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*Coming to Zion*  
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The human desire for friends is probably one of life's few universals. We want to be with people like us, people who like us, and people whom we like. Being together creates familiarity and mutual acceptance. We work to support one another, care for one another, and celebrate personal successes and special times with one another. In general, we find that we enjoy our friends and so we hang out together when we can.

Often our circles of friends exist within larger networks of people organized around institutions like work, sports teams, religion, colleges or universities, or even larger networks like towns or villages, ethnic groups, social class or national citizenship.

We tend to see our social circles and networks as "people like us"; people with similar characteristics, goals and desires. In contrast, we often view people outside our social networks as different from us. These people are perceived as strange, unknown, or even dangerous. In times of social stability and calmness, the difference results in social friction or bigotry. In times of upheaval, calamity and war, smaller groups may find themselves persecuted and attacked by larger groups.

Persecuted religious groups may deal with their situation in a number of ways. They may develop eschatology, a belief that God will end their situation by sending a divine leader or a heavenly army and overturning the oppressive order. Some groups will move, immigrating to a better place. For example, Puritans came to America, while Jews went to what was then Palestine.

Both groups understood their migration in positive rather than negative terms. They were not running away; they were going to a special holy place, namely, to Zion. They were going to a land where they would shape a new life, one guided by a divine hand, and one where all like them would be welcome. It would be a new nation, a beacon shining out and bringing in God's people. The newcomers would be free from the bigotry and persecution they left behind, and would live peacefully among their religious brothers and sisters.

The Puritans had the easier time. They came in ships and then settled into communities based on the ships. In what they perceived as wilderness (overlooking those who already lived in America), they formed isolated colonies, largely free to develop on their own.

The Zionist Jews who immigrated to Palestine faced a different problem, one which became more prominent after Israel's independence in 1948. Hundreds of thousands of Jews migrated to the new nation to join fellow religionists. They gained a new identity, but not the one they sought. Once there, the human tendency to associate with friends took hold and exclusive groups developed. The new identity was no longer based on religious adherence because everyone belonged to the same religion. Instead, they were identified with their lands of origin, the places they were trying to escape.

The ironic situation developed in four primary ways.

First, in their place of origin, Jews were identified as members of their religious group to distinguish them from the people around them. The difference became the basis for varying levels of social rejection, from mere friction to outright persecution.

Second, to achieve social acceptance, some Jews migrated to Zion, to Israel.

Third, once they arrived in Zion, they were religiously like everyone else, and so their religious identity carried no distinguishing characteristics.

Lastly, since the people's distinguishing features derived from their place of origin, even though they were religiously accepted, they remained culturally set apart. Their manners of dress, their food, their native language and accents, all came from the place they sought to leave when they came to Zion. That differentiated them from others in Zion. The place they escaped became their primary identity. This can be seen clearly in Jerusalem's restaurants. One cannot go out to eat "Jewish food." Instead, one goes out to eat the foods that Jews cooked for centuries in the countries from which they came: Italian, Polish, Arabic, Greek, French, etc.

In the end, Zion has become a place of separation within unity, where people who came to be with those of their own religion were separated into enclaves made up of those who are like them, who are from the same country of origin. This is true not only for this Zion, but for other Zions as well—that is, for other religious centers to which people migrate.