

# The Theology of Going Up (and Down)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn back briefly to Isaiah chapter 2 this evening. We can read again at the beginning of the chapter, especially verses 2 and 3.

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills, and all the nations shall flow to it, and many people shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob.

Particularly these words, let us go up. The chapter that we read on the Lord's Day in the morning, chapter 45 of Genesis, and throughout that chapter it's quite striking how in reference to Egypt, it always says to go down to Egypt.

And in respect to Canaan, it always says to go up to Canaan. And while that may indeed have geographical significance, it also seems, and I hope from studying this evening, we'll see that it also has spiritual or theological significance.

Because while many cases in the Bible where you find the words go down and come up or go up are not really all that significant, they just mean literally what they say, in terms of geography or space or whatever else it is.

[ 1 : 36 ] But in some cases, these words undoubtedly have spiritual, theological meaning. Egypt is the opposite of Canaan in what they represent.

Canaan represents the inheritance that God has for his people. Egypt represents that which is at enmity with God, that which belongs to darkness, that which is opposite to what God has prepared as an inheritance for his people.

And therefore you can see that going down to Egypt is not just in terms of descending physically or descending geographically, downhill as it were.

It also means in terms of state, in terms of relation spiritually from one thing to another or comparing them. Egypt is regarded as low spiritually because it is at enmity with God.

It is down. Whereas Canaan is regarded as in the heights. Canaan is regarded as the inheritance God has given to his people or prepared for them to which he is committed to taking them.

[ 2 : 49 ] And of course, these were early days. In Genesis 45, Jacob was still living in Canaan but regarded it as God's inheritance through the promise that had been given to Abraham particularly respecting his seed, his descendants, that they would have this land as an inheritance.

And the New Testament, of course, makes it clear that that Canaan, geographically, was itself a spiritual type or representation of the spiritual inheritance that God has laid up for his people in glory.

And that is what Abraham himself looked forward to. It wasn't that he regarded Canaan and that literal land of Canaan as his final resting place nor did Joseph in regard to the fact that while they were going to be buried physically there they regarded it as something as a type of representation of that highest state and that highest place of heaven.

Abraham looked for a city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God. So we're looking at this idea of, if you like, the ups and the downs in regard to that spiritual theological significance of some of the places where they're used in the Bible.

For example, here in verse 3 many people shall come and say come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord. The mountain of the Lord being initially that of Zion where the temple would be situated where the people of God gathered to worship they went up to the temple they went up to Mount Zion.

[ 4 : 29 ] And the way that this is opened up for us we're not going to really go into the theology of the verse itself but this looks forward to the days of the gospel to the days when peoples would come not just Israel but peoples from the world would come and would say come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.

In other words peoples from all parts of the world not coming to literally to Jerusalem but to say the mountain of the Lord where God has established his salvation where God lives where God himself is in his salvation let's go up to that but it is upwards it's ascending from where you begin in your human life and it's ascending to where God has intended the life of his people will forever be situated.

Three things that come into it and we're going to cover quite a few texts quite a few verses just as we go through the study but three things that come into this first of all the supremacy of God himself the way that God presides above all things and when you think of the supremacy of God the Bible uses this language to teach us the height at which God is in his being in his sovereignty in his government in his will in his dealing with us as human beings he is above it is to him that we look up for example the first reference to this in the Bible is in regard to the Tower of Babel and what we're told there is that God looked down to what these people were doing at the time they were building this tower which was intended to reach up to heaven and that itself forevermore since then has stood as an emblem or a representation of human beings attempting to exalt themselves to the highest pinnacle without God or against God by leaving God out of their efforts and God of course looks down on that sees that and then we're told that God speaking as it were within himself says let us go down and confound them which led to them being scattered but you can see that above all that's happening there although it is so much opposed to God and the Lord deliberately designed to exalt man himself by his own efforts by his own ingenuity by his own creativity

God is looking down on that God presides above that and you can almost go back to the Tower of Babel when you think that somehow or other perhaps the world is looking so chaotic that it's out of control or what people suggest to you that it is in fact chaotic and nobody can properly predict where things are going to ultimately end God is looking down God is up there God is presiding in his sovereignty in his government of all things so that in looking down he himself never is without control of anything that happens in this world of human beings you go forward a bit from that to Genesis 18 and Genesis 19 which speaks about Sodom and that again is the same kind of language that's used as Sodom is brought before us as a very very wicked place the wickedness of which is rising up against God

