to destruction refers to a point in the end time—perhaps a year from when light begins to dawn on the captive Israelites, at the beginning of the Day of the Lord. This would imply destruction upon Arabia at the return of Yeshua.

Prophecy Against the Valley of Vision; Shebna and Eliakim (Isaiah 22)

“Valley of Vision [verses 1, 5] sarcastically describes Jerusalem. Mount Zion is ironically personified in its valleys from which it could see nothing. Instead of partying on housetops, the ailing city should have been in its prayer closets” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 1).

Isaiah explained that “a day of trouble and treading down and perplexity” was coming (verse 5). In verse 6 it appears to have already come, but the words of verse 7 show that it had not yet occurred. God often speaks of things that have not yet happened as though they already have (compare Romans 4:17). The day of trouble likely refers to the impending invasion of Sennacherib in Isaiah’s day. However, given the messianic reference later in the chapter—which we will take note of shortly—it is possible that the rest of the passage has a dual application, referring to events in Isaiah’s day as well as the latter days. And in an end-time context, the day of trouble would represent the time of Jacob’s trouble—the coming awful Great Tribulation.

Isaiah 22:6 shows the involvement of Elam. This would seem to indicate Elam attacking but perhaps not. It says Elam “bore the quiver,” which could indicate that it is serving another army, perhaps even by compulsion, which would make sense if this applied to the ancient Assyrian army, which likely had Elamites and other peoples pressed into involuntary service (the Elamite nation as a whole was supportive of Babylon against Assyrian rule). Again, however, it is conceivable that the reference is dual, applying also to the end time. As modern Elam is found in Eastern Europe, Iran and India, perhaps weapons from these areas will be utilized by the end-time Assyrian army in its initial assault on the modern nations of Israel. A “quiver” in a modern context might represent a store of missiles.

Verse 8 refers to the armor of the “House of the Forest”—no doubt a reference to the “House of the Forest of Lebanon,” which Solomon built. It was used as the national armory (compare 1 Kings 7:2; 10:16-17). The Jews were not relying on God but looking to their own military stockpiles. How different is that from the Israelite nations today?

As to what was transpiring in Isaiah’s day, we should realize that Hezekiah was making preparations for a rebellion against Assyria. He was evidently in talks with Egypt, certain of the Philistines and Merodach-Baladan of Babylon about throwing off the Assyrian yoke.

Remember that a general spirit of rebellion broke out all over the empire following the death of

Sargon in 705. Within two years, in 703, Merodach-Baladan was back on the throne of Babylon for a short stint. Indeed, this prophecy likely dates to the period between 703 and 701, the latter date being when Sennacherib comes to stem the rebellious tide. In the meantime, Hezekiah and Jerusalem's other leaders were making preparations for war.

That brings us to Isaiah 22:9-11. The city of David is damaged (verse 9) by great numbers of houses being torn down to expand and fortify the city wall (verse 10). "Confirming this, Israeli archaeologist Nahman Avigad, in the course of his excavations of the old Jewish Quarter, uncovered a massive 130-foot stretch of city wall, partly built directly onto bedrock, and partly on top of houses only recently constructed. The dating of the pottery in these houses provided clear evidence that the huge wall was part of this same Hezekiah-directed fortification effort" (Ian Wilson, *The Bible Is History*, 1999, p. 162).

Verse 11 appears to refer to the pool and tunnel also mentioned in 2 Kings 20:20, referring to "improvements in the water supply of Jerusalem in preparation for possible attack (compare Isa 22.8b-11). This conduit, with an identifying inscription has been found and is now popularly called Hezekiah's Tunnel, or the Siloam Tunnel (compare 2 Chr 32.30). It runs from [the spring of] Gihon (see 1 Kings 1.33 n.), which was outside the city wall, to the Pool of Siloam, which was inside the wall. Extending 1700 feet through solid rock, this tunnel was a remarkable engineering achievement in its time" (*Oxford Annotated Bible*, note on 2 Kings 20:20-21).

