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there is no suggestion that she knew who He was. His words, 'Neither do I condemn thee', may have led to the insertion of the incident at this point in the Gospel because of their similarity to 'I judge no man' in verse 15. Evidently He accepts her accusers' charge against her as true; His refusal to condemn her does not imply that she was not guilty of adultery, but He 'came not to judge the world, but to save the world' (John 12:47; cf. 3:17). He discharges the sinner without condoning her sin; with His command to her not to go on sinning we may compare His similar command to the man who was healed at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:14).

(To be continued)

THE LITTLE PSALTER

II. The Songs of the Pilgrims

A. NAISMITH

Undoubtedly the fifteen 'Songs of Degrees' were chanted by pilgrims on their way from rural districts to Jerusalem to worship God, and by the exiles returning from the Provinces of the Persian Empire in which they had been eating the 'bitter bread of banishment'. This return, Jeremiah had prophesied, would commence seventy years after Nebuchadnezzar led them captive to Babylon; and Daniel, a keen student of prophecy who had prayed earnestly for the fulfilment of that prediction (Dan. 9:1-19), lived till after the first band of pilgrims wended its way back to Jerusalem. While we may be sure that they sang at each stage of their journey all the fifteen songs of ascents, and probably many other Psalms as well, we cannot fail to observe that definite progressive sentiment and experience are embodied in the five triads of these Pilgrim Songs. The first triad is plainly appropriate to the commencement of their pilgrimage, when the element of anticipation was strongest, the fifth and last to the conclusion and the realisation of their hopes and desires.

The first group of songs—Psalms 120, 121 and 122—in all likelihood engaged their minds as they set off, about to leave behind a land in which they had been hated and persecuted aliens, and in joyful anticipation of entering the city Jehovah had chosen for blessing, and of standing on Mount Zion.

Psalm 120 indicates the distressing conditions under which many of the Jews lived in those lands in which they were scattered, while, with 'no continuing city', they sojourned in Mesech or dwelt in 'the tents of Kedar' in the midst of savage and uncultured peoples which were always hostile to them. In such circumstances they raised their eyes to the lofty mountains but could not expect help from them. Their only Helper and Keeper was Jehovah Himself. Psalm 121 is the traveller's psalm, and the action words that provide the key to this hymn are 'keep' and 'preserve'. Protection and preservation as they moved out of the lands of their exile and into the land Jehovah had chosen for them must come from the Lord alone. In the last song of the triad the ecstasy of embarking on a pilgrimage to the House of the Lord is mingled with the hopeful expectation of completing the long journey and entering Jerusalem, for whose peace and prosperity they would pray as they proceeded.

In the three songs of the second triad the pilgrims to Zion look upward in Ps. 123, backward in Ps. 124, and forward in Ps. 125. The first of the three is the hymn of the uplifted eyes, four times mentioned in the first two verses. In answer to the appeal of their upturned eyes for Jehovah's mercy, His hand is outstretched, and their escape from hostile peoples and adverse circumstances is accomplished (Ps. 124:7-8). In this Song of Degrees three metaphors are used to depict their plight—the voracity of men with the nature of wild beasts (v. 3), the devastations of floods of waters (vs. 4-5), and the ensnarements of the fowler (v. 7). Delivered from such perils, they continue to sing of their security and stability under the protection of God, comparing it to that afforded by Mount Zion, the place for which the righteous are bound. All this is likewise true of us who are redeemed from the power of darkness in these days in which we

live. We too are pilgrims having 'no continuing city' here but looking for the 'heavenly Jerusalem', 'a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God'. As we journey, we can sing.

'We're marching to Zion, the beautiful city of God'. Ps. 125 is the sixth Psalm of the Little Psalter, and the first in which Zion is named.

