

THE PILGRIMS' JOURNEY
The Songs of Ascents Introduction
Psalm 120-134

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.' Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem..." Psalm 122.1-2

OVERVIEW: The Psalms have had a rich history both for Israel and the church through the centuries since God breathed on the hearts and souls of men such as David to write these songs to encourage and prepare the hearts of God's people for worship. These specific Psalms (120-134) are unique, in that these were probably chanted by Hebrew pilgrims as they approached Jerusalem to attend one of the Old Testament's annual worship festivals.

The Psalms as individual songs (all 150) were written at various times in Israel's history, but most were clearly post-exilic (i.e. after 539 B.C.). As a collection, 116 have titles and 100 indicate an author. 73 are attributed to David, others are identified as Moses (90), Solomon (72,127), Asaph (50, 73-83), Heman (88), Ehan (89), and the group called the Sons of Korah (42, 44-49, 84-85, 87).

The Psalms are divided into five books:

Book I: 1-41

Book II: 42-72

Book III: 73-89

Book IV: 90-106

Book V: 107-150

The division of these books do have some significance. For instance:

Davidic Group I: 3-41

Sons of Korah Group I: 42-49

Davidic Group II: 51-65

Asaph Group: 73-83

Sons of Korah Group II: 84-88

Congregational Praise Group I: 95-100

Halleluyah Group: 111-117

Songs of Ascent to Jerusalem: 120-134

Davidic Group III: 138-145

Congregational Praise Group II: 146-150

The purpose of showing these groupings is to show that the Psalms (songs) are not randomly compiled or chronologically arranged, but that they show there is a definitive and purposeful in their arrangement. The evidence that the five book of Psalms were not initially compiled all at once comes from those psalm manuscripts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. They are written over a thousand-year period (1405 B.C. - 450 B.C.), from Moses to the post-exilic Israelites.

These psalms were gathered into the collections above, arranged in a work with a particular theological agenda in mind.

HISTORICAL & LITERARY BACKGROUND: What is the literary history and definition of a psalm? The English designation “psalm” comes from the Latin *Psalmi* and the Greek “psalmoi” (songs sung with musical accompaniment). The Hebrew word is “mizmor” (a song accompanied by musical instruments). The grammatical history of this form of literature dates back to the Mesopotamians and Egyptian hymns and prayers. For instance, many of the modern hymns and Christian songs today are in the form and style of secular music. The same with the Biblical psalms and secular psalms of their time. Here is an example:

“Prayer to the Moon-God”

(Excerpt from a Mesopotamian Psalm)

NOTE: “Sin” is “Nana” one of the gods of Mesopotamia of the younger generation whose name mean “lord of the earth” who mankind owed to the fertile fields.

O Sin, O Nannar, glorified one
Sin, unique one, who make bright
Who furnishes light for the people
To guide the dark-headed people aright...etc

(compare to...)

Psalm 96

“A Call to Worship the Lord the Righteous Judge”

Sing to the Lord a new song;
Sing to the Lord, all the earth
Sing to the Lord, bless His name;
Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day. Etc...

What does this mean? Though there are similarities in form and style of the literature, it has more to do with the general content. This is where the differences become more substantial. Because it shows the writer’s view of God and how He is to be worshiped. Therefore, the uniqueness of the psalms in the Bible is found in how each author, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reflect the theological distinctiveness of Israel verses the Egyptians and Mesopotamians.

WHAT ARE THE PSALMS? First and foremost, the Psalms are God’s Word to His people. They not only tell us about who He is, but they are like all Scripture, “*useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Tim. 3.16-17).

The value of the Psalms both corporately and to the individual are: (Expositors Bible Commentary: Psalms)

1. **Book of Prayers:** Teaching humans how to have communion with God through prayer.
2. **Book of Praise:** Showing the proper response of praise that the Lord deserves.
3. **Book of Liturgy:** These songs have been sung or chanted by God's people to prepare for worship, used in worship, and in service to Him.
4. **Book of Inspiration:** These songs inspire the believer with hope of God's kingdom by showing His justice, righteousness and hope of eternal bliss.
5. **Book of Faith:** These songs reflect the faith experience of God's community of faith. Revealing their frustration, impatience, anger, joy and tension between promise and alienation.
6. **Book of Community:** God addresses both the individual and community
7. **Book of Redemption:** The value of the Psalms lies in the connection between the OT and NT as it speaks to longing for the day of the redemption of the Lord. As the NT church we value reading the songs in light of the mission and work of Christ.

The message of the Psalms are divinely inspired poems or songs intended for the use in worship. The subject of the Psalms is worship. Worship is the act of offering to God what is due to Him because of who He is. In this worship, the Psalm pictures the attitude of humility and submission to God as the superior person and object of worship. In most cases, Jerusalem in the central place of worship (Israel's central sanctuary) on His holy hill (Mt. Zion) were the people worship in fear, awe, and joy the Lord their God.

The Psalms captures "**Yahweh**" as the essential being of God. His name occurs often. God is the eternally self-existent Person who becomes all that His people need (Psalm 23.1). "**Elohim**" is the second great name of God that is used in the Psalms. It is translated as "**God**" in our English Bibles. This name expresses the essential might and power of God. Strength not just in potential, but kinetic (in motion). Such is the reason the writers are often in "**awe**" of the Lord (Psalm 68). The title, "**Adonai**" (Lord in the sense of Master) does not occur frequently, but the idea it expresses is constantly present (Psalm 86). Thus, whenever a person, king, nation or race conceives of God as Yahweh, Elohim, or Adonai, the result is worship.

The attitude of worship is also captured in the Psalms. We observe people responding to the revelation of God joyfully, trustfully, and submissively. The application of this is that when believers understand that God Himself is the adequate resource for us, we should worship by rejoicing in Him alone. When we learn that God is sovereign, we should respond in worship by submitting to Him. When we appreciate God's grace in providing all we need, we should rejoice.

Submission to the sovereignty of God expresses itself in reverence and obedience in the Psalms. Reverence is the external evidence of submission to God, and obedience is the core proof of it. This means, the person (believer) will really believe that God is the ultimate authority and shows this through reverence and respect that he or she can only yield to Him. This humble worship is expressed through the action of kneeling in reverence, bowing humbling to His will throughout the Psalms. We often see that their commitment to trust often followed their frustration.

Another revelation of worship in the Psalms is seen in the activities of worship. Man does not worship because there is something intrinsic within him that must come out. Worship is always a response to something that God has done. God elicits worship. Man does not initiate it on his own. The same with salvation. God pursues us in a loving reconcilable relationship through the redemption of His Son (His Act). Man does not seek God, nor can he save himself. After God initiates worship, and man responds by worshipping, God becomes to the worshipper all that he or she needs. God is found faithful and true in His dealing with worshippers. He becomes everything for us. Everything we need when we worship Him. Thus, the activities of worship begins and ends with God. They begin with His initiation of situations in life. They end with His drawing us to Himself. In all this, we bare our souls and receive His gifts and we offer our praise.

THE PSALM OF ASCENTS: (*Psalm 120-134*)

These songs will be the focus of our study in Psalms. This group, in turn, constitutes the major part of the “Great Hallel Psalms“ (Psalms 120-136). These psalms received this title because the pilgrim Israelites sang them as they traveled from their homes all over the land and ascended up to Mt. Zion (Jerusalem) for the annual feasts.

David composed at least four of these psalms (Psalm 122, 124, 131, and 133). Solomon wrote one (Psalm 127) and the remaining are anonymous. The original intent might not have been for the pilgrims, but the pilgrims used them as songs of ascent. According to the Mishna, during the second temple period, they were incorporated into the temple liturgy.

Psalm 120: “The Prayer of a Homesick Soul.” - A burdened believer is far from his spiritual homeland and is living among ungodly people who are only for war.

Psalm 121: “Help Comes from the Lord.” - What can a believer expect from the Lord who watches over us? Simply, that He will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life.

Psalm 122: “Joy in Going to Church” (by David) - There is joy in Jerusalem as the pilgrim looks forward to his journey there because that is where the people of God worship and He is the cause of their worship.

Psalm 123: “The Gracious Help of the Lord” - The pilgrim looks to God for total dependence as a slave looks to his master for grace and kindness.

Psalm 124: “God is My Help” (by David) - The pilgrim looks to God as his only source for help.

Psalm 125: “A Song of Trust” - God does good to those who are good. Thus, we can trust in Him for He cannot be moved.

Psalm 126: “Thanking God We are Home” - The pilgrim looks back at the journey of the captivity and see that is was a prelude to blessing.

Psalm 127: “The Gift of Children” (by Solomon) - The pilgrim realizes that children are a gift of the Lord.

Psalm 128: “The Blessing of Fearing God” - The blessings of reverence towards God are celebrated.

Psalm 129: “Blessed are those who are Persecuted” - Past troubles can not add up to the blessing of peace and prosperity we have in God.

Psalm 130: “The Song of Redemption” - The man who stands and is amazed at God’s willingness to forgive understands both his own sin and the extent of God’s unfailing love.

Psalm 131: “A Childlike Faith” (by David) - David pictured faith as a young child nestled close against his mother. This contrast the attitude of the arrogance that challenges God’s word.

Psalm 132: “God’s Oath and Covenant” - The pilgrim recalls God’s covenant and promise to David that assures Israel and her destiny.

Psalm 133: “The Family of God” (by David) - Worship brings God’s people together as a family.

Psalm 134: “The of the Journey” - The pilgrim concludes his journey by giving thanks to the Lord for the privilege and joy to be a servant of the Lord.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. How do you prepare for Sunday worship?
 - What daily activity prepares you for worship?
 - What happens before church on Sunday?
 - What is your attitude when you arrive to church on Sunday?
 - Why do you come to worship and what do you offer to the Lord in worship?

2. Read through each Psalm of Ascent (120-134).
 - Give a theme for each one and the big idea of what the Psalm is saying.
 - How do they help the pilgrim to prepare to worship the Lord?

3. From the reading above, what are the Psalms and their purpose?

4. After reading these Psalms and examining your preparation for Sunday worship, what is it you need to change and how will you prepare better for worship?

PSALMS OF ASCENT
Lesson #1: “Prayer for the Homesick Pilgrim”
Psalm 120

Josh Moody in his book, “Journey to Joy” states, “I believe there is a crying need for people who believe the Bible to feel it.” This couldn’t be more true than when you read Psalm 120-134, where we feel the burdens, joys, sorrows, hopes, faith, and expectations of these writers.

BACKGROUND: Psalms 120-134 are known as the “songs of ascent.” These psalms received this title because the Israelite pilgrims sang them as they traveled from their homes all over the land and ascended Mt. Zion for the annual feasts. They were compiled for this purpose but originally these psalms had other purposes. However, the pilgrims used them as songs of ascent and, according to the Mishnah, during the second temple period they are incorporated into the temple liturgy.

For example, Psalm 120 is written by an unknown composer who asked God for protection from people who wanted to stir up war (cf. Ps. 42). This psalm has been called an individual lament that anticipates thanksgiving, yet there is not one glad note in the whole Psalm.

KEY THOUGHT: The pilgrim journey for believers begins with prayer that acknowledges total dependance on God to bring deliverance and peace from the troubles they face.

I. PRAY TO THE LORD IN TIMES OF TROUBLE (vv. 1-4)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 120.1-4*)

1. Why did the psalm writer cry out to the Lord? Why is this important for believers?
2. What kind of trouble did he experience?
3. Who is the writer speaking of in verse 3?
4. What do you suppose the implication of verse 4 is?

B. LEARN IT: The homesick pilgrim cries out to God in prayer in his time of affliction expressing his dependency on God to deliver him from the treacherous and deceitful people he lives among.

1. **Dependence on God in Prayer (v.1-2)** - *“In my trouble I cried to the Lord, and He answered me” (v.1)* - Who do you call upon when you are afflicted? Our homesick pilgrim calls out to the Lord. What was his affliction? The *“lying lips”* and *“deceitful tongue”* of his sojourners. He prays for relief and deliverance because he is distressed how his sojourners constantly lie and act treacherously towards him. Therefore, he brings his burden directly to the Lord for “deliverance.” His prayer reveals his dependency on God alone to rescue him from his afflictors. I can think of many in scripture who depended on God to save them. For example, the Israelites who cried out to God to rescue them from their bondage in Egypt (Ex.2.23), the sons of Israel in the book of Judges when they were being attacked by their enemies (Jdg 3.9; 4.3; 6.7), Daniel’s prayer on behalf of Israel in captivity (Dan. 9.15-21), and Stephen who cried out to the Lord in the book of Acts when being stoned for testifying about

Christ (Acts 7.59-60). Believers have a personal relationship with the Lord. We have assurance that He hears us when we cry to Him for help in our distress (Ps. 18.6). We can “*draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb. 4.16).

- 2. Deliverance from God through Prayer (v. 3-4) -** “*What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue?*” (v. 3) - Since the homesick pilgrim is assured that the Lord will hear his cry, he knows the Lord will “answer” him. The word “*answer*” in verse 1 speaks of “assurance” or “agreement.” The pilgrim knows the Lord has answered him because he is praying in accordance to God’s will. For example, when God’s people seek His kingdom first (Matt. 6.33) and abide in Christ and His Word (Jn. 8.31-32; 15. 7) they pray for the very thing God wants. Romans 12.1-2 is a good example of when minds are transformed to God’s standard rather than the world’s, as it states: “*...you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect*” (Roms 12.2). Here we see that the homesick pilgrim prays that God will be his avenger. God will bring on his afflictors the fulfillment of their own words. He compares their “deceitful” tongues to “*sharp arrows of the warrior, with the burning coals of the broom tree*” (v. 4). He is confident that God would punish his enemy with their own weapons, but the consequences would be far worse for them. The “broom tree” is a desert shrub that gives shade (1 Ki. 19.4) and it’s roots are used for charcoal. Thus the pilgrim is saying that God’s wrath would be compared to a fire devouring a dry broom tree. Matthew Henry states that “God’s wrath is compared to burning coals of juniper, which do not flame or crackle, like thorns under a pot, but have a vehement heat, and keep fire very long even when they seem to be gone out.”

- C. LIVE IT:** As God’s people, we can be lured into the vanity of human ways to fight fire with fire, when all along what we should be doing is turning our ears away from hearing foolish things and trusting God to fight for us. Remember, we cannot control what people do or say. We can only control how we will respond and our own actions. Therefore, the best course of action when being afflicted by others is to pray to the Lord with assurance that He will rescue you.

II. TELL THE LORD ALL ABOUT YOUR TROUBLES (vv. 5-6)

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 120.5-6)

1. Where has our writer journeyed and with whom?
2. What is the meaning and implication of the word “Woe?” (v.5) - see notes below.
3. What were his sojourners like? (v.6)
4. What sort of effect has this had on him?

- B. LEARN IT:** The homesick pilgrim is desperate. Yet, he needs to patiently endure as he waits on the Lord. He speaks honestly to God about his sin and repents of his journey with those who hate peace.

1. **Be honest by confessing your own sin to the Lord.** - *“Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech, for I dwell among the tents of Kedar!”* (v.5). The word “Woe” here actually means “foolish.” Paraphrased, our pilgrim is saying, *“How foolish have I been.”* What has he been foolish about? Dwelling with barbaric nomads who are only for war, not peace. The pilgrim is being honest with the Lord by confessing his sin like the prodigal son in Luke 15.11-32 who ran away from his people and found himself among deceitful evil doers who took advantage of him. Here we find that “Meshech” was one of seven sons of Japeth (Noah’s son). His clan produced a barbarous nation far to the north of Israel by the Black Sea in Asia Minor (cf. Gen. 10.2; Ezek. 38.2; 39.1-2). “Kedar” was the second son of Ishmael. He and his clan dwelled as nomads in northern Arabia. It was these people who periodically harassed the Israelites (Gen. 25.13; Isa. 21.16-17; Jer. 2.10; Ezek. 27.21) and now are the kind of people this homesick pilgrim lives among. Hostile barbarians and heathen liars. He now realizes how foolish and vain he has been.

2. **Be specific and seek repentance.** - *“Too long has my soul had its dwelling with those who hate peace”* (v.6) - Not only is this pilgrim dwelling among liars, they are also hostile barbarians for they *“hate peace.”* Like the words of Psalm 35.20 they are like those who *“do not speak peace, but they devise deceitful words against those who are quiet in the land.”* It seems our homesick pilgrim finally comes to his senses and repents. He does not desire to dwell with his sojourners anymore. He acknowledges that he can no longer be unequally yoked with those who do not believe in the Lord. He then confesses this and seeks repentance.

C. LIVE IT: What does the Bible say about being unequally yoked? It says, don’t do it (2 Cor. 6.14). But what does that mean? It means, don’t be bound together with unbelievers. What partnership does righteousness and lawlessness have in common? What fellowship does light have with darkness? Unbelievers have opposite world views and morals, even business decisions. This includes the most intimate relationship of all, marriage. For the relationship to work, one or the other must abandon his or her moral center and move toward that of the other. The problem with this is, it’s the believer who is often pressured to leave their Christian principles behind for the sake of the relationship. This is why being in fellowship with other believers is so crucial for Christians. This doesn’t mean we stop being a witness to unbelievers. But when it comes to being deeply involved with an unbeliever, expect the relationship to bring you hostile and difficult challenges that may even cause you to compromise your relationship with the Lord, the most important relationship of all.