"At the southern end of the tunnel, workmen inscribed in ancient Hebrew script on the walls of the tunnel a vivid description of the completion of the tunnel on the day when workmen cutting from the two sides met. The inscription is now in the Istanbul Museum. The text runs in part: '... while there were still three cubits to be cut through, (there was heard) the voice of a man calling to his fellow, for there was *an overlap* in the rock on the right (and on the left). And when the tunnel was driven through, the quarrymen hewed (the rock) each man toward his fellow, axe against axe; and the water flowed from the spring toward the reservoir for 1,200 cubits, and the height of the rock above the head(s) of the quarrymen was one hundred cubits'" (E.M. Blaiklock and R.K. Harrison, *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, 1983, p. 414).

We will read of further developments in this project in 2 Chronicles 32:2-5, 30. Sadly, these verses continue to point out Judah's trust in its own defenses instead of trusting God.

Verse 13—"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"—is cited by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:32 to describe the futility of life if there were no resurrection. If we were living only for today, then this could logically be our whole pursuit. But God has revealed otherwise. And God had revealed to Jerusalem that they needed to draw close to Him in sincere repentance. Through the Bible, He proclaims the same thing to the people of Judah and Israel today (and, by extension, to all people). Yet because of their flippant attitude—"Hey, might as well live it up because we're going to die anyway"—God says they *will* die (verse 14).

In connection with Hezekiah's preparations for Sennacherib's impending attack, a change in leadership is demanded. Shebna has been the "steward" who is "over the house"—like a

modern prime minister or chief of staff. He is accused of making a tomb “on high” (verse 16). Archaeologists have actually found a lintel fragment of a tomb with Hebrew script from Hezekiah’s time, which stood in Silwan, on the steep slope across the valley from David’s city, in full view of the inhabitants of ancient Jerusalem. The fragment (now in the British Museum) says it belonged to a person who was “over the house.” The name, partially destroyed, ends with the common Hebrew ending *-yahu*, meaning God—and the name Shebna is thought to be a short form of the name Shebanyahu or Shebaniah, applying to someone else in Nehemiah 9:4. Many scholars believe this fragment was part of Shebna’s sepulcher.

“*Pride* is the sin of this official, who like the pharaohs of Egypt sought to build himself a lasting monument while his land was in peril. Perhaps we can see a parallel between Shebna and those modern elected officials who put reelection above the good of the nation” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on Isaiah 22:15).

The Bible says Shebna is to be driven from his office, pulled down and dragged away into a large country and killed—and his job given to Eliakim, son of Hilkiah. We will later see that when Sennacherib sends his representatives to Jerusalem, they are met by Eliakim, who is said at that time to be “over the house” (36:3, KJV), and either the same or a different Shebna is the *scribe*. There is no evidence that Shebna the steward was dragged away, say to Assyria, although it is possible that he was.

It is of course possible that this prophecy did not apply to the present Shebna and Eliakim of Isaiah’s day—or did not primarily apply to them. They could have been used as types of others. Eliakim, incidentally, means “God Will Establish.”

Some have seen links in the passage to a later “son of Hilkiah,” Jeremiah the prophet—who was apparently given stewardship over the house of David, overseeing its transfer to another land. Furthermore, we *know* that Eliakim represents the future Messiah. Verse 22, regarding the key of David and opening and shutting, is specifically said to apply to Yeshua in Revelation 3:7. This perhaps ties in with the “keys of the kingdom” given to God’s people (Matthew 16:19)—seemingly related to the “key of knowledge” (Luke 11:52) of salvation in the Kingdom (compare Matthew 23:13). It ties back to David because Yeshua will inherit the throne of David (Isaiah 9:6-7), and His saints will share His throne—the Davidic throne—with Him (Revelation 3:21).

Yet why would the Messiah, as King, be taking over a steward’s office? Consider that when He is crowned as King of the Kingdom, Christ will actually be the Steward of the Kingdom of God the Father. Indeed, this is parallel to the past history of the Davidic monarchy, wherein the human ruler actually rules as a steward for the *real* king—God.