God is again presented as looking down and coming down to deal with Sodom it is from his sovereignty it is from above all things that God looks down on these events on these doings of human beings not only in the Tower of Babel seeking to reach heaven by their own efforts but in the terrible debauchery and sinfulness of Sodom it's not happening without God's notice nor is it happening out with God's sovereignty and God's control and when you see sinfulness and ungodliness and perversity rampant in the world in which we live today remember that God is looking down he in Psalm 2 he that sits in heaven looks down and laughs laughs in the sense of putting such things to scorn and dispelling any idea that actually this is what ultimately is going to rule the world and it's not just simply him looking down but of course there's this coming down think for example of Mount

[ 9 : 46 ] Sinai where in the Old Testament one of the major emphases of God acting towards movement in movement towards us on earth it's specifically said that God came down upon Mount Sinai God came from above to reside momentarily upon Mount Sinai that was temporary that was for a short time but then you come to Jesus you come to the Son of God you come to God in his Son and then you read that he has come down from heaven that being made flesh it wasn't a temporary coming down in the sense of coming momentarily and then going back up he came down in the person of

Jesus and in one sense he has remained in that coming down in the sense that Jesus the Son of God continues to be in our nature those will see in a moment he is now exalted that's important too but God came down and there you see is again the supremacy of God the sovereignty of God the control of God in our redemption in the work of God in Christ it began up there it began in the heights God himself took the initiative as Jesus put it in that chapter in John chapter 6 verses 33 and 50 and other verses around that but specifically there this is the true bread which came down from heaven wasn't produced by human beings it wasn't invented by clever individuals who invented a religion and set a leader over themselves it came down in the person of

God's Son when he came down this is the bread which if a man eat of it he shall live forever and you find the same thing then emphasized in John 3 21 where Jesus refers to that which is from above and contrasting it with what is from beneath same in John 8 speaking to the Jews who dispute who he is and who find fault with them for suggesting that he has come from God from above them that he is even greater than their father Abraham and that's what he says to them that which is you are he says from beneath you're from the earth I am from above from the heights from God himself and of course then you go through to James passages where you find

James in chapter 1 speaking about every good and perfect gift it doesn't just say comes from God or from the father comes down from above from the father of lights the least gift if you can ever describe a gift of God as the least gift there are gifts lesser in comparison to the great gift of Christ but no gift from God is insignificant but every gift from God even the one you would regard as the smallest is from above it carries with it the supremacy and the sovereignty of God in giving it in arranging it in the purpose for why we have it it is from the height that it's come down to us and as we said it's not simply his looking down and his coming down you also find the supremacy of

God using this language in respect to our looking up and that's one of the remarkable things is that you find Jesus himself doing that remember he is God and there is great mystery in this but it's very valuable mystery and we can understand only the fringes of it but it is still a great point to note that the Son of God in our nature was one who had communion with the Father in prayer who lived in dependence upon the word of God and through the spirit of God within him and as he came to certain points like in Mark chapter 7 for example where he was setting about healing the man who was both without hearing and without speech you read there quite specifically before

[ 14 : 54 ] Jesus said Ephatha be opened that he looked up to heaven he looked to the heights to God to the source of the miracle though he had the power in himself still he was making it known that it comes actually from above which is where he himself is from and then you come to his great prayer in John 17 we mentioned that a few times in the last couple of weeks but how does he begin or how does the chapter rather begin Jesus Jesus Jesus knowing that his hour was come looking up to heaven he lifted his eyes to heaven and said father the hour has come he lifted his eyes to heaven isn't that an amazing thing that God in our nature would lift his eyes up to God that he would express through himself our need as human beings to acknowledge the height the supremacy of

God as the source of all our sustenance of all that we beg in prayer from him and our looking up follows on from the looking up of Christ himself some many times in the psalms for example just leaving it at one example psalm 123 not a psalm perhaps that we sing very often but it's a wonderful expressive psalm although it's very short psalm 123 to you I lift up my eyes o you who are enthroned in heaven you see he's mentioning his enthronement in heavens his height his supremacy his sovereignty but he's also saying to you I lift up my eyes two things going together then he says behold as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress so our eyes look to the Lord our God till he have mercy on us there's the great picture there of servants looking to their master male or female doesn't matter that's what we are that's what we are in respect to

God we are the servants we are the people who serve we are the ones who need his support where do we find it up in the heights where he is we look up to him we address our concerns upwards and that's the fault with so many human beings ourselves included naturally we're not inclined to look up we're inclined to look in on ourselves we're inclined to look downwards we're not inclined to look upwards take another example of it in Isaiah chapter 31 where you find both looking upwards and also reference to downwards Isaiah 31 at the beginning woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses who trust in chariots because they are many and horsemen because they are very strong but do not look up to the holy one of