III. LIVING PEACEFULLY FOR THE LORD IN THE MIDST OF TROUBLES. (v.7)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 120.7*)

1. Outside of being liars and deceitful (v.2) how else does our writer describe his sojourners? (v.7)

2. What sort of person is our writer? What influence does he try to have on his sojourners?

B. LEARN IT: Finally, the homesick pilgrim leaves his burdens behind and not only seeks the peace of God, but proclaims it.

1. **Live for the peace of God** - *"I am for peace..." (v.7a)* - The only way out for our pilgrim is to be honest about himself. Who am I? What am I for? Here, he declares that he is about "peace." The word for peace here is "shalom." It means completeness, welfare, and to be satisfied. Our pilgrim realizes that the lifestyle of those he has journeyed with did not bring peace in his life. The only one who could is the Lord. Therefore, he denounces his former way of living and those associated with it and declares that he is for "shalom," the peace of God. This is what he wants. This is what will bring contentment in his life. Not the chaotic ways of his sojourners, but the path that leads to peace and life. Therefore, he seeks to return to Jerusalem, the city of God.
2. **Proclaim the peace of God.** - *"...but when I speak, they are for war" (v.7b)* - Our pilgrim now wants to be a peacemaker and tries to reason with his sojourners but they are more intent on making war. The more he speaks of peace the more angry they become. Sometimes this is what happens when we present the gospel of peace to those who do not understand it. The Apostles preached the gospel to numerous hostile crowds who even sought to take their lives or throw them in prison for the sake of the gospel. They were not surprised by this for Jesus even warned them of this (Mat. 10.16-42; Jn. 15.18-16.4). But, there is a blessing for those who are persecuted for the sake of Christ (Mat. 5.12).

C. LIVE IT: Being at peace with God means to completely trust in all that He does and says. Being at peace with God means to be like David who writes, *"the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" (Ps. 23.1)*. It means to let His peace rule in our hearts (Col. 3.15). It means to live at peace with all people (Rom. 12.18). It also means that even though we may not fully comprehend all the ways of the Lord, we need to continue to trust in Him (Phil 4.7). Finally, it means not to be anxious about anything, but through prayer, giving thanks, and proclaiming the gospel to others, letting God's peace guard our ways (Phil. 4.7). Being at peace with God also means fulfilling His command in making disciples by proclaiming the truth of His gospel to others. The only way for any person to be fully at peace with the Lord is to come to Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 5.1).

CONCLUSION: Every believer is a pilgrim in this world. The Bible is very clear that this world is not our final destination. It tells us clearly how we are to live our lives until we are called home to heaven to be with Christ Jesus our Lord. 1 Peter 2.11-12 states:

"Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which

they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

Like the homesick pilgrim in Psalm 120, Peter expects that we will come across others in this world who live evil lives and will attempt to slander and accuse us falsely of things we do or say. He urges all believers that even though we may face persecution, it should be because of our excellent behavior, not because of evil.

All believers live in a glass house that allows the world to view our lives so that they may see Christ living in us and that Christ may be glorified. To accomplish this our study teaches us these important applications:

1. Be dependent on God through prayer.
2. Be patient as you endure affliction.
3. Be steadfast in the Lord. Trust God to fight for you.
4. Be equally yoked to believers not bound to unbelievers.
5. Be responsible for your own sin through confession and repentance.
6. Be a peacemaker by being and proclaiming the peace of God through Christ.
7. Be excellent in your behavior. Only be accused for good deeds not evil ones.

These principles should help any homesick pilgrim who longs for heaven as their home to be with Christ for all eternity.

A PSALTER
on
Psalm 120

In my distress to God I cried,
And He gave ear to me.
From lying lips, and guileful tongue,
O Lord, my soul set free.

What shall be giv'n thee? or what shall
be done to thee, false tongue?
Ev'n burning coals of juniper,
sharp arrows of the strong.

Woe's me that I in Mesech am
a sojourner so long;
That I in tabernacles dwell
to Kedar that belong.

My soul with him that hateth peace
hath long a dweller been.
I am for peace; but when I speak,
for battle they are keen.

(Sung to Common Meter 8.6.8.6)
or
"Alas! and did my Savior Bleed"

PSALMS OF ASCENT
Lesson #2: “Where Does Our Help Come From”
Psalm 121

INTRO: One of the mistakes while traveling is not being willing to ask for directions or help. There have been many intensive negotiations between couples on trips, mainly because, the husband will not stop and ask for directions. Fortunately, we now have the technology to type in an address in our smart phones and the GPS will not only show the route of your destination, it will actually speak the directions to you. I suspect this device has contributed to the peace that now resides in many automobiles that are moving towards a destination. Similarly, we learn here in our study of Psalm 12 that the pilgrim looks to the Lord as his ultimate source for help as he can see in the distance the hills of Zion, the place that the Lord, the creator of the heavens and the earth, loves more than *“all the other dwelling places of Jacob”* (Ps. 87.2).

BACKGROUND: As a reminder, the Psalms of Ascent were traveling Psalms for the worshipping Israelite on his pilgrimage toward God as they went up to Jerusalem for the three festivals. Deuteronomy 16.16 reminds us that each male was instructed by God to attend the festivals of unleavened bread, of harvest, and the festival of shelters. The compilation of Psalms 120-134 probably existed as early as the exilic period with the design to help the pilgrim journey closer in their relationship to God and to avoid the many pitfalls, difficulties, diversions, and distractions that can prevent one from continuing in their walk to worship the Lord.

KEY THOUGHT: This psalm directs the thoughts of the pilgrim to God as his source of help (c.f. Ps. 23). It gives assurance that Israel’s Keeper will maintain vigilant oversight to protect His people.

I. THE SOURCE OF HELP (vv. 1-2)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 121.1-2*)

1. Where does the pilgrim look for help? (vv. 1-2)
2. Which mountains do you suppose this pilgrim is referring to? (Psalm 87.1-2)
3. Who ultimately made those mountains and is this source of the pilgrim’s help? (Psalm 123.1; Isa. 40.26; Ps. 124.8)

B. LEARN IT: This psalm begin by directing the pilgrim to God as his source of help.

1. ***The initial need for help? (v.1)*** - *“I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from whence shall my help come?”* - This pilgrim had every reason to look for assistance for his journey to Jerusalem. There is always risk in traveling. Even today there are the risks of weather, mechanical failure, terrorists, health, thieves, and etc. This pilgrim takes the initial step as he looks up to the hills towards Jerusalem and proposes the important question, who is going to help me safely journey to my destination. Here are some things below to think about as to why our pilgrim had concern for his journey.

a) *The Road:*

The journey to Jerusalem is not by all means a safe journey. No matter the genesis of the pilgrim's journey, what lies before him are certain obstacles and present dangers. Before the Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D. Jewish pilgrims would make their way to Jerusalem for the festivals (Ex. 34.22-23; Dt. 16.16). There were different types of roads to take. The "Walking Road" that were stone roads on which ancient Jews would make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. There was also the "Imperial Highways" planned out by the Roman Empire that linked major urban areas and military bases, supporting commercial activities and the communication and transportation of supplies. There were also the "Agricultural Roads" that connected settlements with their fields. Then finally the "rural roads" which included nearby sites such as springs. One other type of ancient road was the upward pass at Beit Horon, about 10 miles northwest of Jerusalem. This road was comprised of curved rock cut steps measuring over five feet wide. These carved stone steps are found throughout what was the Roman Judea-Palestine. The Beit Horon ascent was used by the ancient Jew who made their way to the Temple in Jerusalem. This road was not made by the Romans. (Biblical Archaeology Society.org, 1.18.16)

b) *The Journey:*

The average daily traveler covered about 18 miles a day. The book of Acts recorded Peter walking 40 miles from Joppa to Caesarea in two days. Jesus, assuming he went from Nazareth to Jerusalem annually for the three required feasts, His journey would have been 75 miles each way using the shortest route through Samaria, or 106 miles each way by the way of Jericho which most Jews would have taken. It would have taken 5 to 6 days to make the journey to Jerusalem.

There were certainly dangers and hardships that the pilgrims risked. Attacks by wild beasts (i.e. lions and bears [1 Sam. 17.36; 2 Ki. 2.23-25]) remained a threat until the end of the nineteenth century, especially along the Jordan Valley. The greatest threat were the attacks by bandits along lonely stretches, as described in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10.25-37). The attacks were often politically motivated, and the Roman penalty for such acts was crucifixion (i.e. Barabbas [Mat. 27.15-26; Mk. 15.6-15; Lk. 23.18-24; Jn. 18.40]).

c) *Lodging:*

For the Jews, hospitality to travelers was a necessity. The climate made necessary the giving of water, food, and protection as God commanded. Abraham was a model host and considered him the founder of inns for travelers. One Rabbi described Jerusalem as a city where "no man ever said to his fellow, 'I haven't found a bed to sleep on in Jerusalem.'" No payment was required for beds and coverings (i.e. Jesus and His disciples used a furnished upper room for the passover meal [Lk. 22.7-12]). - (Christianity Today, Marilyn Hargis, Issue 59)

- d) ***The Quest and Question:*** Thus as the pilgrim sets out on his journey what shall he put his confidence in? Is it in the hills, the roads, the lodging, great men or princes? His question is more rhetorical than an anxious plea. He already knows the answer, but is drawing you into his pilgrimage to remind his readers that there is only one true source of help and it lies beyond the hills. The only true source of help comes from the Lord (v.2).
2. ***The proclamation of help (v.2)*** - “*My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.*” - The pilgrim reminds us (and himself) that his help was the God who made those hills, along with the whole heaven and earth (cf. 124.8). This was the God he was traveling to worship at the temple on Mt. Zion.
- a) ***The answer of faith:***
There is no question or hesitation in the voice of our pilgrim. His “*help comes from the Lord (Yahweh).*” He looks beyond the hills and they are lifted up to the Creator of those hills. He looks to the only God who stands before, outside, and within His creation. To place his life in the help of the Lord is a matter of trust and faith. Later he will give examples of assurances of this help.
- b) ***The statement of faith:***
Why is he assured that the Lord (Yahweh) is his help? His assurance is in his statement of faith. He acknowledges that the Lord is the Creator of “*heaven and earth.*” He places his trust by faith that if the Lord is able to create the hills and command the stars in space, who orders the planets to orbit around the sun, then this God can help him in his journey. Warren Wiersby states that “Everything in the heavens and on earth bears witness to the great Creator who is also our heavenly Father, so why should we fear? (Ps. 33.3; 89.11-13; 96.4-5; 104.2-9; 115.15; 134.3; 136.4-9). Ultimately, this statement of faith is trusting in the One who sovereignly reigns over all creation. When the pilgrims journeyed and their eyes could see Jerusalem on the mountains, they knew this was by God’s testimony, where He dwelt in His sanctuary and provided they help the pilgrims needed (Ps. 3.4; 20.2; 46.1; 1Ki. 8.29-53).

C. **LIVE IT:** What is the source of your help? Who or what do you place your confidence in when it comes to life decisions, crisis of faith and the provision of daily living. What happens when you face the forks in the roads of life when you do not know which way to go? This pilgrim reminds us that the only true source of our help comes from the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth. He and His Word is your spiritual compass.

II. THE ASSURANCE OF HELP (vv. 3-4)

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 121.3-4)

1. What assurances does the pilgrim give that the Lord will help him?
2. What does the pilgrim mean by “*He who keeps you*”?
3. What is the implication that the Lord neither slumbers or sleep?

B. LEARN IT: The pilgrim now gives specific examples of assurances in how the Lord is his constant and vigilant helper.

1. ***The assurance of stability (v. 3a)*** - *“He will not allow your foot to slip”* - The word for “slip” means to “totter” or “shake.” If you have done any significant hiking, you know the importance of sure footing. How easy it is to roll an ankle, break a bone while walking on uneven, rocky paths. Here, the pilgrim is assured by faith that the Lord will guard his steps. This psalm shows that the Lord is concerned about the path we walk in life. Proverbs 2.8 states: *“Guarding the paths of justice, and He preserves the way of His godly ones”* (Pr. 3.21, 23, 25-26).
2. ***The assurance of protection (v. 3b)*** - *“He who keeps you will not slumber”* - The word “keeps” means to “keep watch” or “preserves.” The pilgrim uses it three times in this Psalm (vv. 3,4,5). It is first used in Gen. 2.15 where the Lord put Adam in the garden to “keep it.” It means to be watchful and take good care of it. The Lord promised Jacob that He would keep Jacob and became the father of twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 28.15; 48.15-16). This pilgrim would have also known about the promise of God in Psalm 34.15, *“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry.”* We as pilgrims of faith know that if the Lord is with us, who can be against us (Rom. 8.31). We have assurance today that the Lord will never leave nor forsake those who trust in His only Son for salvation (Deut. 31.6; Heb. 13.5)
3. ***The assurance of vigilant counsel (v.4)*** - *“Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”* - God’s vigilant watch over the pilgrim assures him that even when they journey after dark, God would never stop watching out for His worshippers. The Lord on His watch never gets drowsy or falls asleep. He being the Good Shepherd will keep watch over His sheep and will not allow the thief to come to kill, steal, or destroy His own (Jn. 10.1-21) for we have His promise that He will lead us in the way which we should go and will give us counsel with His eye always upon us (Ps. 32.8).

C. LIVE IT: There is never a reason for a child of God to be anxious for anything. The Lord is always awake. He is always faithful to His covenant. He knows our every moment, step and need. We can pray to Him at anytime, even at midnight. When your thoughts betray you and you take on the burden and worries of this life and are awoken at 3 a.m., God is awake. He is there, keeping watch over your soul. Jesus reminds us that there is nothing to gain by living in fear and by being anxious when He states: *“For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life...and which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life span?...do not be anxious then, saying, “What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or With what shall we clothe ourselves?”* (Matt. 6.25-31).

III. THE EXAMPLES OF HELP (vv. 5-8)

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 121.5-8)

1. List the ways the pilgrim states how the Lord helps him on his journey (vv. 5-8).
2. Which examples are physical, spiritual, and eternal?

3. What then is the overall implication of these verses when it comes to the assurance of God's help?

B. LEARN IT: The pilgrim now provide specific examples how the Lord protects him on his journey both physically and spiritually.

1. **Protection from hostile influences (vv. 5-6)** - *“The Lord is your keeper; The Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not smite you by day, nor the moon by night.”* - The pilgrim shows us that Yahweh will guard His people as an animal keeper protects his livestock. He will, like the Good Shepherd, protect them from hostile influences like that of the blazing Palestinian sun. The Lord will not allow danger to overtake His own by day or by night because He cast a shadow of His protection over them.
2. **Protection from all evil (v. 7)** - *“The Lord will protect you from all evil”* - The Lord not only protect us from physical evil, but personal evil. It's evil of every kind. Psalm 91.10-11 gives us this assurance, *“No evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your tent.”* Why? Or perhaps How? *“For He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard (watch, keep, protect) you in all your ways.”* This reveals the unique and personal relationship we have with the Lord. The Lord is intimately concern for our welfare that He would take such an interest in our coming and going to protect us from all evil. The world is an evil and sinful place. You and I are probably not aware of all the dangers the Lord has spared us from. Yes, from time to time we experience the evil in this world. But, I would say that for every evil that we may encounter that the Lord allows us to experience, there are multitudes of evils daily that we are protected and guarded from by Him and His angels.
3. **Protection for all eternity (v.8)** - *“The Lord will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore”* - Finally, the Lord promises to protect this pilgrim's going and coming. Not only today, but for all eternity. This involves present and future cares, including one's eternal soul. This is the peace and assurance that every believer should have. To know as we journey through this life we can walk in the peace of God, knowing that His rod and staff are there to protect and guard us. Even to dwell with Him for all eternity (Ps. 23).

C. LIVE IT: Does this mean that a believer will never experience sunstroke or fall into the hands of bandit? Any pilgrim must understand that everything that invades our lives is under God's watchful care and providence. The spirit of this psalm is to evoke trust in the Lord, the Keeper of the pilgrim. This psalm is a comforting reminder of God's continual protection from harm and danger of all kinds. It is especially appropriate for travelers to remind themselves of His watch-care. But most importantly, the Lord is the watch-care over our souls. Anyone who places their trust in His sovereign care has this great assurance that there is nothing in universe that can ever separate us from His love. For we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus (Roms. 8).

CONCLUSION: What does this mean for us? To avoid the common pitfalls that often comes on spiritual journeys, we must be willing to ask the Lord for help. I just met with a gentleman this week who I have been counseling. His sin was pornography. While he has had some victory by not engaging in this sinful habit, he did fall off the wagon just recently. I had instructed him that if at anytime he felt tempted to give me or another advocate a call. Though he confessed his sin to us and he also confessed that if he had done as I had said, he more likely would not have sinned.

The reason we do not experience the protection of the Lord at times is because we do not ask for help. This was the Apostle Paul's point when he wrote: *"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure"* (1 Cor. 10.12-13).

So, what about you? What are you going to do when you need help? I pray you will do as this pilgrim did, seek the Lord who made the heavens and the earth.

