

## Psalm 122

### Getting Close to God

**Read Psalm 122:1-5:** This is the third Psalm of Ascent being sung as the travelers are now getting closer to the temple. The influences of this world are being replaced with a greater sense of approaching God; and all that goes with it. Likewise, our problems do not vanish when we get together in the Holy Spirit. Those nagging thoughts and issues of life just become displaced with something better.

David wrote this psalm. He was one of the most enthusiastic worshippers recorded in the bible. His enthusiasm and cheerleading for God uniquely made him a man after God's own heart. There was an incident when the ark of the covenant was mishandled as it was being moved; and men died. David was overcome with confusion and regret. Then God began to bless the people near where the ark had been left. David took that as his sign to bring it back to its rightful place in Jerusalem.

*So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with gladness. And so it was, when those bearing the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, that he sacrificed oxen and fatted sheep. Then David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. (2 Samuel 6:12-15)*

David's wife was embarrassed seeing her husband the king running around yelling and dancing like a child. She wanted him to act more like a king in a *dignified* way. God honored David and erased his wife from the story. People who never get excited about God should realize that they are just too far away. I can think back on times in my faith walk when it was very exciting. There were evangelical outreaches and church growth involvements going on. God is always exciting. The question is what we are filling our mind with. You can be standing in the congregation; but be reflecting on anything except God.

Our enthusiasm for time with God and his people is a dipstick to our spiritual tank. Is bible study and prayer something I just do before work in the morning? Last night I got off work a little earlier than usual. I always look forward to being able to watch a little TV after dinner, and before going to bed. I turned off the TV and

spent a little time meditating on God's word and praying. I thought to myself that *this should not feel like a sacrifice.*

It was telling to me to see where my enjoyment was coming from...and what I was doing out of commitment. Over the years I have learned that what seems like a silly sacrifice to my shallow need for entertainment pays dividends. A little time in the word helps me to further enjoy life's simple pleasures much more than I otherwise would.

*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)*

Our attitude towards God time can be: apathetic, depressing and boring, habitual, somewhat enjoyable, or transforming and invigorating. *It is what it is.* We are not supposed to allow our feelings to dictate our faith commitments. Our faith journey cannot go far on autopilot. Religion is autopilot. Faith is unpredictable and exciting.

Part of effectively coming into the house of the LORD, includes personal preparation. If we just show up and expect the *magic to happen* we will usually be disappointed. We need to spend time communicating to God and studying his word to prepare ourselves for the meeting. Even weekly bible studies are half as interesting if you do not put in your time in the word in advance.

A perfect example of God's people preparing to step into his presence is found in the book of Joshua. The children of Israel had been wandering aimlessly for 40 years in the wilderness. They stayed back and let Moses do all of the meeting with God; and they missed out on special moments with God. It is not the pastor's job to entertain us or be our only source of teaching. He is bringing us God's word. A child in the faith is known to be fed by others; instead of feeding their own faith. That is a good illustration of the problem.

God was going to let them draw near and come into the holy land. Joshua told them to **consecrate themselves** before approaching the ark of the covenant. We need to take our time with God seriously enough to prepare for it.

How do we consecrate ourselves unto the LORD? It is not about a burst of energy or commitment. It is about prayerfully waiting on God...and then immediately moving on that instruction. The children of Israel had tried to barge into Canaan in

their own energy and inspiration previously, and they failed. Joshua now told the people to take time alone to get their hearts ready. Our quiet time can't be a microwavable instantaneous thing. It is a time-elapsed development that is subtle. The children of Israel were told that they needed to get ready for something special. The ark of the covenant represented God's presence. The people had kept a distance behind it as they walked through the wilderness. God supernaturally stopped the Jordan River as the people walked right past the ark.

Anytime that you can get that close to God it is supernatural. God is always willing to dwell with man; but we are way too complicated and fickle. James 4:14 tells us that we are like a vapor (mist). A mist only exists momentarily as air cools down rapidly. We only reflect the presence of God momentarily. Our ongoing life experiences prepare our hearts, and cultivates a need to reach out to God again and again.

Joshua told the people to stay focused on the ark; since they had never gone this way before. 2,000,000 people walked past the ark and they saw the Jordan River miraculously stopping to let them pass. The point is that if we take some time to prepare our hearts, we will witness God's miraculous wonders and have a greater sense of his presence. If you blink you will miss it. God is not a showman.

*Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over. So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp; and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before." And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you." Then Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over before the people." (Joshua 3:1-5)*

David and Joshua were both examples of enthusiastic faith. They had a lot of one on one time with God as well as gathered the people together before the LORD.

Conversely, leprosy is used as a metaphor for sin and living like the walking dead, because it leaves you without feeling. Do you feel more like a Christian zombie or a cheerleader for Christ? The telling signs that you are far away from God may not be a guilty conscience as much as just having an apathetic attitude. Whenever I

find myself bored with church, I know that the problem does not lie with God. I have to break out of my self-centered and robotic path; and reestablish my intimate connection with God.

The pattern for Christian kids dropping out of the church frequently occurs at grade 5. Sunday school is less fun than playing X Box or playing with friends. They quit when they don't feel like coming anymore. The truth of the matter is that we all don't feel like coming to church anymore from time to time. That is like stopping chemotherapy because there are other things that you would rather do. The solution is not to bail out. The solution is to snap out of it and prayerfully run in closer. I recall going to church camp as a young man one year. There were some kids who were super enthusiastic about the gospel. I was not as excited as they were. I was satisfied that I knew the basic facts of the scriptures. I was even a little bothered by their exuberance and glow. It just seemed a little *over the top* to me. At the same time I realized that they were not doing anything wrong; and that the problem was in my heart. We need to use brutal intellectual honesty with ourselves. That red light on the dashboard telling me I am *low on oil* should not be ignored.

Perhaps you have never been too excited about going to church. Have you ever been deeply affected by *the vibe* at a Harvest Crusade, or a Promise Keepers, or a Billy Graham event? Has there ever been a time when God completely overwhelmed your senses? God has established worship and the gathering of the saints as his preferred places to manifest himself to our senses. You might be missing the moving of the Holy Spirit.

*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)*

Zeal for God can be *something caught instead of something taught*. You have to step out more in obedient faith to break out of the doldrums. You won't suddenly be motivated to step up your faith. It will never happen. The normal pattern is that spiritual apathy eventually leads to personal crisis, thus leading back to new motivation the hard way. It is better to avoid that lifelong endless painful loop. What has God told you to do; that remains to be done? The ball might still be in your court.

## Aliyah, Ultimate Ascent to Mount Zion

**Read Psalm 122:6—9:** We are told in numerous places to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. How is that different than praying for the peace of London or Stockton? It is to show favor and assist God's chosen people. The demonic forces have influenced men of all nations to harass and destroy the Hebrew people worldwide, but God tells us to bless them.

*I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:2-3)*

In recent years there has been a repatriation of Israel. Antisemitism has driven many displaced Jews back to their homeland. That return to the homeland is known today as *Aliyah*.

Aliyah means "going-up" (to Jerusalem). Jews see it as "going up to holiness". In just 100 years the Jewish population of Israel has risen an amazing 7,700 percent. Why? It is a fulfillment of prophecies which say that God will take His people from all the nations and bring them back into their own land (as promised to Abraham).

Today, organizations like [The Jewish Agency](#) and [WZO](#) help returning Jews get installed in Israel. Our church, Maranatha Chapel has been a supporter of ministries to repatriate Jews and to help Jews living in their homeland. We have also adopted a city in Israel (Ariel) to invest in their community and foster support for Jewish people and their causes.

In 1915 there were just 83,000 Jews in Israel, but this increased to nearly 6.5 million Jews in 2017. By 2017 Israel's population stood at a record 8,680,000. This is a 10-fold increase compared to when Israel was founded in 1948.

Certainly, the amazing and unprecedented return of a people that has survived extremely violent attempts at their extinction is a baffling phenomenon unmatched in the history of mankind. But those who study Bible prophecy see this phenomenon as the fulfillment of prophecy, as in:

*Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone ... and bring them into their own land (Ezekiel 37.21)*

Jews are coming from all over the world, from wherever they have been scattered amongst the nations. The first wave of immigration started in 1882 and particularly involved Jews from Russia and Romania. By 2008 the number of Jews living in Israel was more than any other country since the year 70 AD. The so-called “first aliyah” (1882 to 1903) was a wave of about 30,000 Zionist immigrations mostly from Eastern Europe, Russia and the Yemen. Another wave of about 40,000 Jews came between 1919 and 1923. This was triggered by the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, anti-Semitic pogroms in Eastern Europe, the British occupation of Palestine, and the 1917 Balfour Declaration.