Israel or consult the Lord two things in that verse woe to those who go down to Egypt in other words you trust in other whatever you trust in apart from God is a trusting in something that's down there something that's not going to be of much help to you instead he says of looking up to the Lord of God so there's the supremacy of God second thing that we can think of and see in the Bible with regard to this language is the Old Testament compared to the New Testament this is really just something I'm going to mention and you can follow it out yourselves the last words of the Old Testament in Hebrew the language was written in originally and the arrangement of the books in Hebrew Bibles the last book of the Old Testament is 2nd Chronicles and the last verse of 2nd Chronicles which is effectively the last verse of the

Hebrew Bible is a verse that looks upwards and looks upwards in the sense of looking forward to the New Testament age this is what it says thus says Cyrus king of Persia the Lord the God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah whoever is among you of all his people may the Lord his God be with him let him go up let him go up now that of course was initially a reference to coming back from Babylon to going up to the mountain of the Lord to rebuild the temple and Cyrus facilitating that with his decree but you have to look at the spiritual meaning of that as you look into the prophecies of Ezra and the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah and the books of

[ 20 : 14 ] Ezra and Nehemiah which we looked at not so long ago the theology of that let us go up is a theology looking forwards up to a higher level of revelation because the New Testament age brings us up higher than what they were in the Old Testament a higher privilege a higher state of privilege than the Old Testament that's why Jesus said in regard to John the Baptist that of all those born of a woman none was greater than John the Baptist nevertheless he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he would you say yourself tonight or I say of myself personally in terms of faith in terms of strength in terms of faithfulness that you were greater than John the Baptist I certainly wouldn't but am I greater than John the Baptist in terms of the light that

God has given me yes John the Baptist belonged to the Old Testament he was within the borderlands of the Old Testament as it gave way to the New and therefore he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater in that sense than he because he has access to revelation as we have in the New forerunner of Jesus had and so let us go up in that sense means prepare for he was saying the coming of something greater prepare for the coming of greater light greater privilege prepare for the coming of the Lord so that's looking forward in the sense of the way revelation developed from the Old Testament days up to the New Testament especially to the coming of Christ and the addition of New Testament scriptures there is the Old Testament saying let us go up let's prepare for the higher plane of revelation that's coming but thirdly the third thing in it is when you compare the lost and the saved or the saved and the lost especially the state of being saved against the state that we are in when we are lost remember what we said about

Egypt and Canaan as opposites and each what they represent you go down to Canaan to Egypt whereas you go up to Canaan with respect to the inheritance that God has given to his people so you see salvation is up on the heights compared to what man naturally can do for himself that is down there that is below and it is interesting too in Genesis 19 it doesn't just simply refer to in chapter 18 God through these angelic messengers that came to Abraham they looked down upon Sodom they came down to Sodom to see what was happening but we're told in Genesis 19 that Abraham looked down upon Sodom as the smoke of it rose to heaven and of course that meant that he was geographically on a hill or somewhere from which he could see downwards into the valley where Sodom was situated but there's a spiritual meaning built into that that he himself spiritually is above what's happening to Sodom he is above the judgment of God unleashed against the wicked and so are you and so are I in the

Lord Jesus Christ and by faith in him we'll see in a minute how that means we have been in him exalted above death and above judgment we don't go down we actually go up and so it has to do firstly with exaltation think of the word exaltation of course you have to go again to Christ himself in his own person because although he came down he also went up in his exaltation when his work on earth was finished remember Luke chapter 24 chapter 24 verse 51 and there's a corresponding reference in Acts chapter 1 verse 9 he led his disciples out as far as Bethany then he lifted up his hands and blessed them and while his hands were still lifted up above them just so that they could have this parting image of him as he was parted from them he was lifted up and a cloud received him out of their sight the last sight they had of him was with his hands lifted up in blessing but it was while he was being lifted up in other words they were being assured you're not going to see him physically anymore but what you see now is what's going to carry on he's going to keep blessing you but it'll be from above from his exaltation from the heights and that you can follow it out in the theology of it in the

Acts of Philippians chapter 2 verse 9 which speaks about the downwards and the upwards aspects of Christ's ministry who being in the form of God did not hold on to that or think to be grasped or did not maintain his position there but whatever translation you choose it means that instead of remaining where he was he came down he took the form of a servant and was obedient to the death of the cross wherefore God has highly exalted him on the basis of having finished the work God highly exalted him he came down to do a work but having finished the work he was exalted he was lifted up by God and that's how it is with our persons as well that's what Christ himself experienced that's the basis of our exaltation and we are exalted as