The *rejected* steward, Shebna, if a scenario of Jeremiah’s day or the end time is intended on some level, could apply to a later steward—that is, a prime minister or a monarch—in Jeremiah’s day dragged off to Babylon at Jerusalem’s fall, or in the end time dragged away into Israel’s final captivity.

Prophecy Against Tyre (Isaiah 23)

Chapter 23 is a prophecy against Tyre, a chief city of the Phoenicians—inextricably linked to Sidon, of which Tyre was the primary colony. Tarshish refers to lands in the west, generally Spain—where sat the Phoenician colony of Tartessus. Chittim (KJV) is translated Cyprus in the NKJV, although it can mean “western lands” generally (see NKJV margin). The Sidonians and Tyrians are told to “cross over” to these “western lands” (see verse 12). This is likely referring to their fleeing to Spain and their colonies in northwest Africa, such as Carthage. Shihor (verse 3) is generally recognized as another name for the Nile (see Jeremiah 2:18).

Verse 13 mentions “the Assyrian” (KJV) who founded Babylon (by implication) for the Chaldeans. This could refer back to the founding of Babel by Nimrod, from which Asshur went out to build various Assyrian cities (compare Genesis 10:8-12). In this sense the Assyrians founded Babylon—that is, the original *empire* of Babylon. But more likely this is referring to the later involvement of Assyria in that land, and to the city that had been reestablished under Assyrian rule more recently. Just as Babylon was brought to ruin (and would be again), so would Tyre be destroyed.

Sargon had completed the Assyrians’ five-year siege of Tyre in 720 B.C. It is possible that this prophecy of Isaiah is out of chronological order and was actually given previous to many other prophecies we’ve been reading—back to before Tyre’s fall. However, it seems more likely that Tyre’s destruction referred to here is the one the Babylonians would bring about around 573

B.C.

Verses 15 and 17 refer to a 70-year period. This may refer to basically the same 70-year period Jeremiah refers to (Jeremiah 25:11-12)—the time from Nebuchadnezzar II beginning his reign to the fall of Babylon (609-539 B.C.). The “days of one king” may mean the days of one kingdom—that of Babylon—or possibly the lifespan of a man.

Of course, the prophetic statements here may all represent events that are yet to come. In the highlights on Isaiah 13, we saw how the ancient Babylonians became the Romans—as did many of the Phoenicians. Incidentally, this directly ties the Chaldeans and Phoenicians together, as they are in the current passage. In any event, the Phoenicians were the merchants of the ancient world. And they were also the merchants of the Middle Ages and Renaissance—the merchants of Venice and many other European cities having descended from the Syro-Phoenician traders spread across southern Europe.

Tyre was the “marketplace for the nations” (23:3). You can read about the rise of another “Tyre” as a great end-time trading block in Ezekiel 26:1-28:19. This trading block is referred to in Revelation 18 as Babylon. In Revelation 17, in a more religious context, we see a direct tie-in to Isaiah 23:17: “She will return to her hire, and commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth” (compare Revelation 17:2). Perhaps we can see a connection in

the “virgin daughter of Sidon” (Isaiah 23:12)—that is, a *supposed* virgin but really a harlot (verse 16). Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, was a direct type of the end-time religious and commercial system that will soon plunge the world into the final crisis leading up to the return of Christ (compare Revelation 2:20-23).

Further prophecies against Tyre can be found in Joel 3:4-8, Amos 1:9-10 and Zechariah 9:1-4.

Zion the dwelling of God and His Anointed (Psalms 132)

Psalm 132 is a royal psalm touching on God’s covenant with David and His royal successors. As the first song of ascents in the fifth and final set of three, the expected setting would be one of distress. Though there is dispute about the time this psalm was composed, we should note the prayer in verse 10 that, for David’s sake, God not reject His anointed one—that is, an anointed king of David’s dynasty. While Solomon originally spoke these words as a general plea for himself and his successors—as verses 8-10 are adapted from his dedicatory prayer for the temple (compare 2 Chronicles 6:41-42)—it may be that the words are recalled in the psalm because a later Davidic king, and perhaps the continuance of the dynasty, were now seemingly in jeopardy.