A PSALTER**on****Psalm 121*****C.M. (O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing)***

- 1. I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
from whence doth come mine aid.*
- 2. My safety cometh from the Lord,
who heav'n and earth hath made.*
- 3. Thy foot he'll not let slide, nor will
he slumber that thee keeps.*
- 4. Behold, he that keeps Israel,
he slumbers not, nor sleeps.*
- 5. The Lord thee keeps, the Lord they shade
on thy right hand doth stay;*
- 6. The moon by night thee shall not smite,
nor yet the sun by day.*
- 7. The Lord shall keep thy soul; he shall
preserve thee from all ill;*
- 8. Henceforth thy going out and in
God keep for ever will.*

PSALMS OF ASCENT
Lesson #3: “The Pilgrim’s Delight to Worship in Jerusalem”
Psalm 122

INTRO: The writer of Psalm 42 recalls how he used to go out with the people to lead the procession to the house of God. Read along as he shares this memory:

“These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God, with the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival. - Psalm 42.4

Notice then as he questions himself about his soul’s condition and then offers himself counsel for his lamenting spirit :

“Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? HOPE in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.” Psalm 42.5

BACKGROUND: Psalm 122 is the third psalm in the collection of the Psalms of Ascent. By genre, it is also a Song of Zion (Ps. 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 132). This genre, like the royal psalms, celebrate the glories associated with Jerusalem, that is the city itself, its’ kingship and temple. This psalm is also the first of four written by David in the Psalms of Ascent collection (Ps. 124, 131, 133). Some scholars deny David’s authorship and move Psalm 122 to the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. This move seems contradictory to the Psalm because David’s dynasty did not exist in post-exilic days. Psalm 122 speaks of David’s delight in going up to the temple (house of God) to worship God in Zion. This phrase could be used for the tabernacle (1 Sam. 1.7, 24; 2 Sam. 12.20) for the temple had not been built during David’s reign, but during Solomon’s reign. David exhorts the Israelites to pray for the security of Jerusalem so that this blessing might continue. This peaceful state would glorify God as well benefit His people.

A type of context for this psalm could be when David captured Jerusalem and made it the capital of Israel. Jerusalem became the focus of the political and religious life of God’s people. Another context could be when David brings the Ark of God into Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 13 and 2 Samuel 6).

Before that event, Israel was divided. There were two kings (Saul and David), two high priests (Abiathar at Hebron and Zadok at Gibeon). When David became Israel’s only king and captured Jerusalem, he brought the nation together as Jerusalem became the required central place of worship, the two priesthoods came together and the ark of God was moved into the nation’s capital. 2 Samuel 6 records this as one of David’s most important action in bringing the whole nation of Israel together something that did not exist during the post exilic days beginning with Jeroboam (1 Ki. 12.25-33).

KEY THOUGHT: Thus we understand that it is the pilgrim’s pleasure and privilege to worship the Lord in Jerusalem. There is no greater pleasure or place as worshippers pray for security and the well being of God’s people.

I. THE PILGRIM'S PLEASURE & PRIVILEGE (vv. 1-2)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 122.1-2*)

1. What was David happy about?
2. Why would this bring him joy? For instance, where would their feet be standing?

B. LEARN IT:

David relates how happy he felt when it was time to worship God at the sanctuary in Jerusalem. For any pilgrim, it was a privilege to stand within the gates of the city that God had chosen as the place where He would meet His people.

I remembered the excitement and joy when our new worship center was completed at the church where I currently serve as a pastor. Myself and others could not wait to worship the Lord and fellowship with one another in Christ there. I get a sense of the same enthusiasm by David. I imagine that when the tent of tabernacles had been finally set up in Jerusalem and the ark placed in it, David went and worshipped the Lord frequently for his love for God's house was well known (Ps. 27.4; 65.4; 2 Sam. 7.1-3).

The pilgrim who made his way to Jerusalem three times a year for the annual feasts was not an easy thing. We may travel far as 10 miles today in a car to any place of worship. Our only obstacles are traffic and parking. It took the ancient pilgrim days to make his journey to Jerusalem via difficult terrain, weather, hazards such as bandits and beasts, even their health was a great concern. Still, with all these obstacles, the pilgrim took pleasure in his journey. He does not complain because his heart is set on the Lord, His city and temple. This is not only the pilgrim's joy, but his privilege. David also tells us that it is a privilege to have ones feet standing within the gates of Jerusalem. This would be like Moses' privilege before the Lord on Mt. Sinai as his feet were standing on holy ground (Ex. 3.5).

C. LIVE IT:

1. Is it a pleasure for you to go and worship with fellow Christians?
2. Is it expressed by your determination and dedication?
3. Take some time to observe your heart's desire to worship the Lord. Is it pleasurable or painful?

II. THE PILGRIM'S PRAISE (vv. 3-5)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 122.3-5*)

1. How does David describe Jerusalem?
2. Why are the tribes of Israel instructed to go to Jerusalem?
3. Besides worship, what else takes place in Jerusalem and where?

B. LEARN IT:

God had blessed Jerusalem by giving it a large compact population. He appointed it as the center of national life and worship to which people from all the tribes of Israel resorted for festive occasions. They also traveled there for judicial verdicts from the righteous king, whom God had provided for His people (cf. 1 Ki. 3.16-28; 2 Sam. 15.2).

Jerusalem was the place where the Lord chose to establish His name (Deut. 16.2; 2 Chron. 6.6) and where He instructs all the males to gather as a testimony to observe and remember through feast and festivals how the Lord brought them out of bondage and slavery from Egypt (Deut. 16.16). It was on Mt. Moriah where the Lord directed David to build an altar and gave him the plans to build the temple (1 Chron. 28). The history of the city had been a Jebusite stronghold before it became “the city of David” (2 Sam. 5.6-10). When David looks at the city and its’ location he thinks of unity and security. The words “*compact together*” means “*joined together*” or an “*alliance.*” Meaning this, that just as the walls and houses were compactly joined together, so were the people bound together in their worship of the Lord and respect for the throne.

The church today is bound together by the Holy Spirit in the unity of Christ (Eph. 4.1-6). Just as it was important for the ancient Hebrews in Jerusalem to be “*compact together*” in “holy alliance,” in like manner the church must maintain and demonstrate unity before the world who watches our every move (Jn. 17.20-23). Just as Jerusalem served as a place of security from evil forces, the church today is promised by Christ that the very forces of hell will not stand up against His bride (Matt. 16.18).

Because of this, David instructs the pilgriming worshippers to give thanks to the Lord for all He has done and give their allegiance to the throne of David for it was the Lord who ordained the feasts and who also established the throne (vv. 4-5).

The Lord deserves our praise and thanks for the system of governments so we can live dignified lives (Rom. 13). So then, just as we should respect the house of God, there should also be respectful prayer for those placed in authority over us by the Lord. Therefore it is our civic and Christian duty to pray for those in authority regardless of your political view or beliefs (1 Tim. 2.1-6).

C. LIVE IT:

1. How thankful are you for your church and the city you live in?
2. How faithful to the Lord are you in observing the ordinances of the Lord? For instance, have you been baptized as a believer as the Lord commanded (Matt. 28.19-20; Mk. 16.16; Acts 2.38)? Do you observe the Lord’s Supper in a proper fashion (1 Cor. 11.17-34)?
3. When was the last time you prayed for political leaders instead of complaining about them (1 Tim. 2.1-3). Here are five ways to pray for those in authority over us:
 - a) For their health and safety (Ezra 6.10).
 - b) For executing justice (Rom. 13.3-4; 1 Pet. 2.14).
 - c) That they may follow the Lord’s ways and repent when they don’t (2 Chron. 33.1-20).
 - d) They may govern with wisdom for the “welfare of the city” (Jer. 29.7).
 - e) That God would accomplish His purposes through them regardless their willingness to be used by Him (Prov. 21.1).

III. THE PILGRIM'S PRAYER (vv. 6-9)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 122.6-9*)

1. What exhortation does David give to his readers concerning Jerusalem?
2. What does David pray for those who live in Jerusalem?
3. What should the pilgrim worshiper be seeking as they come to worship the Lord? (v. 9) What do you suppose he means by "seek your good?"

B. LEARN IT:

Speaking of prayer, David now calls on the Israelites to ask God to maintain Jerusalem in peace. They were to pray for God's prosperity on all who wanted to preserve Jerusalem as the important center it was. They should also pray for the peace and prosperity of all who lived in the city. David himself prayed for the populace. He sought for the welfare of Jerusalem chiefly because the house of Yahweh stood within its' walls. The name "Jerusalem" it self means "foundation of peace." Oddly enough, Jerusalem has been a center of conflict for many generations and centuries. The peace that David seeks for Jerusalem will not take place until the Prince of Peace takes His place on His throne in Jerusalem as prophesied according to the Scriptures (Matt. 25.31-46).

David's instruction to pray comes with a double blessing for those who pray for Jerusalem's peace. The meaning of "peace" in verse 6 means "security" and "well-being." Thus, the first blessing is "prosperity" (which actually means, [to be secure]). This is for those who live or long for Jerusalem. The second blessing is for the city itself. That there would be "peace within your walls." Again, the prospect of security, not only within the walls, but for the "palaces" too (v.7). David places all of Jerusalem inhabitants, relatives, pilgrims, neighbors and more, collectively in this prayer and blessing. Not for his sake, but for theirs (v.8).

Finally, David gives us the reason why we should be praying for the peace of Jerusalem, "*for the sake of the house of the Lord our God*" (v.9). There could have been many reasons why David could have requested for prayer for the city. But his motivation is to "seek your good" (v.9b).

God's house dwells in Jerusalem. It is for it's good that David commands us to pray. Like incense rising from Mt. Moriah, so do the prayers of the saints of God rise before His throne. This is the peace and the strength of Jerusalem's God and His temple. Today all three temples (Solomon's, Post-exilic, and Herod's) are gone and lie in ruins buried under the Dome of the Rock, the great Muslim mosque which ornately dominates the Jerusalem skyline. Many Jews weep at the wailing wall over their sins. Jerusalem knows very little peace today as Jews, Muslims and Christians alike dispute over land and shrines.

C. LIVE IT:

This should not discourage today's weary pilgrim. Scripture records that even Jesus prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple because she rejected Him as her Messiah (Mk. 13.1ff). This took place in history by the Romans in A.D. 70.

We should also remember that Christians today are God's dwelling place, His temple (1 Cor. 6.19). Instead of choosing to dwell in a building of stone, the Lord chooses to live in us. As such, we are being built up into a living temple in the Lord (Eph. 2.19-22). Finally, as pilgrims in this world, we can look forward to the future with hope because when this world is no more, and the New Jerusalem is revealed on the new earth, it will be the center of the presence and worship of God (Rev. 21.2).

This prayer by pilgrims today is to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and the security that is to come when Jesus returns and establishes His reign. Then the redeemed of the Lord will bow in complete unity worshiping and serving the Lord before all His glory.

CONCLUSION:

The peace of Jerusalem for you today begins with inviting Christ Jesus as Lord to reign and dwell within you as you humbly submit yourself to Him as God and King of your life. As God's pilgrims we have been "*justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Rom. 5.1).

To know peace is to know the Prince of Peace. This is the pilgrims pleasure, privilege, praise and prayer. "May peace be within you" (v.8) as David stated. May you rest securely in the blessed gates of the New Jerusalem, the blessed city of God.

A PSALTER: Psalm 122
C.M. (Alas and did my Savior Bleed)

- (1). I joy'd when to the house of God,
 Go up, they said to me.
- (2). Jerusalem, within thy gates
 our feet shall standing be.
- (3). Jerus'lem, as a city, is
 compactly built together:
- (4). Unto that place the tribes go up,
 the tribes of God go thither:
- To Isr'el's testimony, there
 to God's name thanks to pay.
- (5). For thrones of judgment, ev'n the thrones
 of David's house, there stay.
- (6). Pray that Jerusalem may have
 peace and felicity:
 Let them that love thee and they peace
 have still prosperity.
- (7). Therefore I wish that peace may still
 within they walls remain,
 And ever may thy palaces
 prosperity retain.
- (8). Now, for my friends' and brethren's sakes,
 Peace be in thee, I'll say.
- (9). And for the house of God our Lord,
 I'll seek thy good alway.

PSALMS OF ASCENT
Lesson #4: “The Pilgrim’s Petition for Help”
Psalm 123

INTRO: Have you been ridiculed for your faith? What about being mocked or laughed at for being a Christian? Christian pilgrims are like salmon swimming upstream against the current. Many of God’s pilgrims experience ridicule and persecution even today. Consider these facts:

- Each month 322 Christians are killed
- 214 churches and their properties are destroyed
- 722 forms of violence are committed against Christians (i.e. beatings, abductions, rapes, arrests, and forced marriages).
- According to The Pew Research Center over 75% of the world’s population live in areas with severe religious restrictions.
- The US Department of State tells us that Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from their governments or surrounding neighbors simply because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

What then are Christians to do when they are being ridicule and persecuted for their faith in Christ? The writer of this psalm reminds us to humble ourselves before the Lord. Look up to Him in prayer as our only source for help and mercy. Wait patiently as we volunteer our service to Him for His glory and His kingdom.

BACKGROUND: The composer of this fourth psalm of ascent voices his dependence on the Lord by recognizing his humble posture that God is enthroned in the heavens and he is His servant below on the earth. In this humble posture the pilgrim then petitions the Lord for grace, since Israel’s enemies ridicule her for her trust in Yahweh. This psalm is a combination of individual and community lament.

KEY THOUGHT: The humility of the pilgrim is in recognizing their posture before the Lord as they petition Him for help and grace.

I. THE PILGRIM’S POSTURE (vv. 1-2)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 123.1-2*)

1. What sort of view does the psalm writer have of God?
2. What comparison does he make between man and God?
3. What does the psalm writer want from the Lord?

B. LEARN IT:

The writer looks up to the Sovereign of the universe and prayed for Him to send deliverance from His heavenly throne. He takes a humble posture in making this request by comparing himself to a servant who waits on his master to act. This begins by having a high view of God.

1. ***The pilgrim’s high view of God (v.1)*** - “*To You I lift up my eyes...*” - This is the second of two psalms of ascent that speak of the writer lifting his eyes up to the Lord

(Ps. 121.1). Both psalms have a high view of God as they focus their attention on God being “enthroned in the heavens” (v.1). Three times in the first two verses the writer uses the imagery of looking “to the Lord.”

Where does he look? He looks heaven where God and His throne is. This speaks not only of God’s abode (His throne), but also His high position over man and His creation. He is enthroned in His holy temple testing the sons of men (cf. Ps. 11.4). Even though God’s presence dwelled in the temple in Jerusalem, the writer makes it clear that the Lord is not confined there. He is omnipresent. God is always everywhere, yet separate from His creation (Gen. 1; 1 Ki. 8.27; Ps. 139.7-12; Heb. 4.13). This is distinctively different than those who believe in pantheism, which teaches that god is everything, and that god and the material world are one and the same. Knowing that God is omnipresent brings comfort to those who know Him because He is present with them always in their time of need. But for those who are trying to hide from God, this brings great concern (cf. Gen. 3.8; Ps. 139.1-2; Rev. 6.15-17).

2. ***The pilgrim’s low view of man (v.2a)*** - “Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master...” - Since our writer has such a high view of God, how does he see himself? As a “servant” (v.2). The word “ebed (abad)” means to work. It is used 300 times in the Old Testament and can mean “working or dressing the vines” or to indicate putting someone to work, even enslaving someone just as Laban did with Jacob (Gen. 29.15) or Pharaoh did with the Israelites (Ex. 1.14). Here, this writer submits himself to the Lord voluntarily as His bond servant. The New Testament version of this is “doulos” which means one who is subservient and at the disposal of his master. Simply put, a slave. In Roman times, the term bondservant or slave could refer to someone who voluntarily served others. But it is usually referred to one who is held in a permanent position of servitude. Slaves under Roman law had no rights and were the owner’s personal property. Just as this psalm writer submitted himself as God’s servant, we too must submit to Christ as His bond-servant who are devoted to Christ (1 Cor. 7.22; Eph. 6.6; 2 Tim. 2.24).
3. ***The pilgrim’s long suffering (v. 2b)*** - “until He is gracious to us” - Some translation translate the word “gracious” as “mercy.” Both have the same meaning. But what’s important here is that the prayer of the psalm writer is continual. His prayer goes up until the mercy or grace comes down. This means we are to pray in faith, expecting God to act, like Jacob did, not letting go until the Lord blessed him. This writer expects God’s grace and the foundation of this grace is upon the covenant treaty that God made with His people.

C. LIVE IT:

1. It does not take a lot of effort to look up. It’s just the simple movement of your eyes. From looking down to looking up. Psalm 42.5 reminds us, “*why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.*” Here we see a great example of one who was downcast. His eyes and countenance looking down to the ground. You have

probably heard the expression, “chin up!” When we find ourselves in this journey in life traveling with our face and eyes looking down, watch out! You might injure yourself. Look Up! Behold, our God is on His throne and has promise to give you grace and mercy in time of need!

2. Being a bondservant of Christ is not drudgery. His “burden is light” (Matt. 11.30). There is also a promise in being servants of Christ, “*Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life*” (Rom. 6.22).

II. THE PILGRIM’S PETITION (vv. 3-4)

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 123.3-4)

1. What is the psalm writer’s petition?
2. Why is he making this petition?
3. What are others doing to the psalm writer and how does this make him feel?

B. LEARN IT:

The Israelites needed more grace because their pagan neighbors, who were leading comfortable lives, were ridiculing them for their trust in Yahweh.