[ 26 : 41 ] Ephesians puts it very interestingly for us in our union with Christ when he went up we went up in him that's what he said he raised him from the dead and he raised us also from the dead in him and in him set us at his own right hand in heavenly places it's a verse I'm sure you know and one that is very interesting the way it's composed referring to it in Ephesians 2 and verse 6 where he says even though you were dead in our trespasses he has made us alive together with Christ in union with Christ by grace you've been said and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus and through that union with Christ we have been exalted in him even before we came to know him personally

God's people in him were exalted by virtue of their union with him that's a lot of theological depth and difficulty involved in that but nevertheless that's our union with Christ goes back to that before you come to union by faith in him in fact your union by faith in him is based on that union you already have with him in his person that's carrying us into areas we're not going to go into tonight but in our persons we are united with him and therefore lifted up in him in his exaltation but then you come to trust in him you come to your saving experience of him what happens well he delivers you from sin and from the effect of sin and how does the psalmist put that psalmist in psalm 40 for example puts it very clearly he took me out of the miry pit and from the clay from the boggy clay and set my feet in a rock he took me up he raised me up from where I was of course you'd have to really say before that if we had time that we refer to our sin against God in the beginning and Adam very rightly as our fall our coming downwards

God created us at such a height that we were perfect sinless and placed in a suitable environment for perfect human beings but when we sinned against him and we sinned you and I sinned in Adam we fell as the catechism puts it from that estate from that state in which you were created and fell into an estate of sin and misery we came down how we came down and it's God's purpose and grace to take us up again to take us out of that pit isn't that what Psalm 113 we'll sing in a minute also refers to God looking down upon those who need rescued and as he comes to lift us from the dunghill as it puts it he sets us amongst the princes of his people it's a lifting up it's a going up on our part out of sin and out of its effects and of course that means that in the final exaltation that is what we await some people will tell you that you mustn't think about heaven being up there and what

I'm sure there may be a sense in which that's true but nevertheless it is still true that what the disciples saw was Jesus being taken up what Elijah's disciples or followers saw was Elijah being taken up and there's always an upwards emphasis when you think of heaven when you think of the final state of God's people it is always upwards and the primary meaning of that of course is not geographical it's spiritual you are taken up away from all that is to do with sin with condemnation with God's wrath with God's judgment and wrath you are taken up to be with himself and that's what James and 1 Peter for example build into the way that they approach those who are suffering in this life of God's people and of the need in fact as Peter puts to humble ourselves and James to humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God for he will exalt you in due time in other words he's saying this present world is not one for exaltation it's one for hoping towards that exaltation and that exaltation will put an end to all suffering so it fits with that whole emphasis of our exaltation we're going up we've been taken up presently out of the pit of sin we have been delivered from going down to the pit of hell we are waiting for that time when we will be taken up without exaltation that's why there's such a thing as what resurrection is referred to as being raised up to meet the Lord in the air it's an upwards movement it's to a higher level of existence it's to being set above everything you've known in this life and especially above suffering and pain and death it is exaltation there is of course the corresponding side to all of that where the

Bible speaks about being exalted being raised up being taken up being lifted up out going up but also the opposite direction as Jesus said as we saw in studying Luke Luke chapter 10 the privileges Capernaum had in that sense they were lifted up they were privileged they had higher privileges than many other cities or towns you Capernaum who were lifted up to heaven in that sense you shall be cast down to hell being lost is always downwards the pit is always bottomless it is always downwards travel just as heaven is upwards and so the ups and the downs of the Bible in respect to our spiritual advantage our spiritual experience and spiritual meaning in them in the supremacy of God in the advance of revelation from Old

[ 34 : 23 ] Testament to New in the comparison between the saved and the lost let's be thankful tonight we know what it means to have been down but that we know also what it means to have been taken up and that we also know what it is to await being taken up further still to be exalted to be with Christ to be up with him and to share together in that salvation let's pray our gracious God we give thanks for the accuracy of your word and for the way that it describes for us so much that is meaningful to us spiritually even in very simple human language and we thank you Lord for all that is included in these great references to your coming down we thank you for your own supremacy and sovereignty for the way in which you preside as majesty on your throne we thank you that you came down in such a wondrous way in the person of your son that you came not only to visit us here in the world but came to lift us up out of the pit of sin we thank you for all that you tasted in the death which you died and for the resurrection that you achieved so that we might be lifted up we thank you Lord for the grace that operates in our being lifted up out of the pit of sin we give thanks to you for the hope that you place in the heart of your people that looks forward to being lifted up in exaltation for that is your own great promise to him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne even as I overcame and upset with my father in his throne granted to each of us we pray for Jesus sake amen