In this light, consider that some identify the author of the unattributed songs of ascent or songs of the degrees as King Hezekiah. That would fit a time of seeming peril for David’s royal dynasty, as he faced the Assyrian invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem. However, the reigns of a few other kings of Judah would also fit such a time, and the author could be someone other than the king referred to in the psalm.

The song begins by asking God to remember David and all his afflictions (verse 1)—all that he suffered as a servant of God, as detailed in so many other psalms—along with his deep devotion to a dwelling place for God (verses 3-5). This began with David bringing the Ark of the Covenant, representing God’s presence, to a tabernacle he raised up for it in Jerusalem and, beyond that, his commitment to a fixed temple for God (see 2 Samuel 6-7). Though God did not permit David to actually build the temple, as it was to be built during Solomon’s reign of peace (1 Chronicles 22:9-10), David nevertheless invested great wealth and energy into the temple plans before turning the project over to his son. David purchased the property for the temple (2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21:28-22:1) and “made abundant preparations [for it] before his death” (22:5; see 22:1-29:20).

Verses 6-9 of Psalm 132 appear to follow the progression of the ark to David’s tabernacle and then to Solomon’s temple. Note in verse 6 the hearing and discovery of “it” in Ephrathah and the “fields of the woods” or “fields of Jaar” (NIV). Ephrathah by itself could refer to the vicinity around Bethlehem (Ruth 4:11; Mic 5:2) or to Kiriath Jearim [meaning ‘City of Woods’] (cf. 1 Chronicles 2:19, 24, 50); but with the further description of ‘the fields of Jaar’—a reference to Kiriath Jearim (Jearim is a plural of ‘Jaar’)—the identity of Ephrathah is further delimited in favor of Kiriath Jearim, where the ark was located [when David and his men sought it out] (cf. 1 Sam

6:21-7:2)" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on Psalm 132:6). Yet the "it" heard there probably refers not to the ark itself, but to the call in verse 7 to take it into the Jerusalem tabernacle and worship there, for "in Hebrew the pronoun is feminine, but the Hebrew for 'ark' is masculine" (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on verse 6). The word *footstool* in the call in verse 7 refers to God's sanctuary as the place of His feet, set down on the earth among His people (compare 99:5; Isaiah 60:13; 66:1).

Verses 8-10 of Psalm 132 are, as noted earlier, evidently adapted from Solomon's prayer in the dedication of the temple (2 Chronicles 6:41-42)-when the ark was moved from the tabernacle to the new structure intended to be its permanent dwelling. And here in the same prayer linking God with Jerusalem as His perpetual holy dwelling place, Solomon also asked that God, for David's sake, would not reject His anointed (Hebrew *mashiach* or messiah). Solomon was no doubt referring to himself, but by extension this included all of David's dynastic successors-prophetically culminating in the ultimate Messiah or Anointed One, Yeshua.

"If, as some have proposed, the petitions in vv. 1, 10 form a frame around the first half of the psalm, the second half offers assurance that the prayer will be heard.... In any event, David's vow to provide the Lord a dwelling place, which would be for his royal sons and for Israel a house of prayer (see 1Ki 8:27-53; 9:3; 2Ch 7:15-16; Isa 59:7), is made the basis for the appeal that God will hear his anointed's prayer" (*Zondervan*, note on Psalm 132:10).

It is interesting to note a few parallel statements between the first and second halves of the psalm. The words adapted from Solomon's prayer in verses 8-10 call on God to occupy His resting place, for His priests to be clothed with righteousness, for His saints to shout for joy and for God to not turn away His anointed. In verses 14-15, God answers that Zion is the resting place He has chosen to permanently dwell in and that He will bless accordingly. In verse 16, God responds that He will clothe Zion's priests with not just righteousness but even salvation (compare Isaiah 61:10)-and further answers that the saints *will* shout for joy. And rather than rejecting His anointed, God will make the "horn" of David-symbolizing power and authority-grow. Further, God would prepare a "lamp" for David-the metaphor here of a light that wouldn't go out, symbolizing his perpetual dynasty (Psalm 132:17; compare 1 Kings 11:36; 15:4). The enemies of God's anointed would be put to shame while his own crown or rule would flourish (Psalm 132:18).