Between 1929 and 1939 some 225,000 to 300,000 Jews arrived from Europe and Asia. This wave of immigration began as a pioneering one, but with the onset of racial persecution in Nazi Germany attained the character of a mass migration between 1933 and 1939. A major wave of immigration occurred after the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. So the late 1940’s and early 1950’s saw large-scale waves of immigration from Arab countries primarily from Iraq, Yemen and Libya. Some 260,000 Jews immigrated despite the necessity of leaving their property behind.

Aliyah translates as “elevation”, “ascent” or “going up.” It refers to going up to Jerusalem. It is true that Jerusalem is located on a plateau in the Judean Mountains at an altitude of 760m (2,490 ft), but that is not the primary meaning here. When Jesus (Yeshua) talked about “going up to Jerusalem” (Lk 18.31) He was referring to deeper things than hill-climbing! Jews regard Aliyah as “moving up in holiness”. It refers to moving to the land given to them by God through Abraham, *with a real purpose*. Because of their ancestral connection **they see this land as the most suitable place to relate to and connect to God.** They see it as the primary place to lovingly engage in the observance of God’s commandments. In other words, to go there is to be elevated to a higher spiritual level. The term reflects Micah’s prophecy, when many nations will soon say:

*Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD (Mic 4.2)*

### **Getting Back to A place of Purpose and Meaning**

Why do the Muslims and others want to take Jerusalem away from the Jews? It is not a highly valued location for any financial reason. It is the source of Jewish identity. When the Jews were deported in Babylonian captivity they had a hard time resonating with their sense of purpose and history and connection to God. They felt like they could not be Jews without their temple. Jerusalem represents a spiritual uniting with God and fellow Jews.

*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion. We hung our harps Upon the willows in the midst of it. For there those*

*who carried us away captive asked of us a song, And those who plundered us requested mirth, Saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How shall we sing the LORD's song In a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth— If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy. Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom The day of Jerusalem, Who said, "Raze it, raze it, To its very foundation!" (Psalm 137:1-7)*

There have been problems with unbelievers harassing Jews as long as Jews have existed. Here is an example from the 2015 Jerusalem Post:

The problem of intimidation of Jews at the holiest site to Jews has reached a critical stage in the last several years, Yisrael Medad, secretary of the Temple Mount Group, said on Wednesday. "Over the past two to three years, we saw men first sitting in circles studying the Koran, and then, sooner than later, they sat on pathways designated for Jewish visitors, so they couldn't walk," he said. "Then the women got up and followed us around, screaming and yelling 'Allahu akbar!' The police will not push and shove them like they will the men, which is why women frequently lead the mobs." The Jordanian government pays between 300 and 500 Muslim women and unemployed men to harass Jews, Medad claimed. The Islamic Movement's northern branch, based in Umm el-Fahm, compensates 150 additional provocateurs, he said. While Medad acknowledged that several Muslims with long histories of stirring trouble on the Mount have been barred from entering it for up to three months, he said that harassment of Jews there has continued to grow. "What happens now is that when we exit the Chain Gate, they follow us out, screaming and yelling," he said. "Last Thursday's yelling at the woman who was later arrested for saying 'Muhammad is a pig' was not on the Temple Mount, but in the Muslim Quarter. So, not only are they on the Temple Mount, but they are following Jews outside to the Muslim Quarter as well," he said. Medad said the most practical solution, an idea he raised nine months ago at a meeting with the Knesset's Internal Affairs

and Environment Committee, is for police to enforce a policy that restricts Muslim mobs from coming within 20 meters of Jewish visitors to the Mount. “You want to protest against Jews?” he asked. “Fine, [but] do so at a safe distance.” The central problem, Medad asserted, is that while Jews are told by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that there is a status quo – and that it cannot be altered – facts on the ground tell a different story. “The Arabs are altering that status quo from month to month, and year to year,” he said. “More and more, Jewish visitation is being limited during Ramadan, as well as additional closings due to security threats.” Medad said that wait times for Jews to ascend via Mugrabi Gate have grown exponentially, while non-Jewish visitors enjoy speedy service. “The best solution is to give them [non- Jews] 90 percent of the place for visits. I’d be satisfied with 90 minutes to two hours a day in a far corner to pray and be a Jew,” he said. “You cannot be a Jew at Judaism’s holiest site. You must be an unidentified tourist,” he said.

The bible tells us that judgement begins at the house of the LORD. When we don't take God seriously our whole world gets off track. We need to check ourselves. Are we really thankful and appreciative enough to be motivated to draw closer to God than we have been before? If we are not going forward in faith, we are going backwards.