The central group of songs—Psalms 126, 127 and 128—is full of activity, portraying the toils of the farmer, the labours of the builder and the contentment of the parent. The figures, which are also used in the New Testament of the labours of God's servants and ministry within the Church of God, are agricultural, architectural and domestic. Ps. 126 celebrates the release of the captives and the return of the exiles, as they reiterated the expression of the heathen in whose lands they had suffered banishment, applying the same words to their new circumstances in a rapturous song of praise: 'The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad'. Emancipated and returning to the land of milk and honey, they could now consider the tasks that awaited them in the fields of their homeland and contemplate the going forth of the servant, the flowing of his tears, the sowing of the seed and the mowing of the harvest. How often this figure has been applied, with the utmost appropriateness, to the servant of the Lord in every age and every land! The rebuilding of the temple and the construction of dwelling-places for themselves would also occupy their attention and energy as soon as their pilgrimage was completed, and for those occupations, too, the help of the Lord was essential. The analogy of the Christian Church, its edification, and the Spirit's exhortation—'Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon'—are salutary exercises in the days in which our lot is cast. Next in the thoughts of the pilgrims come the fellowship and joy of the family circle, no longer in heathen surroundings but in close proximity to Zion, the city of God.

The fourth triad contains clear suggestions that the pilgrims are conscious that they are nearing their destination. They

remind themselves of Jehovah's righteousness in delivering them from their enemies and bringing confusion to their persecutors. On further reflection, however, they are reminded of their own iniquities and unworthiness and exclaim, 'If Thou, O Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?' What a solace to them and to us to know that He is 'a God ready to pardon' and to be able to affirm, 'There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared' (Ps. 130:3-4). Our hope, like theirs, is in the Lord (130:7; 131:3).

In the final triad of the 'Songs of Ascents' the pilgrims have reached Mount Zion, 'the city of the living God'. The new sanctuary is to be built on the same site as the magnificent temple of Solomon which the Babylonian monarch had desecrated and destroyed, and they take up the words of David, professing in their zeal that they will not give 'sleep to their eyes' or 'slumber to their eyelids' until they find a habitation for 'the mighty God of Jacob'. Their song in Ps. 132 anticipates the completion of the building and worship within the house of the Lord. How more fittingly could worshippers be described than in the three Psalms that conclude the 'Songs of Degrees'!

In Ps. 132 they are designated the Priests of God clothed with righteousness and salvation, expecting blessing for the house of God, bread for the Lord's poor, joy for His saints and a lamp of witness for His Anointed, great David's greater Son. In such conditions Jehovah can declare, 'This is my resting-place: here will I dwell: for I have desired it'. But His permanent rest is not to be in the Jerusalem to which those pilgrims had returned nor in the temple rebuilt by the returned exiles. The place of His dwelling was soon again to be destroyed, and today the habitation of God by His Spirit is in His Church composed of 'living stones', a spiritual house against which all the powers of hell can never prevail.

The worshippers see themselves in Ps. 133 as 'Brethren together in unity', experiencing blessing in the house of the Lord. The Psalm itself has three parts, commencing with an exclamation in verse 1 and concluding with the realisation of the Divine bless-

ing. The central portion contain illustrations of how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to 'keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' The illustrations—the holy anointing oil and the fertilizing dew—are both types of the Holy Spirit. In the final clause of the Psalm we find the first mention of 'eternal life', the only other occurrence in the O.T. being in Dan. 12:2. The great theme of eternal life is characteristic of the N.T. Scriptures which tell of the advent of Him Who said, 'I am come that ye might have life and that ye might have it more abundantly'.

The last song of the series tells of blessing emanating from the house of the Lord. In it the worshippers are viewed as Servants in His house, using in their ministry their feet, as they stand by night in His house, their hands lifted up in holy supplication, and their lips as they offer 'the sacrifice of praise to God continually', the fruit of their lips, making mention of His name.

Thus end the 'Pilgrims' Progress' and their songs by the way.

DISTINGUISHING THINGS THAT DIFFER

W. FRASER NAISMITH

Peter, in writing his first epistle, refers to three great and fundamental principles in the opening chapter viz., SALVATION—v. 9: REDEMPTION—v. 18: and NEW BIRTH—v. 23.

It is not uncommon for believers in our Lord Jesus Christ to assume that those truths are synonymous; but it is wise to distinguish things that differ.

Salvation

Salvation is a work accomplished both outside the believer and inside him. It should be realised that in salvation there are three different aspects of this great blessing. The salvation of the soul would emphasise the fact that the individual is saved from the penalty of sin: for Paul assures us in Romans 8:1 'there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