1. ***The pilgrim’s plea (v. 3)*** - “*Be gracious to us, O Lord, be gracious to us, for we are greatly filled with contempt*” - Have you ever been fully and completely made fun of. The subject of office jokes. The laughing stock at school. This is how our pilgrim, the psalm writer feels. Actually, he is not only speaking for himself, but for his peers. When Israel returned to Palestine after 70 years in Babylonian exile, only about 50,000 returned to rebuild Jerusalem, it’s walls, and temple. This was not easy because the nations around them did not want this. They did not want the Israelites back in Palestine. They were hated by the gentiles and endured much contempt (Neh. 2.19; 4.1-4, 7ff; Lam. 3.15, 30). The word “contempt (buz)” means “laughing stock or despised.” God chooses the despised things of this world to accomplish His will (1 Cor. 1.28). Even His only Son who purchased our salvation was “*despised and rejected of men*” (Isa. 53.3). The Psalm writer makes his plea to the Lord for grace and mercy from those who are laughing and mocking them for returning to Jerusalem. This need for “mercy” comes from a deep awareness that injustice is being done to God’s children.
2. ***The pilgrim’s endurance (v.4)*** - “*Our soul is greatly filled with the scoffing of those who are at ease*” - Often, our ridicule comes from those who are prideful. They are full of themselves. The ones “who are at ease” where the wealthy in the land. Sitting back and laughing at the Israelites as they attempt to rebuild Jerusalem. During times like these God’s people must wait on the Lord and His promises as they endure hardships for being faithful. One day the promises of God will come true and we enjoy the benefits of serving the Lord in heaven for all eternity, but for those who mocked His children and rejected Christ as Savior will experience “weeping and gnashing of teeth” in the lake of fire for all eternity (Lk. 13.28; Rev. 20.14). Jesus reminds us from His “Sermon on the Mount” - “*Blessed are you when people insult*

you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matt. 5.11).

C. LIVE IT:

The focus of God’s pilgrim then, must be on His grace. Just as remembering and returning to Jerusalem was the eye of hope for the exiles, so is keeping our focus on Christ who is the hope of all who believe (Eph. 1.11-14). The difficult journey for the pilgrim who travels from his home to Jerusalem for the annual feasts is more than just physical obstacles and hazards that lie in the way, it’s the endurance and discipline to continue to finish the course. It can be so easy to turn around and go back home because of those who taunt us along the way. If our focus is not on Christ and His promise of grace then we will give up. But, if our focus is on Him as we look up and behold God our Savior on His throne, then we will finish the course of our journey that lies before us.

With all the laughing, scoffing, and ridicule. What can they say or do to you? Nothing! For if you truly believe that Jesus is the Christ then nothing can keep you from reaching the prize and upward call of Christ as we press on towards the goal (Phil. 3.14).

CONCLUSION: (*The Pilgrim’s Focus*)

Here are some concluding applications then to this lesson:

1. It is appropriate to request additional divine help and enablement to bear the criticism and mocking of unbelievers who ridicule you for your faith.
2. Maintain an upward focus on God. Have a high view of God and low view of man. Remember you are His servant. Submit to His grace and not to the ridicule of those who do not believe.
3. Have a realistic attitude of dependence on God as you petition Him. Your attitude is based on the hope you have in Him because of His covenant treaty He has made with His people through Christ.
4. Be patient and wait on the Lord. Do not give up or loose hope. Expect the Lord to grant your request as it concerns the promises He has made to His children.
5. Always keep your eyes on the Lord. Keeping your eyes on Him is like looking ahead. Stop looking backward you will never plow a straight line unless you look ahead in your pilgrim journey.

A PSALTER: Psalm 123
C.M. (O God Our Help in Ages Past)

(1) O thou that dwellest in the heav'ns,
I lift mine eyes to thee.

(2) Behold, as servants' eyes do look
their masters' hand to see,

As handmaid's eyes her mistress' hand;
so do our eyes attend
Upon the Lord our God, until
to us he mercy send.

(3) O Lord, be gracious to us,
unto us gracious be;
Because replenish'd with contempt
exceedingly are we.

(4) Our soul is fill'd with scorn of those
that at their ease abide,
And with the insolent contempt
of those that swell in pride.

PSALMS OF ASCENT
Lesson #6: “The Pilgrim’s Praise”
Psalm 124

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND: David voiced praise to God for not allowing the pagan nations that surrounded Israel to defeat and assimilate God's people. This is a psalm of declarative praise. Throughout the course of Israel's Biblical history, she has had seventeen enemies. The Egyptians, Amalekites, Edomites, Canaanites, Philistines, Assyrians and Babylonians, just to name a few. Each of these enemies were committed to Israel's destruction. The only solace and refuge Israel could find was only in their covenant-keeping God.

Some of Israel's enemies were more numerous, better equipped, cruel and oppressive, cunning,



in league with other nations, and determined to wipe Israel off the globe. Some of these enemies were used by God to chastise Israel because of her constant disobedience to the Lord. Though the Lord led Israel into captivity, He was unwilling to destroy Israel completely at the hand of her enemies.

Since this Psalm is written by David, it would be important to know who were Israel's enemies during His reign (c.1010-970 BC) as seen in the map to the right.

KEY THOUGHT: Believers should praise the Lord because He is our sole helper and protector by His name.

I. PRAISE GOD FOR HIS PRESENCE (vv. 1-2a)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 124.1-2*)

1. What does David want Israel to say?
2. Why does he repeat the opening statement?

B. LEARN IT:

1. *Pastoral proclamation (v.1) - "Had it not been the Lord who was on our side,..."*

David is fully aware that Israel has not perished as a people and nation because of God's constant presence in their midst. Without knowing the specific occasion for this season of praise, David is obviously reminding the people that God had been on their side in the battles that might have resulted in Israel's extinction. If the Lord had not been, they would have perished. This same hope and proclamation is found in Psalm 94.14 - "*For the Lord will not abandon His people, Nor will He forsake His inheritance.*" David repeats the phrase in verse two for emphasis sake as He gives personal glory for their safety and protection from their enemies who not only ridicule them, but desire to eliminate them because they are exclusively in a covenant relationship with the Lord.

One of Israel's formidable and constant enemy during David's reign were the Philistines. The Philistines were an ancient people who descended from Noah's son Ham (Gen. 10.14; 21.33-34). During the Exodus the Lord promised that the land of Israel would also include the territory of the Philistines (Ex. 23.31). This would eventually mean that some form of conflict would have to take place for Israel to displace the Philistines.

After the leadership reigns were transferred from Moses to Joshua (Joshua 1) the Lord instructed Joshua to prepare to cross the Jordan river and possess the land. They were not to fear for He would hand the land over to them as He had promised Moses. Their territory would extend all the way to the Euphrates river in the east (including all of Syria) to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. The Lord once again promised Joshua that "no one will be able to resist you all the days of your life" (Josh. 1.5). The problem was that Joshua and Israel did not fully commit themselves to the Lord and His commands. Joshua was unable to complete the task even though the Lord had given Joshua and Israel many victories. The Bible lists 31 kings that Joshua defeated (Josh. 12.9-24) along with the towns and regions (Josh. 11.15-18). However, there were still some people for each tribe of Israel to overcome (Judges 1).

Why did God command the Israelites to remove the people from the land they were possessing? Deuteronomy 20.18 states: "*in order that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the Lord your God.*" Before Joshua died at 110 years old, he told the tribes to finish the job. But the Israel tribes did not fully obey God. They were also commanded not to intermarry with them (Judges 3), something that they ended up doing. Thus, from the time of Joshua, the Judges, Samuel, Saul and David, the Philistines and

other inhabitants of the land became a constant spiritual and physical agitation to God's people.

The battles and threats remained until David defeated the Philistines during his reign in the 10th century B.C as recorded in 2 Samuel 5.17-25. Not only did David strike down the armies of the Philistines with God's direction and help, but this open the door for the Ark to be brought to Jerusalem in the tent which David had pitched for it (2 Sam. 5.16-19). Perhaps this victory is the backdrop for David's praise to the Lord and call for response by the people of Israel.

2. Congregational response (v.1b-2a) - "Let Israel now say..."

The call for Israel to speak out is an imperative call from David. It is possible that this antiphonal response was done during a time of corporate worship before the Lord that David was leading. It was a reminder for the people of God to collectively praise the Lord for His constant presence in their midst. It was also a reminder of the dire consequences if the Lord had not been on their side. For, it was not because of their strength, their instruments of warfare, their ingenuity or planning that kept them from being utterly destroyed, it was all God. Thus, the people cried out with one voice, *"had it not been the Lord who was on our side."*

C. LIVE IT: There is much to be said, but not enough space to express what it means to have the Lord our your side or worse yet, what it means NOT to have the Lord on your side. Consider these verses below:

- Romans 8.1: *"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* - Only God through Christ can condemn any person(s). The word "condemnation" means "penalty" or "damnatory sentence." If God is on your side then you will not be condemned through Christ Jesus our Lord. But, if you are not in Christ, then you are condemned by God for eternity.
- Romans 8.31: *"If God is for us, who is against us?"* - This conditional statement is similar to Psalm 124.1. The condition of our security is based on whether or not the Lord is on our side. The only means for the Lord to be on our side is through Christ Jesus whom He *"delivered Him over for us all"* (Rom. 8.32).
- Romans 8.39: Nothing *"will be able to separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* The reason why Israel had God's presence on their side was because of His love for them. The reason why the church today has God's presence on her side is because of God's love.
- Romans 8.7-8: *"Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God,...and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."* - To be on the other side of God's presence means you are His enemy and cannot please Him. To be God's enemy means you will be utterly condemned by His damnatory sentence in the end of life. No presence of God means no peace of God.
- The concluding thought then is that God's abiding presence in the midst of His people provides security and peace for the household of the Lord. This is something the

congregation of the Lord should express with resounding praise. Think of it...*"if it had not been the Lord on (your) side"* you would not have been saved.

II. PRAISE GOD FOR HIS PROTECTION (vv. 2b-5)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 124.2b-5*)

1. What seems to be the great concern?
2. How did David compare Israel's concern?
3. What could have been Israel's fate?
4. What New Testament story did Jesus share that is similar to this?

B. LEARN IT: God's presence results in His being Israel's protector from her enemies. As stated earlier, Israel had many enemies. Here David describes what would have happened if God was not on their side. They would have been ambushed, swallowed up and consumed by the anger of their enemies.

1. **Ambushed (v.2b)** - *"When men rose up against us;"* - The blessing of God's presence is the protection from being ambushed by the enemy. David points out that certain men "rose up" (ambushed) and caught them off guard. If it had not been for God's protection they would have been destroyed. Using 2 Samuel 5.17 as a possible backdrop for this Psalm, we see that *"all the Philistines went up to seek out David; and when David heard of it, he went down to the stronghold."* God provided information to David as a warning that the Philistines were about to ambush them. If David had not known about this, he and his men would have been defeated. Certainly God's presence and protection provided the help he needed.
2. **Engulfed (v.3a)** - *"Then they would have swallowed us alive"* - David continues with his report stating that if their enemy had been allowed to advance on them, they would have "swallowed us alive." This phrase pictures a prey who is swallowed up in the mouth of a beast. 2 Samuel 5.18 describes how the Philistines *"came and spread themselves out in the valley of Rephaim."* Like a wild beast that spreads its' mouth open to receive its' prey to devour, so were the Philistines ready to engulf David's army.
3. **Wrath (3b)** - *"When their anger was kindled against us"* - Next, David describes the kind of anger and wrath against them (v.3b). The word "anger (aph)" pictures one's wrathful countenance of extreme fury. Their facial features distorted. Veins protruding from their neck as their blood boils and burns angrily. Their anger was fueled by their anger and hostility towards God and His people.
4. **Flood (vv.4-5)** - *"Then the waters would have engulfed us"* - If the enemy would have been allowed to attack they would have been like homes and people washed away in a flash flood. *"The stream would have swept over our soul."* Some of the creeks or eddies in that region for the most part were calm or dry. But, in a moment because of melting snow from the nearby mountains or the rains during the rainy season, many of those dry creek beds would rise up and flood over their banks washing over and away livestock, people and homes in a sudden flash. Jeremiah describes enemy

invasions in his time to sudden floods (Jer. 47.1-4) as well as Job on a personal level (Job. 27.19-20).

- C. LIVE IT:** For the New Testament believer today, Jesus had taught that those who follow Him would be persecuted. For He said, "...but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you" (John 15.19b). He also tells them that the world hates His disciples because they hated Him first (John 15.18). He goes on to say that if they hate me, it's only because they hated the Father "without a cause" (John 15.25). This also brings up Jesus' other point, that if you are loved by the world, it's only because you are "of the world" (John 15.19). Therefore, the summary of this application is that it is better to be a friend of Jesus rather than a friend of the world. For, in being a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God. But understand, because the Lord called you out from among the world to be separate from it (much like He did with Israel) expect the world to hate you just as much as it hates and is hostile towards the Lord. But, know this, there is a blessing for those who are persecuted for His name sake for "*blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 5.10). - This leads us to our final point...

III. PRAISE GOD FOR HIS BLESSING (vv. 6-8)

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 124.6-8)

1. List how God blessed Israel in verses 6-8?
2. Describe what the dangers that Israel was kept from?
3. What is verse 8 restating and why?

B. LEARN IT:

1. **The blessing of protection (v.6)** - "*Blessed be the Lord,...*" - David next praises the Lord for not allowing Israel's enemies to tear her to pieces as a vicious animal tears its prey. This phrase mean that David acknowledges the Lord as the source of blessing (cf. Ps. 103.2).
2. **The blessing of deliverance (v.7)** - "*Our soul has escaped...*" - Israel had escaped as a bird that flies free when someone releases the trap that snared it. Even though the Lord may allow us to fall into a trap, the Lord will always provide a means for us to escape when He wants us to be free. Very much how Joseph was caught in his brother's trap then sold into slavery. The Lord kept him until He was ready to release Him for His purpose to preserve many alive (Gen. 37-50).
3. **The blessing of help (v.8)** - "*Our help is in the name of the Lord*" - It is the One true God, the maker of heaven and earth whose presence and protection oversees Israel's welfare. As the One "*Who made heaven and earth*" He is the strongest of all deliverers. When one plainly uses the term "Lord" as David does in verse 8, the over arching purpose is to declare the mightiest power and revelation of our help. This, the Lord had demonstrated ably throughout the course of Israel's history. God has been for Israel their "*...refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble*" (Ps. 46.1).

C. LIVE IT: In light of all you have personally gone through in life, how often do you bless the Lord, thanking and praising Him for all the ways He has kept you from harm. Here are some reasons believers today ought to praise the Lord:

1. *Praise the Lord for saving your soul.* If it had not been the Lord on your side, you would have never been saved. Everyday, be thankful that you have been born from above.
2. *Praise the Lord for keeping you safe from dangers unknown.* If it had not been the Lord on your side, who knows what dangers would have engulfed you. Does this mean accidents don't happen to us. No! But, what about the ones that could have taken your life that the Lord spared you from.
3. *Praise the Lord for keeping you safe from enemies.* If it had not been the Lord on your side, you would have to contend not only with Satan by yourself, but his demons and other wicked people who are in the world. Does this mean that wicked people do not harm others. No! But, give thanks to Him that you do not live in places where it is not safe to walk in the streets and pray for those who do that they may be delivered not only to safety but unto eternal life.
4. *Praise the Lord for the assurance you have in Him.* When the Lord allows your life to expire, praise Him for the assurance you have in knowing that when you close your eyes in this world, you will awaken in heaven. All this because of what Christ did to deliver us from our sins on the cross and rose again. For, if it had not been the Lord on your side, you would not have the promise of heaven.

CONCLUSION: (*The Pilgrim's Focus*)

This Psalm celebrates God's preservation of His people. For the pilgrim making his journey to Jerusalem, or the believer today, God's presence and protection is a fit subject for praise. Just as Israel has suffered from anti-Semitism for centuries, yet God still faithfully preserved His own. Just as the Lord protected the New Testament church, we like David and his congregation have plenty of reasons to praise the Lord and bless His name!

A PSALTER: Psalm 124
C.M.

- (1) Had not the Lord been on our side,
 may Israel now say;
- 2 Had not the Lord been on our side,
 when men rose us to slay;
- 3 They had us swallowed quick, when as
 their wrath 'gainst us did flame:
- 4 Waters had covered us, our soul
 had sunk beneath the stream.
- 5 Then had the waters, swelling high,
 over our soul made way.
- 6 Blessed be the Lord, who to their teeth
 us gave not for a prey.
- 7 Our soul's escapèd, as a bird
 out of the fowler's snare;
The snare asunder broken is,
 and we escapèd are.
- 8 Our sure and all-sufficient help
 is in Jehovah's name;
His name who did the heav'n create,
 and who the earth did frame.

PSALMS OF ASCENT
Lesson #6: “The Pilgrim’s Confidence in the Lord”
Psalm 125

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND: At 2510 feet, Mount Zion is the location of Jerusalem. Though it is not the highest point in the mountain range that surrounds Jerusalem, it still provides a natural defense for Jerusalem. Mount of Olives is to its east, Mount Scopus to its north, and to the west and south are other hills that lead to Bethlehem and Hebron. In Psalm 125, the writer uses this backdrop to describe and compare the Lord and His people. He compares the faith of the righteous as being immovable like Mount Zion and the Lord as the mountains and hills that surround and defend Jerusalem.

The first mention of Zion in the Bible is found in 2 Samuel 5.7. The word "Zion" essentially means "fortification" or has the idea of being "raised up" as a "monument." It is mentioned in the Bible over 150 times. It is synonymous with the city of God, that is, the place that God loves (Ps. 87.2-3). It is also the high hill on which David built his fortress.

