



HG269: Mountain Top Experiences (Part 2)  
**Zion: Mount of God**

Psalm 48.1-14

Home Group Study Notes

14 January 2024—James Van Cleef



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group  
with you, along with any previous notes and other  
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



**Welcome** (10 mins)  
*Ice Breaker*

Share with your group one gift you received this past  
Christmas you wish you didn't...



**Looking Upwards** (10 mins)  
*Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs  
of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using  
Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Home Group Sermon Notes

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This second part of ‘Mountain Top Experiences’ home group series continues to show God powerfully and faithfully present among us, shaping us and giving us the wherewithal to follow in his way. Our discipleship—our living out the salvation we have in Christ Jesus, receiving the truth of our adoption as God’s children in him—is centred on the greatness and majesty of God.

Which leads to a question whose answer may be useful to keep in mind: What is worship? Sometimes, worship is simply another term for the Sunday service, whilst others narrowly define it with regard to music. Sadly, in our consumerist culture we treat ‘worship’ as something that has to provide benefit to ourselves; it’s effectiveness based on how we feel. When the Bible talks about worship, what are we to understand? God was critical of beautiful singing from people with empty hearts. Can we truly worship if we sing about God’s holiness, yet disregard the call to be holy? What, then, does God desire from our worship? Nothing less than our submission, obedience and service to him. It is the offering of our lives. It is this understanding of worship the Psalms paint for us.

Now, it’s ideal to use a Psalm to reflect on God’s greatness and majesty. Psalms are an invitation into poetry—rhythm and rhyme, simile and metaphor—with the aim of evoking our response. Through them we

stop.

and see God, and breathe... Not only are Psalms useful for our prayer—for how we speak to God—their general accessibility makes them useful for grasping truths about God that lead us to worship, that is, our submission, obedience and service to him.

With all this in mind, let us reflect on Zion: Mount of God, and understand its significance for our life in Christ.

### **Metaphors be with you**

Ancient Israelites were surrounded by pagan nations—people who worshipped idols of stone gods and goddesses of earth, wind and fire. The chief god of the Canaanites was ‘El’ and his palace, from which his rule and all good things flowed, was on the heights of Zaphon. For the Canaanites, Zaphon was the greatest and highest mountain in the world, so to say ‘Zaphon’ was to declare the greatness of ‘El’.

But the Psalmist knew this to be false, for there is but one God—the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the One whose compassions never fail, the One in whom is found the way of life. And because this is so, there can be only one holy mountain that is beautiful in elevation, and where God resides in glory: Mount Zion.

Put yourself in the place of the the people of ancient Israel: Zion is a physical and daily reminder that Yahweh dwells among them, that he alone is their strength, and that by him all the powers of chaos are conquered. Zion is their joy, indeed, the joy of the whole earth, not because it is literally the highest (many of the mountains around Jerusalem are higher than Zion), but because God is there!

For the ancient Israelite Mount Zion was the fulcrum of the universe, the intersection of heaven and earth, whereby his presence inspires vision, transforms lives and brings redemption. Zion is a reminder of what God had done, is doing and will do. Zion is the joy of the whole earth!

### **I find your lack of faith disturbing**

Of course, not all find their joy in the Lord. Not all accept that Zion is the joy of the whole earth, or that Yahweh is the Creator, and that he alone is the true God. In verse four, we read of a ‘hostile collective’, powers gathering together to reject God and his ways...

But when God’s glory is seen, when God’s works are recounted—again we must think of the astonishing display of God’s power over the gods of Egypt and Canaan, of Exodus and Conquest—this confident collective trembles. There is panic. There is pain. There is the judgment of God. Zion is where the Tabernacle is, and within is the Ark of the Covenant, that the Levites carried before the armies of Israel bringing fear to God’s enemies. When captured by the Philistines, it only brought turmoil, so

much so that they had to return it to Israel. It was known that God was with Israel, and his historical redemptive action is proof enough that remains with them, dwelling at Mount Zion. And for some this causes dread.

Yet for those whose lives have been marked by obedience, they can see the hand of God against the assembled kings, and the redemptive power of God leads them to worship (see verses 8-11). And why worship? They recognise that it is God who makes them secure; his presence is with them. Those who truly worship see that God effects their salvation, so they meditate and ponder on the steadfast love of God. They do not gloat over the downfall or lack of faith of the assembled kings as though by their power and genius they routed them. Their eyes are fixed on the glory of God, and their response is meditation on his unfailing love, they praise him in his righteousness, and they rejoice throughout the land because of his judgments. And this history becomes the content of their witness to the following generations, that Yahweh is their God forever, and he will always be their guide.

### **But that was a long time ago...**

But how does that vision hold for us? We're not ancient Israelites. We're not Jewish. And the Temple mount today is more noted for religious violence and intolerance by those who occupy it than it is the peace and presence of God.

Does that mean that God is no longer the One from whom all blessings flow?

No, and the reason is because the ancient hope of God's presence with humanity is fully realised in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is in him that we have the never failing compassion of the Father. It is in him our salvation and joy is found. Therefore, it is reasonable that we submit and obey and serve him, that we worship him:

*'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Romans 12.2)*

*'Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the de-*

*sires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves...’ (1 Peter 1.13-15)*

We are living in dark times, when a ‘hostile collective’ gathers against God, deny his existence and who in their wickedness suppress the truth. In the face of such hostility, what options do we have?

Capitulate, knowing that ‘if we begin to grow lukewarm we will deteriorate’ (Thomas à Kempis). This was the path taken by ancient Israel. Despite God’s faithfulness, they continued in their unfaithfulness. And eventually, God’s glory departed the Temple, never to return. Will we capitulate?

Or, will we look to Mount Zion, wherein we find the steadfast love of the Lord guiding us forever? Amen.

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## **Looking Upwards** (40 mins)

### *Bible Study*

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. What spiritual practices or disciplines do you find most helpful in keeping your faith and trust in God aflame?

2. What elements in our Sunday services draw your heart closer to God in submission, obedience and service?

3. Share a Psalm that when you read it, you stop, breathe, and find yourself undone by the extraordinary grace of God.

4. Both Paul and Peter speak positively of being transformed by God (see Romans 12.2 and 1 Peter 1.13-15). Holiness is positive—it is God’s perfect intention for us. So, what are ways we can present holiness as gain rather than as loss? What do we lose, really, when we come to Christ?

5. What does the Church gain if it capitulates to the world’s demands?

6. If you are willing, share how God has demonstrated his steadfast love for you.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



## Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

**Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD**

**P** 01277 632120 **E** [Emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org](mailto:Emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org) **W** [Emmanuel-church.info](http://Emmanuel-church.info)  
**FB** [Emmanuel Church Billericay](https://www.facebook.com/EmmanuelChurchBillericay) **T** [EmmanuelCM12](https://www.facebook.com/EmmanuelCM12) **YT** [Emmanuel Church Billericay](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

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