Of course, salvation and the everlasting perpetuity of Jerusalem and David's dynasty will only come through the ultimate Anointed-Yeshua. Indeed, whatever the original circumstances that prompted the composition of Psalm 132, we should recognize that as one of the songs of ascent, it became part of festival worship focusing on Zion as God's perpetual city, the place of His temple-His dwelling place-and the throne of David to one day be occupied by the coming Messiah, who would redeem Israel and make Jerusalem the capital of the world. We should further understand Zion as also symbolic of God's people-to be glorified at Yeshua's return to reign with Him on the throne of David over all nations from physical Zion. Indeed, all truly

converted people are anointed of God through the Holy Spirit-and will serve as the royalty and priesthood of the world tomorrow under Christ.

Blessing of God's people in unity (Psalms 133)

Psalm 133, the fourth of four psalms of David among the songs of ascent, concerns the joy of brotherly unity among God's people. As the second song of ascents in the fifth set of three, it looks in trust to God to provide His commanded blessing of eternal life. The key word in the psalm, missed in English because it is translated different ways, is the thrice-repeated *yarad* rendered "running down" twice (verse 2) and "descending" once (verse 3). The idea is that goodness and blessing comes down from above-from God.

David may have composed the psalm when the tribes, after many years of conflict, agreed to unite under his leadership (2 Samuel 5:1-5). As well, the psalm speaks to the pleasure of traveling together in harmony to keep the feasts in Jerusalem-and participating there in the great throngs of unified worship. Furthermore, the song applies to the blessing of unity within and among the congregations of God's people-even today.

The delightful unity described is between "brethren"-brothers-emphasizing family kinship. This goes far beyond immediate family. For people in Old Testament times this was understood in the sense of national brotherhood. And of course we in God's assembly understand it to refer, on an even higher level, to spiritual brotherhood through the Holy Spirit of God. God's children getting along and happily working together is truly a delightful experience-and a blessing that comes down from Him.

The "precious oil" (verse 2) was the anointing oil specially prepared for use in the tabernacle (see Exodus 30:22-33). "When the high priest was anointed, the oil ran down his beard to the front of his body and over his collar. This suggests that the oil 'bathed' the twelve precious stones that he wore on the breastplate over his heart, and this 'bathing' is a picture of spiritual unity" (Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, note on verse 2).

In verse 3, Mount Hermon, a high, snowy peak on the border between Israel and Lebanon, was a significant source of water for Israel. One avenue for this was evaporation-carrying water from Hermon to settle in the south as dew and rain. Also, snowmelt sank into the Hermon region and emerged in many streams in northern Israel, even forming the headwaters of the Jordan River-the word Jordan also being derived from the word *yarad*. (*Yaraden* apparently meaning "coming down from Dan"-which was in the Hermon area). As water was carried this way from Hermon down through the land of Israel to the mountains of Zion, so was further evaporation and precipitation. Yet note that precipitation in general is not in mind here, but specifically dew. From around May to October, encompassing Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles, virtually no rain fell on Jerusalem, so that refreshment came only through the blessing of daily morning dew-and, the comparison is made, through the unity of God's people at His pilgrim feasts.

“The two similes (vv. 2-3) are well chosen; God’s blessings flowed to Israel through the priestly ministrations at the sanctuary (Ex 29:44-46; Lev 9:22-24; Nu 6:24-26)-epitomizing God’s redemptive mercies-and through heaven’s dew that sustained life in the fields-epitomizing God’s providential mercies in the creation order” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on verse 3). Moreover, anointing oil and water precipitation are both representative in Scripture of the Holy Spirit-sent down from God to transform and spiritually sustain His people.

This blessing from above is the source of the unity of God’s people-as well as the closing blessing of this joyous life continuing through all eternity.