Jerusalem is referred to as Salem (peaceful) in Genesis 14.18 in reference to the story of Abraham and Melchizedek. The site and city is chosen by God for His special purposes beginning with Abraham who was to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22) and the place where Jesus was offered up as a living sacrifice for our sins (Matt. 27.32-56). It was David's intent during his reign to build a temple unto the Lord on this property where the Lord appeared to him on the threshing floor of Ornan, the Jebusite. It would be later at this location that Solomon, David's son would lay the foundation and build the temple for the Lord (2 Chron. 3. 1-3).

Thus, Mount Zion, Jerusalem, the city of David would become a place of peace as long as God's people honored and worshiped Him alone as the one and only true God of heaven and earth (Ex. 20.1-11). We see later that the children of Israel would disobey the Lord and instead of being a place of peace, it would be a reminder of God's judgement as His people wait for Christ second coming to judge and reign in peace (Isa. 9.7; Zechariah. 14.4; Rev. 1.7; 19.11-16; Tit. 2.13).

KEY THOUGHT: Those who trust in the Lord have confidence in His strength and security as they call upon His goodness and judgment to help against the wicked.

I. THE CONFIDENCE OF THE RIGHTEOUS (vv. 1-2)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 125.1-2*)

1. How does the writer describe the Lord and those who trust in Him?
2. What is the state of those who trust in the Lord (v. 1b)?
3. What is the duration of the Lord's protection for His own (v.2b)?

B. LEARN IT:

1. **The righteous trust in the Lord (v.1)** - *"Those who trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion..."*

- a) The word "trust" (*Batah*) - means to hide for refuge or to be confident or sure. It describes one who places their full confidence and hope in a thing or person. In this case it is viewed as "trust." Like faith, when a person places their faith and trust in the Lord they are placing the full weight of their being on the hope that the Lord is who He says He is and will fulfill the promises that He has made. Essentially, this person has internal confidence in the strength of the Lord.
 - b) This confidence or trust that the righteous have in the Lord is pictured by the writer as "Mount Zion" which cannot be moved. Mount Zion is pictured here as the foundation of faith. Just as Jesus is our Rock and the Foundation by which His church is built upon (Matt. 16.18), so is Mount Zion the foundation of faith for the people of God. The believers who trust in the Lord are secure in their position as the mountain God had chosen and established as His special habitation (cf. Rom. 8.31-39).
 - c) The duration of God's defense and protection is eternal, *"from this time forth and forever."* For instance, Psalm 121.8 says, *"The Lord will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever."* This is the perseverance of the saints which is a doctrine that teaches eternal security. Which means, once saved, always saved. Because the Lord sovereignly brings us in a relationship with Him, He, not us, holds us secure for all eternity. Therefore, we can never lose our salvation. This gives the believer assurance and confidence in knowing that their inheritance is in the promises of the Bible, which includes eternal life (cf. Phil. 1.6; Eph. 1.4; Jn. 5.24; 6.35-37, 44; 10.27-29; Rom. 8.1; 1 Pet. 1.23; Heb 3.14).
2. **The righteous are safely secured in the Lord (v.2)** - *"as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people..."* - This verse describes how the Lord forever surrounds His people as a protective army keeping overwhelming forces from defeating them (cf. 1 Cor. 10.13). The word "surrounds" describes a "circuit" that encompasses every side and all around. Zechariah 2.5 states: *"For I", declares the Lord, "will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst."* Those who trust fully in the Lord can place their confidence in Him because He protects and keeps His own safe for nothing can ever separate them from His care, hand, and love (cf. Roms. 8.37-39).

C. LIVE IT:

1. How secure is your salvation? Do you have confidence that if you were to die today that you will be in heaven with the Lord?
2. What are you trusting in today for salvation? Is it the good you do or in the power and sovereign care of the Lord as your place your complete trust in His only Son, Christ Jesus our Lord?
3. Can you testify to others that you have complete assurance in your salvation? If not, re-read this section and all the Scripture verses. Christ is our sure foundation and the only way to the Father in heaven (Jn. 14.6).

II. THE PROMISE TO THE RIGHTEOUS (v. 3)

A. LOOK IT UP: *(Read Psalm 125.3)*

1. What is a "scepter" and what does it represent?
2. What is God's promise for the righteous?
3. What will the righteous do or not do concerning wrong doing?

B. LEARN IT:

1. **God's promise to the righteous (v.3a)** - *"For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest upon the land of the righteous"* - This verse speaks of God's protection on the believer from being overwhelmed by temptation and the believer's victory over sin. The Lord is promising not to let wicked authorities overcome the righteous totally. However, God did permit Israel's foreign neighbors to oppress and dominate her for periods in her history. Mostly, these wicked authorities, such as Assyria and Babylon, proved to be a correcting rod for God's people. They were never meant to be a destroying sword. The Lord was keeping His covenant promise and would never allow Israel to be completely defeated.
2. **The righteous will triumph over temptation (v. 3b)** - *"So that the righteous will not put forth their hands to do wrong"*
 - a) We have this promise from the apostle Paul: *"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it"* - 1 Cor. 10.13). God has designed and called us to be like Him (*to be holy because He is holy*- 1 Pet. 1.16). As pilgrims walking in this world, we are to walk and live in the light (1 John 1.7).
 - b) The Lord will never allow your troubles to last any longer than your strength can hold you up. This verse speaks of the endurance of the saints. The writer of Hebrews states that we have need of endurance so that when our lives come to an end and have done God's will, we will receive what is promised by Him (Heb. 10.36).

C. LIVE IT: When God's pilgrims encounter trials and temptations, what does it produce?

1. Endurance, character, and hope - Rom. 5.3-4
2. Crown of life - James 1.12-18
3. Steadfastness - James 1.2-4
4. Patience - Col. 1.11

I could list more. The summary of this is that God's pilgrims when faced with temptations and trials are to keep on *"rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer"* (Rom. 12.12).

III. THE PRAYER OF THE RIGHTEOUS (v. 4)

A. LOOK IT UP: *(Read Psalm 125.4)*

1. What is the writer asking the Lord to do?
2. What does he mean by "those who are good?"

3. What "good" do you suppose the writer wants God to do?

B. LEARN IT:

1. **The righteous prayer to the Lord (v.4)** - *"Do good, O Lord, to those who are good..."*

a) This prayer calls on the Lord's blessing upon those who trust Him. As God's people, we have the choice to do good or to give in such as Adam and Eve who disobeyed. Even though God's people are as secure and unmovable as Mount Zion, they still have a choice in how they will live. They can either be faithful to the Lord, or depart from Him and live sinful lives. Here the psalmist is asking God to bless those of His people who do good and remain upright in their attitudes and affections towards Him.

b) The words "good" and "upright" describe those who are faithfully walking in manner worthy of the Lord (Col. 1.10). They agree with the Lord (good) and their walk is straight (upright), not being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and temptation (Eph. 4.14). It's difficult to walk straight in the way of the Lord, but at least it leads to life.

C. LIVE IT: God's promises should quicken our prayers. When we are being bombarded by the wicked ways that we face in today's culture, instead of reasoning or considering the ways of the world, their wickedness should drive us to our knees to pray that God will do good for those who are walking faithfully for Him. The ways of the sinners are crooked, and time and time again many faithful followers of Christ get ensnared or caught in sin. This is why Paul again would pray: *"With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints"* - Eph. 6.18

IV. THE CROOKED WAYS OF THE UNRIGHTEOUS (v. 5)

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 125.5)

1. Describe the ways of the unrighteous?
2. What will be their fate?

B. LEARN IT: *"But as for those who turn aside to their crooked ways..."* - Warren Weirsbe has this to say: "The life of faith is not easy, but the life of unbelief is much harder - in this life and in the life to come."

1. **The warning to the unrighteous** - The Bible is very clear that those who trust in the Lord are eternally secure as they follow faithfully and experience His blessing. But, those who turn from the Lord and follow their own path will suffer His discipline and wrath for all eternity.
2. **The way of the unrighteous** - The psalmist gives a clear description the way of the unrighteous. They *"turn aside to the crooked ways."* Words that describe "turn aside (natah)" are stumbling, defraud, deprive, perverted, push aside and etc. It describes those who instead of bowing the knee to worship the creator of heaven and earth,

they bow to their own depraved idols and ways. Their "crooked ways" are hell-bent, twisted with lies and deceit that come from the father of all lies, the devil. They would rather exchange the truth of God for the lie of the devil. They worship and serve the creature rather than the creator (Rom. 1.25). This is the way of the unrighteous.

- 3. The wrath to come for the unrighteous** - *"The Lord will lead them away with the doers of iniquity"* - If you thought that the way of the unrighteous was hard, the destiny of the unrighteous is by far harder. We see here that it will be the Lord's doing to do good for those who trust in Him, but also it will be His doing to "lead" "doers of iniquity" away to eternal destruction. The broad path for those who turn away from the Lord, though it may be simple, it does lead to a death and destruction (Matt. 7.13-27). The writer of Proverbs states: *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death"* (Prov. 14.12). This certainly was the Lord's warning to Adam and Eve in the garden was that if you do not obey my Word you will surely die (Gen. 3.3). Stated more clearly, the future of the wicked will be destroyed and cut off (Ps. 37.37-38).

- C. LIVE IT:** The Bible has never hidden the fact that there are two distinctive outcomes for those who trust in the Lord and those who turn away from the Lord. For those who trust in Him, meaning - trusting in Christ Jesus our Lord alone for salvation, it says, you will be saved. For anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom. 10.9-10, 13). Yet, the Bible is just as more clear that those who follow their own path will not only experience physical death, but will also experience a second death in the lake of fire with the king of wickedness, Satan for all eternity (Rev. 20).

CONCLUSION: (*The Pilgrim's Focus*)

This is my plea to anyone who has turn aside from the Lord to repent and confess your sin, to trust in Christ alone for salvation and follow in His ways, the path of a Christian pilgrim that seeks to please the Lord in a manner worthy of the Lord. If you struggle with the assurance that you are truly saved then consider the statements below:

A - Acknowledge and agree with God concerning your sin by confessing and repenting from it (Rom 3.23, 1 Jn. 1.6-9).

B - Believe that Jesus died on the cross as a sacrifice for your sin and rose up from the dead three days later (1 Cor. 15.1-9).

C - Confess Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life and soul (Rom. 10.8-10; 13).

D - Devote yourself to Christ, His church, and His word (Acts 2.42-47; 2 Tim. 3.16-17).

E - Evangelize by being a faithful witness unto the Lord and making disciples (Matt 28.18-20; Acts 1.8).

F - Faithful to end. Live a life that seeks to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord (Eph. 4-6; Rom 12-15).

G - Grow in knowledge of the Word and doctrine (Eph. 3.14-19; 4.11-16).

A PSALTER: Psalm 125
C.M. (Amazing Grace)

- (1) They in the Lord that firmly trust
 shall be like Zion hill,
Which at no time can be removed,
 but standeth ever still.
- 2 As round about Jerusalem
 the mountains stand alway,
The Lord his folk doth compass so,
 from henceforth and for aye.
- 3 For ill men's rod upon the lot
 of just men shall not lie;
Lest righteous men stretch forth their hands
 unto iniquity.
- 4 Do thou to all those that be good
 thy goodness, Lord, impart;
And do thou good to those that are
 upright within their heart.
- 5 But as for such as turn aside
 after their crooked way,
God shall lead forth with wicked men:
 on Isr'el peace shall stay

PSALMS OF ASCENT
Lesson #7: “The Return of the Pilgrim”
Psalm 126

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND: Beginning with the reign of Saul (1050-1010 BC) and through the reigns of David (1010-970) and Solomon (970-930), Israel existed as a unified kingdom. After Solomon's death, the kingdom was divided into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom was called the Kingdom of Israel. It included the northern ten tribes. The southern kingdom was called Judah. It included the remaining two southern tribes (Benjamin and Judah). When the northern kingdom broke from the union with Jeroboam 1 (930-909) as their first king, he established a new worship system out of fear that the people would return to Jerusalem to worship the Lord and rejoin the unified kingdom. This led the Kingdom of Israel down the path of false worship and pagan idolatry for 208 years. During those years, the Lord sent prophets to warn Israel to repent and return to the Lord. Because Israel did not obey and repent, the Lord sent the Assyrians to conquer and take them away into captivity during the reigns of the Assyrian kings, Tiglathpileser (745-727 BC [2 Kings 15.29; 1 Chron. 5.26]) and Shalmaneser (723 BC [2 Kings 17.5]).

The southern kingdom, the kingdom of Judah, lasted as an independent kingdom from 930-597 BC. Like her northern counterpart, Judah's sins and refusal to obey the Lord through the prophets led Him to allow the Babylonian empire under Nebuchadnezzar to take Jerusalem in 597 BC. He pillaged the temple and took Judah's king, as well as many of the people including the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel, into captivity. Finally, in 586, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Judah and Jerusalem once more destroying the city and temple completely to the ground (2 Kings 24.8-16).

As prophesied in Scripture, the Jewish people would be allowed to return to Jerusalem after 70 years of exile. That prophecy was fulfilled in 537 BC under the rule of King Cyrus of Persia who defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Israelites to return and begin rebuilding the city and temple of Jerusalem. Ezra was chosen to lead the people back which led to a revival among the Jewish people and the rebuilding of the temple which was completed in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6.13-15).

This background provides the context of Psalm 126, which is also known as a Psalm of National Lament, which were a group of Psalms expressing deep sorrow for the captivity and asking for God's blessing or intervention.

KEY THOUGHT: The psalmist rejoices in Israel's return to Zion as God had promised (vv. 1-3) and prays for a complete restoration of the people of Israel (vv. 4-6).

I. JOY IN THE RETURN (vv. 1-3)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 126.1-3*)

1. Who did the work of bringing Israel back from exile?

2. How does the psalmist describe those who came back?
3. Describe their reaction?
4. What were the comments by the nations and the people of Israel?

B. LEARN IT:

1. ***Joy in God's handiwork - "When the Lord brought back the captive ones of Zion" (v. 1)***
 - a) *The prophesy:* Jeremiah prophesied a second exodus for the children of Israel before they were conquered and taken into captivity by king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Jer. 25.8-12). Now the Lord has *"brought back the captive ones of Zion"* just as He promised He would, for by His grace, He would forgive them (Isa. 40.1-2; 44.21-22) and they would begin again in the land that was promised to them. Very few Israelites who were young and were taken as captives from Zion to Babylon would remember what it was like there. For them, this would be a dream come true when it was announced in 537 B.C. that king Cyrus of Persia, who conquered the Babylonians, is allowing the exiles to return to Zion.
 - b) *The handiwork of God:* The psalmist is very clear that this was God's handiwork, not Ezra's, Nehemiah's, or the prophets, even Cyrus himself. This was God's plan long before these people were born to prophesy and rule as kings. Even Cyrus, the king of Persia recognized his role under God's sovereign reign over him when he stated: *"The Lord God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has instructed me to build a temple for Him in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Anyone from His people among you (may his God be with him!) may go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and may build the temple of the Lord God of Israel - He is the God who is in Jerusalem"* (Ezra 1.1-3)
 - c) *The surreal reaction:* What an exciting moment in Israel's history this must have been. You can sense the eagerness and surreal anticipation the returning exiles must have felt. Bob Dauffinbaugh provides this insight as to what the exiles must have said about this:

"Our forefathers really missed God's blessings. It was their sins which brought us into captivity. But now that's all in the past. Now we're returning to the land. We've learned to obey God's law and to forsake idolatry. We're going back to Jerusalem, rebuild the temple, and experience the blessings God promised. The 'kingdom of God' is finally going to be experienced on earth."
2. ***Joy from the mouth of the captives - "Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joyful shouting" (v. 2a)***
 - a) *The day the music died:* Music and literature was well cultivated by the Hebrew people from their early beginnings and all through the Old Testament and passed on to the Christian church until now. This genre seems not only important to God's people, but to God Himself, for He has inspired by His breath and Spirit a whole section of literature compiled in the Old Testament, these being Job,

Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. The first musical instrument is recorded in the Bible is found in Genesis 4.21 by Jubal, the father of the harp and organ. The first song recorded in the Bible is found in Exodus 15.1ff. It was a song of praise to the Lord for saving them from the hands of the Egyptian army at the Red Sea. Since then, there have been many songs recorded in scripture. The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 songs has served as a bedrock of Jude's-Christian hymnology. When the Israelites were taken into captivity they had lost their song in Babylon, the music had died as recorded by Psalm 137:

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. Upon the Willis in the midst of it we hung our harps. For there our captors demanded of us songs, and our tormentors mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.' How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" - vv. 1-4

- b)** *The day the music was revived:* With the news of their release and return to Zion, their song and singing was revived with laughter and joyful shouting (v.2) Their expression was a witness in response to God's faithfulness in keeping His promises. They knew about the prophesies by Jeremiah and Isaiah, but to see them actually come true and on time just as the Lord had promised began an eruption of glad hearts proclaiming with "laughter" and "shouts of joy" for what God had done.
- 3. Joy in the witness** - *"Then they said among the nations, 'the Lord has done great things for them'" (v.2b-3) -*
- a)** *Among the Nations (2b)* - The proclamation by Cyrus and the joyful elation expressed by the exiles reached *"among the nations."* Whenever through Scripture the Lord performs His mighty works, other nations and peoples hear of it, they become witnesses of His glorious ability to deliver His own for His glory and name sake. Psalms 71.19 says, *"For your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens..."* The Lord will make His name famous among the nations (Psalm 105, Isa. 12.4)
- b)** *Among Israel (3)* - This act of the Lord in delivering His people is precious to them, just like Mary who first was shocked by the news that she was pregnant and to give birth to the Savior of the world. Her shock then was replace with joy once she understood what the Lord has done when she expressed: *"For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name" (Lk. 1.49).* This is more likely the exiles expression. Shock then joyful proclamation.

