

Israel's Place in the Plan of God
The Songs of Ascent, Psalms 120—134
by Dr. David L. Cooper

Psalm 123

Israel's Return To God

1. Unto thee do I lift up mine eyes, O thou that sittest in the heavens.
2. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their master,
As the eyes of a maid unto the hand of her mistress;
So our eyes look unto Jehovah our God, Until he have mercy upon us.
3. Have mercy upon us, O Jehovah, have mercy upon us;
For we are exceedingly filled with contempt.
4. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scoffing of those that are at ease,
And with the contempt of the proud.

Since this psalm is not attributed to any particular human author, we do not know whom God honored by permitting him to make this revelation. Neither do we know the circumstances out of which it came, or the occasion giving rise to this new revelation. It is quite possible, and even likely, that it was a time of national crisis, when the country of Israel was overthrown and Israel was suffering a major defeat. In the past God used such occasions—when the people's hearts were mellowed by their harrowing experiences—to give to them further revelations of His marvelous plans and purposes for the people in the future. Some have thought that this psalm came out of the time of Hezekiah when the great Assyrian world power was making incursions into the westland, the land of Ammur, and was leaving death and destruction in its wake. It is quite possible that such a time constitutes the background of this marvelous prediction. But we are confident that this psalm far transcends anything that has passed, and that it is a vision of the future.

This position is proved by the fact that the whole nation, according to verses 1 and 2, is looking to God alone for deliverance. Such unity of purpose and action has never characterized the Jewish nation at any time. This statement being true to facts, then we must conclude that these verses are a vision of something that will yet transpire in the future.

Moreover, from verses 3 and 4, we learn that the nation of Israel at the time here foreseen in the prophecy is filled with exceeding contempt and is brought very low. When we take all of these facts into consideration, and when we read definite predictions concerning Israel's predicament in the Tribulation, we come to the conclusion that the prophet is here speaking about Israel at this time yet in the future, when he will be brought low before God and will turn to Him completely and wholly for deliverance.

Penitent Israel Looking Steadfastly to God

There appears in the latter part of Hosea, chapter 5, an awe-inspiring prediction concerning God's punishment of the nation and of His forsaking it until it returns to Him in genuine repentance. This prophecy is as follows: 14 For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and there shall be none to deliver. 15 I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me earnestly" (Hosea 5:14, 15).

If a person will read, beginning with verse 8 of this chapter, he will see that Hosea was speaking of the land of Palestine's being overrun and looking to Assyria for deliverance, to which thing God positively was opposed. In doing this, the Chosen People merited nothing but rebuke and chastisement from God. This following God afar off and being disobedient to Him in the historic past are blended with another event that has proved to be *the* crisis of the nation of Israel thus far. In this major crisis God comes to Israel; he rejects Him. Then, after the nation rejects His Messiah, Ephraim and Judah—the 12 tribes—are torn asunder like a helpless lamb by a lion. Thus the Lord, thinking of Himself in terms of the fierce lion, declares to Israel: "I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and there shall be none to deliver." This is a prediction of the time when Jehovah comes to the nation of Israel. They sin against Him; He then, like the lion, tears the nation limb from limb. Then He leaves the scene of the disaster, as is set forth in the next verse: "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me earnestly" (Hosea 5:15). Jehovah, after having torn the nation, goes and returns to His own place and remains there "till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face. ..." Jehovah came from heaven to earth and delivered the message of God to His people. They, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God, rejected Him and thus fulfilled prophecy.

When He thus leaves Israel and returns to heaven, His place, He remains there "till they acknowledge their offence. ..." This is a prediction that, after Messiah is rejected by the nation of Israel, He, at the invitation of God (Ps. 110:1), ascends to heaven, takes His seat at the right hand of the throne of God, and waits there until God makes His enemies (the Jewish people) the footstool of His feet.

The coming of Jehovah to Israel occurred nineteen hundred years ago, when our Lord entered the world by miraculous conception and virgin birth. He grew up and at the proper time engaged in His personal ministry. Since the nation as a whole did not know Him, nor the Scriptures which were read every sabbath day in the synagogue, it rejected Him and condemned Him to death. But, according to the Scriptures, it was not possible that He should remain in the tomb. He therefore arose on the third day. After remaining on the earth in His glorified body for forty days, He ascended to the right hand of the throne of God and has been there ever since. He is waiting the time when God will put the Jewish people—who rejected Him at His first coming, and who still reject Him as their Messiah, Savior and Lord under His feet. That they will be thus brought into subjection to Him is declared by various passages of Scripture. The way in which God will put the Jewish people under His feet is by the sending of the great, terrific judgments of the Tribulation Period, which break their resistance, that they have built up against Christ for nineteen hundred years, as is told in Daniel 12:7. Thus those mighty judgments will break in pieces the power of the Holy People. When that is accomplished and Israel sees his helpless, hopeless state and condition, he will acknowledge his offence and seek the face of his Messiah. In this passage, Hosea 5:15, we are told that the people will seek the Lord earnestly "in their affliction," the Tribulation Period.

When the power of the Holy People is thus broken in pieces, the leaders of the nation will issue the following call to the people to come back to God, who alone can heal them, raise them up, and cause them to live before Him:

1 Come, and let us return unto Jehovah; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. 2 After two days will he revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him. 3 And let us know, let us follow on to know Jehovah; his going forth is sure as the morning; and he will come unto us as the rain, as the latter rain that watereth the earth (Hosea 6:1-3).

Another picture of Israel, when his power is broken, and when he is looking to God alone, as is set forth in Psalm 123, is found in Zechariah:

10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look unto me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born. 11 In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. 12 And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; 13 The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of the Shimeites apart, and their wives apart; 14. All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart (12:10-13).

In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness (13:1).

When the judgments of the great Tribulation are falling thick and fast upon the Hebrew people, they will turn to the Lord in genuine repentance and in godly sorrow, seeking the truth and salvation. When the nation of Israel is brought to that position, then God will pour out "upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look unto me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him [the Messiah] as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." An illustration of the pouring out of the spirit of grace and supplication mentioned in this passage is found in such cases as that of Lydia, of whom we read in Acts 16:14: "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul." This woman was seeking after God. She did not know the truth of His Word, had never heard the gospel message. God, knowing her heart and knowing her honesty and desire for the truth, poured out the spirit of grace and supplication upon her and opened her heart to give heed to the message which was spoken by the Apostle Paul. In a manner analogous to this, God will, at the time foreseen by Zechariah in the passage under consideration, pour out upon the penitent remnant of the nation this spirit of grace and supplication, which will enable them to pray as they have never before prayed, and which will open their eyes to see Him from whom the nation turned away nineteen hundred years ago. Then they will look unto Him (the Messiah) whom they pierced at His first advent.

Never before has there been, and never again will there be, any mourning and genuine sorrow as will be manifested by Israel as at this time when he turns to God with all his heart. At that time the eyes of the people will be spiritually opened, and they will see the fountain for sin and for uncleanness that was opened nineteen hundred years ago at Calvary. Then they will hasten to accept Him and to be cleansed in that crimson flood that poured from Immanuel's veins.