Praising God in His house at night (Psalms 134)

Psalm 134 is the last of the song of ascents. As the third song in the fifth and final set of three, the psalm returns to the concluding theme of blessing and peace in Zion. Indeed, the key word here is *bless*, used three times in three verses.

Verses 1-2 contain a call to God’s servants to bless God, while verse 3 is a declaration of blessing from God on His people. In the first case, as noted in the Bible Reading Program comments on Psalm 103, a “blessing” from a human being directed to God is a word of heartfelt praise or thanksgiving or an expressed wish to see all of God’s purposes fulfilled, implying cheerful and committed cooperation with Him-submitting fully to His will.

There is some question regarding the identity and circumstances of the “servants of the Lord , who by night stand in the house of the Lord ” (134:1). This is widely believed to refer to Levites on watch each night, after the temple was closed and secure-or to their continuing to sing after this closing (compare 1 Chronicles 9:33; Psalm 42:8; 77:6). Yet it may refer, or may have *come to refer*, to a tradition that developed during the Feast of Tabernacles of Levites and worshippers of the nation participating in night festivities in the temple court that ran late into the night on every night of the feast except the first. Tradition states that there was singing, dancing, juggling and the Levitical performance of the 15 songs of ascent on 15 steps ascending from the court of the women, as noted in our introduction to the songs of ascents.

This may be related to Isaiah 30:29: “You shall have a song as in the night when a holy festival is kept, and gladness of heart as when one goes with a flute, to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Mighty One of Israel.”

So the “servants” in Psalm 134 could be Levites or priests who are called on to bless God on behalf of the people-or they could be all the people collectively calling on each other to bless Him. Either way, this is with lifting up hands in the sanctuary-this being one of the standard postures of prayer (compare 1 Timothy 2:8).

The last verse of Psalm 134 is a form of benediction, asking God’s favor on the pilgrims who were traveling *from* Jerusalem following the festivals (verse 3). Here either the priests declare a

blessing from God on the departing worshippers or all the worshippers collectively pronounce a blessing on one another. This blessing is from “the Lord who made heaven and earth,” repeating an earlier formula in the songs of ascents (compare 121:2; 124:8). And remarkably, the God of all creation blesses *through* His chosen dwelling of Zion-which signifies ancient Jerusalem and the instruction provided through its worship system, the faithful of God, the millennial Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God and the heavenly Jerusalem that will one day descend to earth. May our own pilgrim journey bring us *there* -to the wonderful eternal blessings God has in store.

John 8

Our portion opens with the incident of the scribes and Pharisees bringing to Yeshua the woman “they said” they caught in adultery and was trying Yeshua in this matter, to see if He would uphold the Torah of Moses. As they continued to press Him, He simply kneeled down and wrote in the dirt with His finger. Upon rising, He said, “He who is without sin, cast the first stone.” Everyone walked away and Yeshua forgave the woman with great compassion.

Yeshua continued teaching saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follow Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but possess the light of life.” The Pharisees accused Him of false witness for witnessing of Himself. Yeshua tells them His witness is true and reminds them of the Torah that the witness of two is true and His witness comes from Himself and the Father. Because the Pharisees did not recognize Him, they knew not the Father either.

Yeshua continues and gives them some clues as to His coming death and resurrection. But of course, the Pharisees could not understand for they are interpreting all things through carnality and the flesh. Yeshua’s Words are not flesh, but spirit and the flesh cannot understand the spirit. They even speak of being Abraham’s seed and that they had not been a servant to anyone at any time. This is quite strange don’t you think? Have they forgotten the 430 years of captivity and slavery in Egypt? Even so, Yeshua was speaking of being servants to sin.

Throughout the next exchanges, Yeshua begins using language where He is speaking of HIS SEED, the spiritual seed from above as He uses the word – word for seed. The Pharisees were Abraham’s seed (earthly, natural, flesh), but they were unable to receive Yeshua’s seed (Spirit, Heavenly, the seed of the Father). Because of this... they show themselves to neither be of Abraham’s seed (for they are NOT doing the works of Abraham) nor will they receive the seed of the Son. Yeshua tells them then... that their father is the devil.