C. LIVE IT:

1. What was it like for you when the Lord opened your heart and eyes to the revelation that Jesus had died for your sins and has delivered you from the bondage of sin and death?
2. How did you respond when you first realized that you were no longer destined for the wrath of God, but now a child of His eternal inheritance?

3. Did your song change? Did you give glory to the Lord with an expression of grateful praises?
4. What was or has been the reaction of those who knew you?

Russell Kelso Carter wrote these words to the hymn "Standing on the Promises" to express gratitude to the Lord for His faithfulness to save:

"Standing on the promises of Christ my King,
Through eternal ages let His praises ring;
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,
Standing on the promises of God."

Are you standing on God's promises as the exiles did? Have you experienced His deliverance from sin and death through His gospel? Then proclaim to others all that the Lord has done with shouts of joy and songs of praise. Let your neighbors know how good and faithful the Lord is to save.

II. PRAYER FOR THE RETURN (v.4-6)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 126.4*)

1. List what the psalmist prayed to God for Israel?
2. What do you think he meant by "*as the streams in the south*" in verse 4b?
3. How specific was the psalmist request for the blessing of the exiles who would return to Jerusalem? (vv. 5-6)

B. LEARN IT:

1. ***Bless the crops*** - "*Restore our captivity, O Lord...*" (v.4)
 - a) *Restoration* - The word "restore" means to "return" in Hebrew. Meaning, "make it like it was before." The psalmist gives a description by what he means by saying, "*as the streams in the South*" (v.4).
 - b) *The land of Promise* - What was the land like before the exile? The promise to Israel by God concerning Palestine dates back to the time of Abraham (to his seed) and described in terms of territory in Exodus (Gen. 15.18-21; Gen. 26.3; Ex. 23.31). Originally, the Israelites were promised the territory by God from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates river. Repeatedly the Lord describes the Promised Land "*as a land flowing with milk and honey*" (Ex. 3.8; Num. 14.8; Deut. 31.20; Ezek. 20.15). This description emphasizes the fertility of the soil and bounty that awaited God's chosen people during the first exodus out of Egypt. The reference to "milk" suggests the many livestock that could find pasture there. The mention of "honey" suggest the vast farmland available. The bees there had plenty of plant to draw next or from and pollinate. The psalmist here is asking the Lord to not only restore the people to the land, but the fortunes of the land. To "restore" is to "return it" back to the way it was before.

2. **Bless the labor** - *"Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting" (v.5)*

- a) *The Pain* - The request to bless the land *"as the streams in the South"* is to assist the exiles in planting crops for the necessity in living. The first group to return to Zion had experienced some bad seasons (Hag. 1.9-11). God had promised that He would send the rains and the harvest if they would keep His commands (Hag. 2.15-19). This explains why the farmer who sowed in tears not knowing whether a crop would produce, would *"reap with joyful shouting"* when they harvest its' fruit (Ezra 3.8-13; 6.16,22). The returning remnant would have to be totally dependent on God and faithful to His commands. This is what James would call in his letter "faith and works" (Jms. 2.26). For faith without works is dead. If we are praising God for what He has done, then we need to follow praise up with obedience.
- b) *The Pleasure* - *"...bringing his sheaves with him" (v.6)*. - The pleasure in reaping the fruit of labor begins with the labor of sowing seed. We cannot reap if we do not sow. What is a "sheave"? A "sheave" is when the grain is reaped. It is laid in handfuls on the back of the reaper to be gathered by others and bound into large sheaves. Literally that is the meaning, figuratively it is the picture of the individual exile returning to Zion who sowed years of tears in captivity and now is reaping the blessing of God's promise of return to Zion. This they express *"with a shout of joy"* just as one who has harvest the grain, sowing the seed with tears, yet praising God for the bounty.

C. **LIVE IT:** When we come to text such as this it is easy to propose something that is not necessarily being said from the text. In this case, it's easy to take this text as a evangelism text of sowing the Word of God in suffering and that a great harvest would be the result. We must remember that the application here is first for the Hebrew people who were held in captivity. They were the ones who were sown in death in exile and released from the captivity in joy. Similarly, we die to ourselves when we mortify our sin by nailing it to the cross of Jesus (Col. 2.14). We are sown in death with Jesus, but there is joy because we will be raised to eternal life in Jesus (1 Cor. 15.22) for it says, *"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive."* Just as the seed that is sown in sorrow. It dies in the ground. But later, in time, it rises up from the ground, sprouting to new life revealing a great harvest just as the Lord had promised would happen.

CONCLUSION: (The Pilgrim's Focus)

Let's us consider the pilgrim approaching Jerusalem. This psalm is a great reminder of the time when the remnant of Israel were taken into captivity to discipline God's people. They were sent there in tears as one who would sow with tears. They mourned and labored through sorrow in captivity awaiting God's promise for the return back to Zion. Then when the time was fulfilled, the Lord *"brought back the captive ones of Zion"* to Jerusalem. This remembrance is an occasion of joy by praising God together in saying, *"The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad."* As the nations witnessed this event in history, all glory went to the Lord for the great things He did for His people by delivering them.

This should be the goal today for the church. To bring glory to God as a light unto the gentiles that shows how the Lord delivered us from sin and brought us into His marvelous light. Even though the world that is lost may not fully comprehend the Lord, they can still be witnesses of His work in our lives and cannot deny the great things He has done for us. This can only be achieved when Christians are willing to do as Jesus commands in Luke 9.23:

1. Die to self
2. Pick up our cross
3. Follow Jesus

I close with this final observation. When the new church in Acts 2 were gathered together. All the observers from the outside of the fellowship were amazed by what the Lord was doing in their midst. For they were all *"praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved"* (Acts 2.47).

A PSALTER: Psalm 126
C.M. (O For a Thousand Tongues)

- (1) When Zion's bondage God turned back,
as men that dreamed were we.
- 2 Then filled with laughter was our mouth,
our tongue with melody:
- They 'mong the heathen said, The Lord
great things for them hath wrought.
- 3 The Lord hath done great things for us,
whence joy to us is brought.
- 4 As streams of water in the south,
our bondage, Lord, recall.
- 5 Who sow in tears, a reaping time
of joy enjoy they shall.
- 6 That man who, bearing precious seed,
in going forth doth mourn,
He doubtless, bringing back his sheaves,
rejoicing shall return

PSALMS OF ASCENT
Lesson #8: "The Making of a Pilgrim"
Psalm 127

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND: Who or what makes a person? You have probably heard the phrase: "he is a self made-man." What does "self-made" mean? A "self-made" man or woman is a person who was born poor or otherwise disadvantaged, but who achieves economic or other success thanks to their own hard work and ingenuity rather than because of any inherited fortune, family connections, or other privileges. A good example of this was Sam Walton (1918-1992). Raised on a farm in Oklahoma, then moved to Missouri with his family, Sam exhibit great ambition as a young man. He became the youngest Eagle Scout ever in Missouri. He was elected class president his senior year in high school. Walton paid his way through the University of Missouri working various jobs. After college he worked for JC Penney's and at a DuPont's munitions plant before WWII.

After the war, Sam was determined to open his own variety store. After saving a substantial amount of money while in the military, and a loan from his father-in-law, Sam bought a Ben Franklin store in Newport, Arkansas. His philosophy then and now was to supply customers with a wide variety of goods at low prices by buying large volumes from wholesalers. His store became a success and opened his own store (Walton's Five & Dime) and then opened the first true Wal-Mart that eventually expanded and became the world's largest retailer by 1991. He reigned as America's richest man from 1985-1998, and if he were alive today, he would be the world's richest man, with wealth double that of Bill Gates. Now, was Sam Walton truly a "self-made" man? Or, was he a man by God's sovereign will and grace, made to be all that he became to be?

Psalm 127 show us that no one person is truly self-made unless the Lord builds that person's life. To think otherwise would be futile. This psalm humble the reader as it stresses God's sovereign will over man's. Therefore, the question for us should be: Is it better to glorify God or better to bask in the glory of our own accomplishments? This Psalm is credited to Solomon as the author. Psalm 127 is considered to be a wisdom psalm, a genre similar to that by Solomon as seen in the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and two psalms, 127 being one of them.

Where did Solomon get his wisdom? Solomon's wisdom was a gift from the Lord. As a young king, following after his father David, Solomon sacrificed and prayed to the Lord for wisdom in leading the nation of Israel (1 Kings 2.6-9). God answered his prayer by promising him great wisdom because he did not ask for personal rewards like long life or the death of his enemies (1 Kings 2.10-15).

What is the purpose of wisdom literature? The purpose of wisdom literature in the Bible is how to focus on happiness and success. It is based on three things: the experience of previous generations, cause and effect in life's relationships and that trusting God has it's rewards (Deut. 27-29). Solomon states the purpose of wisdom literature in the opening of Proverbs when he writes:

"to know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity" (Proverbs 1.2-3).

Wisdom literature then teaches that the One true God is the foundation on which all biblical wisdom is based (cf. Gen. 41.38-39; Job 12.13; 28.28; Prov. 1.7; 9.10; Ps. 111.10). Hebrew wisdom was very practical in that it was based on experience not special revelation. It focused on an individual being successful in life (all of life: sacred and secular). In a way, it is divine "horse-sense." Thus, this psalms as Jay Vernon McGee states: "is applicable to us in our day and reveal an utter dependence upon God."

KEY THOUGHT: No one person is anything because everything in life depends on the blessing and sovereign will of God.

I. THE FUTILITY OF MAN'S LABOR (Psalm 127.1-2)

A. LOOK IT UP: *(Read Psalm 127.1-2)*

1. Summarize verses 1-2. What is the key idea of these two verses?
2. What is Solomon's view of work?
3. What truth does the end of verse 2 reveal for us?

B. LEARN IT: Verses 1-2 recalls the spirit of Ecclesiastes with its emphasis on futility. Solomon tells us that it is futile and frustrating to attempt projects without seeking God's blessing. This applies to building a house and building a household. It also applies to defending a city. Putting in long hours of hard work will only lead to weariness. To the contrast, those who trust in the Lord experience rest. Note: Solomon is not denigrating work, but was advocating dependence on the Lord as one works.

Our work in the Lord: *"Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it..." (v.1) - Verse 1 is a great reminder of not only our dependency on the Lord, but that the Lord has called us to build our lives in light of our dependency on Him. Since the beginning of time the Lord called us to be builders: to pro-create, to take care of the earth, to be fruitful and multiply, to build homes, churches, the kingdom of God. Even Jesus Himself was a carpenter (Mk. 6.3). Paul, a builder of the church (Rom. 15.20). The point being, that even though the Lord calls us to build and be productive in life, it's all in vain unless He is in it. Jesus reminds us that "without Me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15.5).*

Solomon himself was a master builder and architect. 2 Chronicles 8 records that Solomon not only built the Lord's temple and his palace, but also rebuilt cities, fortresses, storage cities, and fortified cities. He would have known the amount of muscle and labor it took for such projects during his reign. Yet, even with all his accomplishments, credits the Lord here. That all this would be rubbish if the Lord had not been in it.

One example in how this Psalm could have been used later in Israel's history, since it's found in this collection, is for the remnant 400 years later who returned from exile in Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem in 539 BC. Nehemiah was the provincial governor of Judah who surveyed the damage of Jerusalem and its walls (Neh. 2.12-15). After enlisting the help of the people to quickly repair the breaches in the wall, he also urged them to set up guards to defend against the constant threat of those who opposed their efforts, including the armies of Samaria, the Ammonites and Ashdodites. The hurried work of repairing and rebuilding the walls and gates were completed in just 52 days (Neh. 6.15). A great accomplishment to say the least, yet could not have been completed without acknowledging God's help through prayer (Neh. 5.19).

Later in their history as the Jews began to resettle in the land, they renewed their pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the festivals as commanded by the Lord. This psalm would serve as a reminder for them that all they lived and worked for would be useless unless the Lord was in it and is magnified.

Our rest in the Lord: *"It is vain for you to rise up early..." (v.2)* - Verse 2 also reminds us that not only is the success of our labor dependent on the Lord, so is our rest in Him. This verse warns against overdoing it and desiring to see results now. Work should be enjoyed and a blessing not something you should painfully endure. Even though one should be diligent in their work, but their work should not overtake them and become an idol to them and others. Even though we have to contend with the results of the fall (Gen. 3.17) work can be something we enjoy doing. Some people are so driven and ambitious that they expect others to be just like them. Anything less than their own personal effort would consider others in being lazy or unmotivated. Some have driven themselves to an early grave or encountered mental problems such as anxiety and/or depression. The point being as Wiersbe states: "work suited to our gifts and personalities (should be) food for our souls (Jn. 4.34), but the anxious laborer eats 'the bread of sorrows' - sorrow while working and sorrow while trying to rest at night as he worries about the next day." One can only find rest in their labor when they trust and depend on the Lord in their labor. Work should be a blessing from God.

Augustine is quoted in saying, "God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in you." Many struggle with insomnia because they worry about their labor for tomorrow. Jesus exhorts us on this by saying: *"...do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? (vanity)...do not be anxious then, saying, 'what shall we eat? Or What shall we drink? Or What shall we clothe ourselves? For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."* (Matt. 5.25, 31-34).

- C. LIVE IT:** What then should be the proper perspective in regards to work and rest? Charles Spurgeon has this to say: "All the works that we can ever do, be they what they may, can never bring such glory to God as a single act of trust in Him." Consider these living truths in regards to our labor:
1. Are we to work? Yes - *"He who tills his land will have plenty of food, but he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty" - Proverbs 28.19*
 2. Are we to depend on the Lord? Yes - For salvation (Eph. 2.8-9); wisdom (Jms 1.5); everything (Ps. 104.27) and in everything (Prov. 3.5-6). He is our rock, fortress, and deliverer (Ps. 18.2).
 3. Are we to magnify the Lord? Yes - By giving thanks to Him alone (Col. 3.17)
 4. Are we to do all things for the Lord? Yes - *"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men" (Col. 3.23).*
 5. Are we to enjoy and rest in our labor? Yes - *"There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This...is from the hand of God" (Prov. 2.24).*

II. THE FRUITFULNESS OF GOD'S REWARD (Psalm 127.3-5)

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 127.3-5)

1. What is the key idea of verses 3-5?
2. In what ways is dependency on God shown here?
3. How would you describe how children are like arrows and how does that relate to verse 5?

- B. LEARN IT:** The folly of working all the time and not trusting in the Lord should be obvious when one considers that much of what we enjoy does not come from working hard. Many of life's best blessings come as gifts from God. Children are one of these gifts.

Our inheritance in the Lord: *"Behold, children are a gift of the Lord..." (v.3)* - God gives children to couples, sometimes he withholds them. He chooses, regardless of how much a husband and wife may strive to obtain them. Under the Mosaic economy God promised to bless the godly with children (Dt. 28.4), but He gave no such promise to Christians. Therefore, it is a mistake to conclude that the more children a Christian couple has the more godly they are.

Children as a gift: What then is the blessing of children. Solomon states that *"children are a gift of the Lord."* The word "gift" (nachalah) means "possession," "property," or "inheritance." In this case the significance of the "gift" is more inline with "inheritance." Here's why. When the remnant of Israel returned from exile to rebuild the walls and homes, it did no good to guard and protect them if there were no future generations to inherit them and keep the family, city, and nation going. If you added up the numbers of those who returned to Jerusalem as recorded in Ezra 2, only fifty thousand returned to the land and city to rebuild it. Nehemiah even states that *"the city was large and*

spacious, but the people in it were few and the houses were not built" (Neh. 7.4). Now remember, this psalm is not a present reflection of the time of restoration, but wisdom literature from the past to motivate the few living in the city to reproduce, populate and secure the city. Just as building the homes and securing the gates are useless, so too having children. Unless the Lord is in it there is no blessing.

Children as a reward: Solomon describes this gift as God's fruitful reward of the womb (v.3b). Not only did the Lord command Adam and Eve to *"be fruitful and multiply"* (Gen. 1.28), He also instructed Noah and his sons families to do the same (Gen. 9.1). The times were unique for both because they were both instructed by God to populate and repopulate the earth. Here, Solomon's intent is not a command, but a promise gift from God. Just as He promised Abraham when He told him, *"and I will make you a great nation"* (Gen. 12.2) and *"you will be the father of a multitude of nations"* (Gen. 17.9). Later the Lord promises the children of Israel in the wilderness that *"He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb..."* (Deut. 7.13). These are not commands of God for them to reproduce, but God's sovereign promise to reward His people to multiply them for His purpose, their security and inheritance. Notice in all the occasions mentioned above, it was crucial for God to reward His own with this promise to reproduce so that He could work His purpose out for the greater promise that He made to Abraham. All this the Lord did through a faithful and righteous man (Gen. 15.6) and a "barren woman" (Ps. 113.9; Gen.11.30).

One interesting note in God's blessing of children, is the practice of child sacrifice among the pagans in the land of Canaan. This has been a horrific practice which was committed throughout the world for thousands of years. It was often done in connection with a fertility god by which the worshippers sought to obtain a blessing from their gods to confirm or complete a vow taken in the name of a god. The worst in the biblical times was the connection with "Molech." This god was the god of the Ammonites. This practice which polluted the land of Canaan eventually infected the hearts of worship of the Israelites. The worship of Molech occurred in the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem and was prohibited by God (Lev. 20.2-5). Anyone practicing such evil was to be put to death. It is worth noting that King Solomon eventually became involved in this horrendous practice as recorded in 1 Kings 11.4-11. This practice, later led by the evil king Manassah (who offered his own son as a sacrifice - 2 Kings 21.6) as did Ahaz (2 Chron. 28.1-4). This became one of the reasons for the Babylonian captivity (Jer. 32.35-36). Needless to say, God hates *"hands that shed innocent blood"* (Prov. 6.17), and we can sure that God will judge any people or nation who practice such a horrendous sin.

Our security in the Lord: (v.4-5) "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth" (v.4) - During Biblical times grown children normally cared for their parents in their old age. They would defend them as the parents became

increasingly dependent and vulnerable. This is essentially what Solomon had in mind in verses 4 and 5.

Children as our defense: Children can be a defense for their parents from exterior and interior foes. Like arrows that defend against attacking invaders, so are children to be for their parents.

Children as our Insurance: "When they speak with their enemies in the gate" (v.5) - Negotiating in the gate pictures defending against enemies who would seek to rob the defenseless through legal maneuvering and bring shame on them. Thus, children can be a kind of insurance policy, but not one that someone can work hard to buy. They are still a gift from God.

Children as a blessing: "How blessed in the man whose quiver is full of them" (v.5) - The word "blessed" can be translated as "happy." The reward of children is not only God's gift of security and insurance, but brings "happiness" and "fullness" to one's life.

- C. LIVE IT:** This is another reminder that all things in life, prosperity and provision comes from the Lord, including children. In God's economy the heritage of family is the best system for senior welfare. The social welfare for senior parents was never meant to be the responsibility of the government or the church (except in the case of widows and orphans - Jms. 1.27). The welfare of parents and their widows were first to fall on their children, for if children neglected this honorable role, they were to be considered worse than unbelievers (1 Tim. 5.3-4,8). The Bible says, "*Honor your father and mother*" - this is the first commandment with a promise - "*that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth*" (Eph. 6.2-3).

CONCLUSION: (*Focus of the Pilgrim*)

For the pilgrim who quoted this psalm on his journey to Jerusalem three times a year is reminded that none of us are never self-made. We owe all that we possess to God's providence. Therefore, as Christian pilgrims in this world we should avoid the trap of depending totally on ourselves for all we need in life. We should instead, trust God as we work and acknowledge His good gifts.

As stated before, no one is a self-made person. We were created in the image of God to serve and glorify Him in all that we do and say.

A PSALTER: Psalm 127
C.M. (Alas and Did my Savior Died)

- (1) Except the Lord do build the house,
 the builders lose their pain:
Except the Lord the city keep,
 the watchmen watch in vain.
- 2 'Tis vain for you to rise betimes,
 or late from rest to keep,
To feed on sorrows' bread; so gives
 he his beloved sleep.
- 3 Lo, children are God's heritage,
 the womb's fruit his reward.
- 4 The sons of youth as arrows are,
 for strong men's hands prepared.
- 5 O happy is the man that hath
 his quiver filled with those;
They unashamed in the gate
 shall speak unto their foes.

PSALMS OF ASCENT
Lesson #9: “The Pilgrim who Fears the Lord is Blessed”
Psalm 128

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND: The pilgrim who journeyed to Jerusalem for the annual festivals would more likely have taken his family with him. We know that Jesus' family made the sixty-four mile journey every year from Nazareth to Jerusalem (Lk. 2.41). Since the journey involved families, it makes sense that one of the psalms of ascent would be devoted to the family. Jesus Himself would have recited Psalm 128 along the way.

This psalm along with Psalm 127 have similar themes: Both emphasize the importance of trusting God in all things pertaining to life, work, home and nation. Psalm 128 begins with a summary statement that one is blessed when they fear the Lord and walk in His ways (v.1). This blessing extends into one's lifetime (v.4) and nation (v.5). The writer then concludes this psalm with a blessing of peace on Israel (v.6).

Psalm 128 is a psalm of didactic wisdom as the writer reflects on previous blessings and then prays for greater long term blessings. If you recall the background in Psalm 127, the purpose of wisdom literature in the Bible is to focus on happiness and success. It is based on three things: the experience of previous generations, cause and effect in life's relationships and that trusting God has its rewards (Deut. 27-29). Therefore, the wisdom of Psalm 128 is to show the reader an ideal that God wants you to fear Him and walk in His ways. Like throwing a pebble in a placid lake, this psalm teaches that with a godly man as the head of the home, this idea ripples out to his wife, then to the children, and finally shows its effect on the nation (source unknown).

A possible commentary for this psalm could be Zechariah 8. The prophet shares the Lord's plans to restore the remnant from captivity to Jerusalem. For instance, compare:

- Psalm 128.2 and Zechariah 8.10 (Labor).
- Psalm 128.3 and Zechariah 8.5 (Family).
- Psalm 128.6 and Zechariah 8.4 (Seniors).

Therefore, as Jonathan Parnell states, this psalm "envisions the coming day of peace and blessing in Jerusalem."

KEY THOUGHT: The one who fears the Lord and obeys His commands is a blessing in his vocation, home and nation.

I. SUMMARY STATEMENT (Psalm 127.1)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 127.1*)

1. Read Psalm 128 and Zechariah 8. Note other similarities than the ones stated above.
2. How would you state the main idea in verse 1?
3. What does the psalm writer mean by "who walks in His ways?" (cf. Ps. 119.3)

B. LEARN IT:

German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) has come to be known as the "Father of Modern Liberal Theology." He single handedly changed how pastors and theologians interpret the Scripture. The Old Testament in his observation was not useful or authoritative and that the New Testament was based on the writings of early Christians' feelings. Thus, there is no truth beyond how one feels. How one feel may direct how one interprets Scripture and how they view God. Friedrich's influence then created a high view of man and a low view of God. His philosophy developed no fear of God and a disregard for His word by which to live by.

The writer of Psalm 128 counters this ideal in that the only way one can be truly happy and blessed is first by "fearing" God and "walk in His ways." Solomon supports this idea as he summarizes in a number of places by stating that *"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1.7)* or again, *"fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (Ecc. 12.13)*. This Biblical idea of happiness is opposite to that of the liberal mindset which is driven by ones' experience, feelings, and motions as the foundation of viewing Scripture and life. Thus, the psalm writer is saying that one is happier when they have a high view of God rather than the low view of God which drives the life of a pagan who often lives in a state of fear and unsatisfied life. Though they may gain the world, they forfeit their soul (Mat. 16.26).

The State of being "blessed": The words "blessed, happy, and bless" are used four times in this psalm with two different Hebrew words. The writer of this psalm used the Hebrew word "eshet" for "blessed" (v.1) and "happy" (v.2). The word describes the Lord's active part in "blessing" a person who chooses to have a high view of Him and His word. Whereas, he uses the Hebrew word "barak" for "blessed" (v.4) and "bless" (v. 5) to describe the good that comes when people do that which pleases the Lord (Wiersbe). Therefore, in both accounts the active agent of being blessed is the Lord as one sees Him "sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted" (Isa. 6.1) rather than being controlled by their own feelings and emotions.

"Fearing God": The Hebrew word for "fears" (vv.1,4) is "yare." It describes one who is in awe or terribly frightened by an object, thing, or person. In this case, Jehovah God. Jesus taught His disciples not to fear man or circumstances in a way that shows a lack of trust in God's protection (Matt. 10.26-31). The same idea is expressed here by the writer of this psalm. What is helpful here is that God's word is teaching us that the Lord does not want us to be paralyzed in life with unhealthy fears. The proper fear of God removes all others. Jesus warns His disciples, *"But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!" (Lk. 12.5)*. Obviously, Jesus is speaking of God the Father. When one reverently fears the Lord by having a proper respect and awe for who He is and His word, then you are not controlled by your own emotions or unhealthy fear. As we love the Lord with all our

being, that kind of love for Him drives out all fear (1 Jn. 4.18). This keeps us from being overcome by peer pressure, codependency, and the fear of man as Edward T. Welch writes about in his book, "When People are Big and God is Small."

The Pilgrim's Walk: The next part of this state of being blessed is not only based on the condition of one's fear of the Lord, but also one's regard for His ways and His word. Essentially, what the writer is stating concerning the pilgrims' walk is that the person who fears the Lord will do no unrighteousness (Ps. 119.3). What does it mean to do no unrighteousness? It means that the pattern and habits of your life are to yield to the Lord's standard of righteousness and not the world's standard. The Ten Commandments are a good example what it means to do what is right versus doing what is unrighteous (Ex. 20.1-17).

1. You shall have no other gods before Me (Ex. 20.3).
2. You shall not make idols (Ex. 20.4).
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain (Ex.20.6).
4. Remember the Sabbath day, keep it holy (Ex.20.8).
5. Honor your parents all your days (Ex.20.12).
6. Do not commit murder (Ex.20.13).
7. Do not commit adultery (Ex.20.14).
8. Do not steal (Ex.20.15).
9. Do not bear false witness against your neighbor (Ex.20.16).
10. Do not covet (Ex. 20.17).

These ten laws were given by the Lord to show His people the big idea on how to live a better life now and please Him forever. Psalm 1 tells us that the one who is "blessed" is the one who *"does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers"* (Ps. 1.1). This kind of person will be like *"a tree firmly planted by streams of water...and in whatever he does, he prospers"* (Ps.1.3). Why? because not only does he fear the Lord, but delights in His law (Ps. 1.2).

- C. LIVE IT:** What is your foundational view of God. Is He high and lifted up, or do you have a low view of Him. Do you fear and respect the philosophy of man over who God is and His ways? Do you journey in this world with a healthy fear of the Lord or a unhealthy fear of man and circumstances. Do you do what is right or do you do what is wrong according to God's word. Proverbs 4.14-15 states, *"Do not enter the path of the wicked and do not proceed in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not pass by it; Turn away from it and pass on."* Do you feel truly and wholly blessed? The state of being blessed by the Lord first begins by fearing Him and walking in His ways.

II. SPECIFIC BLESSINGS (Psalm 127.2-4)

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 127.2-4)

1. How would you summarize verse 2 as you also compare it to Ecclesiastes 8.12?

2. What do you suppose is the meaning of the writer's description of one's wife and children in verse 3?
3. How does he summarize these verses in verse 4 and what does he mean by it?

B. LEARN IT:

Next, the writer of this psalm applies Israel's two most productive industries to the blessing of one's work and home. It is clear that the writer is placing this application on a man who is not only a God-fearer, but also a godly employee, husband and father. This is the big idea from the psalm writer.

Blessed Labor (v.2): The benefit of fearing and walking with the Lord is witnessed by their work ethic. When one works he eats in peace. Working is essential to living and obtaining the essentials for life. When people refuse to work they reveal a lack of common sense in their judgment. Some, refuse to work because they are looking for the better job (Prov. 12.11). Refusing work is not only dishonoring God's design for man (Gen. 2.15; 2 Thess. 3.10), it will not yield a blessed state of peace. Therefore, the work of the person who fears and obeys God will be productive. His labor will yield joy and well-being to him (v.2; cf. 127.1-2; Ecc. 8.12).

Blessed Home (v.3): The second promise to the one who fears the Lord and walks in His ways is in having a godly home. This begins with a wife that will be *"like a fruitful vine within your house."* Every wife had her special room in the back of their tent or house. It was usually located as far from the front door as possible. The place of a faithful wife was not a unhappy state, especially if she was married to a godly husband. She lovingly cares for the home and children. For the husband, the fruit that came from this relationship was like that of a vineyard in the home. Not only would his wife be virtuous by her management of the home, she would also fulfill another aspect of God's design by being fruitful in child bearing and her children would call her blessed (Gen. 1.22; Prov. 31.10-31). To find such a woman is a blessed and worthy find.

Likewise, the children of the godly would make beneficial contributions symbolized by olives, another one of the important crops in Israel (v.4). The reference of children being *"like olive plants around your table"* (v.3b) refers to a plant that symbolizes longevity and productivity. This state of blessedness will extend to one generation to another (v.4; Ps. 145). The point being, unless there is reverential fear of God and obedience to Him, there will not be a happy home (James Vernon McGee).

- C. LIVE IT:** What is missing most in the Christian homes today is not the church, community or government, but a godly man who loves the Lord more than anything. A man who fears the Lord and walks in His word. This man is more likely to be blessed by the Lord in what takes place in job and home life. Men in the church today are basically a non-factor in many homes. This excludes the pagan homes, in that, some so called Christian homes are not much different than pagan ones. The priorities of such families

are such that they would rather be in the world and follow its' path. In doing so they fill themselves with all its' distracting activities and morals, rather than fearing the Lord and honoring His standard and design for the home and life. I would suspect that if the typical Hebrew family from Psalm 128 were to witness the condition of home life in many Christian homes today, they would be greatly disappointed by what they see. Fortunately, they are not the ones we are to please. The only One we must please is the One who calls use⁴ to fear Him only and walk according to His ways, doing no wrong.

III. SPECIFIC SUPPLICATION (Psalm 127.5-6)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 127.5-6*)

1. How would you summarize verses 5-6?
2. What is the implication of these two verses?

B. LEARN IT:

Finally, the psalmist offered a general prayer for his readers' future, and then specified particular blessings from verses 1-4. In referring back to Zechariah 8, this petition in seeing Jerusalem prosper all of one's days is appropriate in a psalm of ascent. The prosperity of the city would extend to every family in the nation ultimately. See here! If the psalm writers' idea were a contagious virus, it would have such an impact that their culture would be blessed and reflect the kingdom of God.

We are mostly defined by our culture rather than influencing our culture. Jesus told His disciples that *"you are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men"* (Matt. 5.13). What happened to Israel before the exile is that they were not influencing their culture and world around them. They had not become the lights to the gentiles that the Lord had commanded and desired them to be (Isa.49.6). The Lord still desires that we as individuals and as families continue that theme in being His light in the world so that when people see your good works they will glorify the Lord who is in heaven (Matt. 5.16).

The blessing requested by the psalm writer belongs to God. It is His to bestow, not anyone else. We are reminded that a fruitful life comes from Him. It comes from Zion, the mountain of God where His house or temple is located (Ps. 2.6; 48.2). This blessing is not just for us who live today, it is also for our inheritance. Meaning, in seeing the generations to continue, they will carry the blessing and we will be blessed by this too. For instance, the Lord promised Abraham that He would make him into a great nation and *"I will bless you"* (Gen. 12.2). This blessing is God's active part, not anything that Abraham could actively do. It would be dependent on God's sovereign will and plan to work His purpose out through Abraham and his future generations, with the end result of not only blessing him, but many other nations, to the glory of God.

So, it is with those who fear the Lord and walk in His ways. You are blessed when you follow His precepts and uphold Him above all else. Likewise, you are also blessed by the Lord when you submit yourself and your ways. All that you have to do is love Him with all your heart and being. How wonderful it would be that because of one's faithfulness to the Lord they would see *"one generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts"* (Gen. 145.4). What a joy and blessing to see ones children and grandchildren expressing praise to the Lord for who He is and His mighty acts for years to come. In just a few verses the writer presents three generations in this psalm. All of them walking with the Lord. *"Peace be upon Israel!"* (Ps. 128.6b).

- C. LIVE IT:** If in this study of Psalm 128 and Psalm 127 you find yourself thinking, "I have not been obedient nor feared the Lord. My family has not benefited because I have lived for the world." It's not too late to change? Now is the time to begin fearing and living for the Lord! You start by submitting your ways to Him alone (Jms 4.7; Rom. 12.1-2) and trusting in Him to restore, encourage, and cause you to be His light to the world, including your family. All one has to do is simply fear God and trust His ways, *"because this applies to every person"* (Ecc. 12.13b).

A PSALTER: Psalm 128
C.M. 0

- (1) Blessed is each one that fears the Lord,
and walketh in his ways;
- 2 For of thy labour thou shalt eat,
and happy be always.
- 3 Thy wife shall as a fruitful vine
by thy house' sides be found:
Thy children like to olive-plants
about thy table round.
- 4 Behold, the man that fears the Lord,
thus bless-ed shall he be.
- 5 The Lord shall out of Zion give
his blessing unto thee:
- Thou shalt Jerus'lem's good behold
whilst thou on earth dost dwell.
- 6 Thou shalt thy children's children see,
and peace on Israel.

PSALMS OF ASCENT
Lesson #10: "The Pilgrim's Affliction and God's Intervention"
Psalm 129

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND: A recent internet article by Barry Leventhal for "Jews for Jesus" writes about the subject of "anti-semitism." He first states that "anti-semitism is both illogical and irrational. It's bitter fruit stems from psychological, political, and religious roots. Whatever the causes, this scourge has plagued humanity for centuries." What is "anti-semitism"? It is defined as any hostility to or prejudice against the Jews.

Where did it come from and when? It's beginning goes back as far as around 1550 B.C. The Egyptians from the book of Exodus have the infamous distinction of being the first anti-semitic nation because they feared that the Jews would outgrow and outnumber them, thus takeover their empire and rule over them. Therefore, "...they appointed task masters over them to afflict them with hard labor." (Ex.1.8-14). Later, the King of Egypt ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill any newborn sons of Hebrew women (Ex.1.15-16). All this was not a surprised to the Lord or Israel for the Lord told Abraham, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions" (Gen. 15.13-14). Here we see God's sovereignty over people and nations. We also see that even though His chosen people would be afflicted, He would intervene, rescue and bless them as His own.

Since then, Israel has through the centuries both in Biblical history and modern history been afflicted, even to the point of being wiped off the face of the earth. Yet, time and time again, the Lord proves faithful in protecting His own. Calling them back to repentance and faithful to His covenant promise. In this psalm of communal confidence, we see the psalmist praising the Lord for doing so, and then asked Him to continue doing so. Some have called this psalm, a psalm of trust, with its roots in the psalms of lament. It also contains some imprecations as well. Meaning that it is a psalm that invokes judgement, calamity, or curses upon God's enemies.

The psalm opens with a tribute to past deliverances by urging the people to acknowledge that had enabled Israel to survive the many persecution she had experienced throughout her history (vv. 1-2). The enemies of Israel had plowed deep furrows on Israel's back. A vivid figure of speech in an agricultural economy (vv.3-4). Then the psalmist petitions the Lord for continuing deliverance and safekeeping in the future against future enemies who oppose them (vv.5-8).

KEY THOUGHT: God's people should give thanks to the Lord for past deliverances and pray for continuing deliverance in the future.

I. THE PILGRIM'S TRIBUTE FOR PAST DELIVERANCES (Psalm 129.1-4)

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 129.1-4)

1. What is the psalmist thankful for and how does he communicate his gratitude?
2. What do you suspect the psalmist means by "many times they have persecuted me from my youth up"? (v.1) Who is he speaking of? Literally himself or all of Israel for all history?

3. What main example in Israel's past history could the psalmist be reminded of, especially in regards to his "youth"?
4. Why has Israel not been destroyed by her enemies?

B. LEARN IT: These verses reflect Israel's past afflictions and God's faithful intervention.

Persecuted (vv. 1-2): *"Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up."* - The psalmist begins this prayer by giving tribute to the Lord for the many times Israel had been afflicted by her enemies. Beginning with her youth as a nation in Egypt, she was oppressed, afflicted, enslaved, then delivered by God's own hand (Gen. 46-50; Ex. 1-13). Many nations have committed themselves to Israel's destruction. Outside of the Egyptians, there were the Amalekites (Ex. 17.8; Jdg 3.13), Canaanites and surrounding nations (Jos. 11.1-5); Syrians (Jdg 3.8; 1Ki 11.25); Moabites (Jdg 3.12; 2 Ki. 24.2); Assyrians (2 Ki. 15.19); Babylonians (2 Ki. 24.1); Greeks (Zec. 9.13); Romans (Jn 11.48). These are just a few references of Israel's enemies. No matter how large, cunning, equipped, cruel or oppressive they were, the Lord has protected and delivered Israel time and time again.

The question one may ask then, why were nations opposed to Israel? For one, it wasn't because of Israel's greatness. God did not choose Israel because they were anything special, but because of His promise to Abraham that He would make of him a great nation (Gen. 12.3). Secondly, it was not because of their might or success. Israel was obviously and consistently disobedient to the Lord through the centuries. Speaking of the Lord's choosing, the Apostle Paul speaks to this in 1 Corinthians 1.26. He states that the Lord often chooses the weak to shame the wise and strong so that no human being might boast in His presence (1 Cor. 1.27, 29).

But the question remains, why are they hated? Could it simply be because they are God's chosen people and God has plans for them in His kingdom through His only the Son, the Messiah, the Savior? This has been God's focus from before time and because of this, Satan, the Devil hates anything and everything about God, therefore he hates Israel because God has so identified Himself with His chosen people. It has been Satan's focus on destroying God's people for centuries. We see this beginning in the garden (Gen. 3); with Job (Job 1-2.8); then Esau and Jacob (Gen. 27.41); even Jesus on the cross (1 Cor. 15.55-57). It's as if mortal man has been caught in the cross-fire (pun intended) of a heavenly feud between God the creator of all things and one of His creations, Satan. In the end, Satan knows he will be defeated, but will still attempt without success thwart God's sovereign plan.

Not Crushed (vv. 3-4): *"...The Lord is righteous; He has cut in two the cords of the wicked"* - How has Israel been persecuted? The picture of the sharp cutting edges of the plow creating deep furrows depict prisoners being whipped which leave long, deep gashes on their backs. One may picture how those during their slavish captivity in Egypt being whipped by their taskmasters. Or, those taken into captivity by the Assyrians or Babylonians received the cutting cords of the whip, perhaps in the fields, breaking up the

follow ground enduring the tormenting affliction by their oppressors. Many Israelites felt the pain of the whip on their backs yet the Lord promised to intervene for them (Isa. 51.23).

Picture here one in captivity who is behind an oxen which pulls the plow in the field. The psalmist shows how the Lord sets the remnant free by cutting the cord in two of their wicked oppressors and sets the exiles free from their years of affliction. They return to Zion, confessing, giving thanks to the Lord as they give tribute to Him for His "righteousness."

- C. LIVE IT:** What about the pilgrim today. The Apostle Paul speaks concerning of his apostolic ministry as being a earthen vessels that carry a great treasure...*"so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body"* (2 Cor. 4.7-10).

Even Jesus promises those who follow Him will be persecuted. That true ministry involves suffering for persecution and proclamation are inseparable (Mk. 13.9-13; Mt. 5.11-12). Jesus reminds us that the worse our opponents can do to us is kill us, and we will die anyway with or without their persecution (Mt. 10.24-33). We are persecuted because we love the Father and the world hates the Father without a cause (Jn. 15.25). Just as some may hate a master, they will also hate his servants for the servant is not greater than his master (Jn. 15.20).

All this to say, we are persecuted as God's people because the world hates the Lord and His plan of redemption. Just as much the world is an enemy of God, through Christ, the world will hate you too. But, the silver lining in all this is be of good cheer, for our Lord has overcome the world (Jn. 16.33). For Jesus states, *"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."*

How has Jesus overcome the world? By His death on the cross and the power of His resurrection. Even Jesus felt the plows upon His back as the suffering servant. He was broken, despised by men. He was pierced for our transgressions, not His. By oppression and judgement He was taken away like a Lamb that is led to slaughter. Yet, though He was crushed, He bore the sin of many and intercedes for the transgressors (Isa. 53). This is God's greatest tribute, His atoning work on the cross.

II. THE PILGRIM'S PETITION FOR FUTURE DELIVERANCE (Psalm 129.5-8)

A. LOOK IT UP: *(Read Psalm 129.5-8)*

1. What is the psalmist petitioning God for in verses 5-8?
2. Look up Ruth 2.4 and compare to Psalm 129.8. What was customary blessing and why is the psalmist encouraging his readers not to bless those who hate Zion?

3. What is the psalmist saying then about trusting in God in these verses?
4. What does this say about seeking vengeance?

B. LEARN IT: Acknowledging that the Lord is righteous in all that He does, it is important to know that in His continual deliverance of His own, vengeance belongs to Him alone (Deut. 32.35). God's people need to always remember that the Lord has a sovereign plan even if the plan means we have to walk through the valley of the shadow of persecution.

Calling out those who hate Zion (v. 5a): "May all who hate Zion..." - The psalmist here calls out Zion's enemies and then moves to praying for their demise. One cannot help to recall God's promise to Abraham to make from him a nation that will bless many nations, but His conditional punishment to those who curse His people (Gen. 12.3).

The word "curse(s)" in Genesis 12.3 are two different Hebrew words. The first is (qal-al) which means to bring on a curse, despise, or contempt. The second is (a-rar) which means, "cursed be those who cursed" or "cursed is everyone who curses." So, in essence the Lord is actually saying in Genesis 12.3, "the one who 'reviles' (curses) you, I (God) will 'bind them under a curse.'" This means that those hate His people will have to contend God.

Cursing those who hate Zion (vv.5b-8): "...be put to shame and turned backward..." - The wonderful insight about Scripture is that even though it is all the divine inspired word of God (2 Tim. 3.16-17), the Holy Spirit allows for the author's emotions and feelings to be revealed and expressed. When we come to verses like (vv.5-8) we need to hermeneutically decide are they descriptive or prescriptive.

If descriptive, then the psalmist is describing how he feels about those who hate Zion and what he would desire the Lord to do to them. If prescriptive, one could interpret these verses as an exhortation to curse anyone who hates Zion. These verses should be taken descriptively rather than prescriptive. For, since we know that vengeance belongs to the Lord, there is no need for us to petition any curse on anyone since doing so would actually bring a curse on oneself.

Imprecatory prayer: What we have here is a "imprecatory prayer." This kind of prayer is often seen in psalms written by David (Ps. 7, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 109, 139). To imprecate means "to invoke evil upon or curse one's enemies." These prayers were written not so much to exact revenge upon one's enemies, but rather to emphasize God's abhorrence of evil, His sovereignty over all mankind, and His divine protection of His chosen people. Many of these prayers were prophetic and could be seen taking place later in the New Testament in actual historical events ([www.gotquestions.com/what is imprecatory prayer?](http://www.gotquestions.com/what_is_imprecatory_prayer?)).

So what were the psalmist requests of the Lord?

First Petition: "Flight in battle": - "...be put to shame and turned backward;" (v.5b) - Since Zion is the mountain upon which Jerusalem was built, it symbolizes God's people. The petition here is that those who hate Israel are to be shamed by defeat in battle and are turned back like a retreating army. The end result being victory for Israel.

Second Petition: "Fruitless labor": - "Let them be like grass upon the housetops..." (vv. 6-7) - The roofs in ancient Israel were constructed of beams covered with branches. They were then layered with clay. When it rained, grass easily grew from seeds in the clay only to wither quickly in the scorching Palestinian sun. This petition describes the enemies of Israel are to be like grass which are quickly scorched. A secondary petition is that these enemies are not to be fruitful as would the harvest would be for the reaper (v.7).

Third and final Petition: "Frozen blessings": - "nor do those who pass by say, 'The Blessing on the Lord be upon you...'" (v.8) - This petition is in reference to the neighborly blessing for those working in the fields as they pass by each other. We see a reference to this in Ruth 2.4 where Boaz greets the reapers in his field by saying, "May the Lord be with you." Then they would say back, "May the Lord bless you." Since those who hate Zion are under the curse of God's judgment, His people must not bless them in a neighborly way.

- C. LIVE IT:** What then does this mean for the pilgrim? Trusting in God for his ongoing deliverance of His people from their oppressors. This trust is reflective and illuminating. Meaning, as one looks back in how the Lord has worked His purpose out for those He loves (despite the suffering they faced), he can look ahead to future deliverances by trusting in the Lord to fulfill His promise to keep His own.

Josh Moody (Journey to Joy, p. 116ff) offers this insight to these verses as a model to copy and a warning to heed. He warns against using this psalm for petty vindictiveness. We need to remember that the battle belongs to the Lord (1 Sam. 17.47). Secondly, he warns against the pharisaic mindset that states a self-righteous spirit (Lk. 18.11). Finally, and mostly there is the model of redemption. Mostly, forgiveness. It is easy for us to take our afflictions to the Lord and imprecate a prayer on them, but we need to take our wounds to the cross to help us get over past afflictions and move forward with healing in relationships.

Even Jesus, being hated and rejected by His own still gave of Himself sacrificially, even prayed to the Father to forgive His accusers "for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk. 23.34). This was consistent with Jesus' teaching to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5.44). Still yet, when Jesus would cross over through Samaria to preach the good news to those the Jews hated in John 4, the Samaritans would eventually believe in His message and know for themselves that He indeed is the Savior of the world (Jn.4.42). Thus, before Jesus ascends into heaven

exhorts His disciples to go out into all the world, beginning with Jerusalem, Judea, and yes, even Samaria to be His witnesses (Acts 1.8) fulfilling the great commission (Matt. 28.16-20).

CONCLUSION: The Pilgrim's Focus

For the pilgrim who was traveling from his home to Jerusalem for the annual feasts this psalm is a reminder to the one who may face persecution, the Lord is faithful to deliver. For the Christian pilgrim, it's a similar theme. We are certain as followers of Christ, we will be persecuted for the sake of righteousness and be insulted because of Christ. Our focus then, if afflicted because of Christ is to "rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great" (Matt. 5.10-11; Jms 1.2).

A PSALTER: Psalm 129
C.M. 0

- (1) Oft did they vex me from my youth,
 may Isr'el now declare;
- 2 Oft did they vex me from my youth,
 yet not victorious were.
- 3 The plowers plowed upon my back;
 they long their furrows drew.
- 4 The righteous Lord did cut the cords
 of the ungodly crew.
- 5 Let Zion's haters all be turned
 back with confusion.
- 6 As grass on houses' tops be they,
 which fades ere it be grown:
- 7 Whereof enough to fill his hand
 the mower cannot find;
Nor can the man his bosom fill,
 whose work is sheaves to bind.
- 8 Neither say they who do go by,
 God's blessing on you rest:
We in the name of God the Lord
 do wish you to be blest.

PSALMS OF ASCENT
Lesson #11: "The Pilgrim's Hope and Faith"
Psalm 130-131

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND: The New Testament Pilgrim is instructed to walk *"in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called."* (Eph. 4.1). This walk includes: humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, love, unity of Spirit and faith (Eph. 4.2-3). The Christian Pilgrim is not to walk as the Gentiles (Pagans) walk, but walk by putting on the new self, which is in the likeness of God (Eph. 4.23-24). To do this we are to *"lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"* (Heb, 12.1). This is the sentiment of the remaining five Psalms of Ascent.

The progression of Psalms 130-134 are to encourage the Old Testament Pilgrim to finish well. First by laying aside that which encumbrances them by confessing sin and placing their hope in the Lord (Ps. 130). Secondly, like a child, humble themselves before the Lord and trusting in Him alone (Ps. 131). Walking also means to hold on to the promise we have from the Lord concerning His chosen One (Ps. 132). As one walks in God's promises, he is to walk in unity, making every effort to keep the peace as he comes to worship (Ps. 133). Finally, as we gather together for worship, we forget about ourselves and simply praise the Lord for who He is and for what He has done (Ps. 134). As you have made this journey through these psalms, it is my prayer that you are being encouraged in your walk to endure to the end. Today we will focus on two of the five remaining psalms, Psalm 130 and 131.

Psalm 130, written by an unknown author, it is an individual penitential psalm of lament. A penitential psalm is a psalm of confession. Five of these psalms were written by David (6, 32, 38, 51 & 143). The others (102, 130) are anonymous. The most notable of these is Psalm 51 as David laments to the Lord concerning His sin with Bathsheba.

The use of the penitent psalms were to aid the worshipper to express individual sorrow for personal sin. They became a part of Israel's worship and later in the early church as they were used in liturgy for Ash Wednesday. Though these seven psalms express the sinner's lament over personal sin, Psalm 130 offers hope as it emphasizes what God does for helpless people who cry out to Him for mercy.

It is possible as the pilgrims made their final approach to Jerusalem that they used this psalm to confess their sin to God and sought His forgiveness and blessing before coming to His sanctuary to worship Him. This is a great reminder for all pilgrim's of the Lord to prepare themselves for worship.

Our other Psalm of focus, Psalm 131, is authored by David. In just a few words, David speaks of his humble trust in the Lord and his hope in Him. What is remarkable about this psalm are the humble words from a powerful king revealing his high view of the Lord and his confidence in Him alone rather than himself.

KEY THOUGHT: No matter one's greatness, all those who place their hope and faith in the Lord must do so with complete humility before the One who not only is able to forgive sin, but redeem us from sin.

I. THE PILGRIM'S HOPE (Psalm 130)

A. LOOK IT UP: (*Read Psalm 130.1-8*)

1. What do you perceive is the general condition of the writer in Psalm 130? (v.1)
2. What reality does the writer understand concerning the Lord? (vv. 3-4) - i.e. Compare and contrast these verses.
3. What does he tell the Lord he will do then and what does he mean in verse 6? (vv. 5-6)
4. What exhortation and promise does the writer proclaim in verses 7-8?
5. How does this psalm encourage you in your walk with the Lord?

B. LEARN IT: The writer of Psalm 130 felt that he was at the very end of his rope (cf. 30.2-3; 71.20). This expression stresses urgency in his request. The particular situation he faced is unknown, but in view of verse 8, it may have been oppression by an enemy.

A cry for mercy (vv. 1-2): *"Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord..."* - One is never too low or far gone in life to go to the Lord in prayer. "Out of the depths" tells us that the writer was in a very dark place in life. He has no where else to turn but to the Lord. Lamentations 3.55 describes one in this situation as being in the "lowest pit." In this dark place the writer states that he has "cried" to the Lord to "hear" his voice (v.2). "Cried (qara)" and "hear (shama)" have the ideas of proclaiming and announcing. We are familiar with (shama) from Deuteronomy 6.4 where it states, *"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!"* This cry from the psalmist is like a beggar's petition as he continually begs the great King to lend an ear to the voice of his "supplication" (v.2b).

A confession of forgiveness (vv. 3-4): *"...but there is forgiveness with you..."* - From the writer's plea also comes a realistic confession. Man's sin, God's judgement and forgiveness. This psalm is similar to Isaiah's confession in Isaiah chapter 6 where Isaiah was confronted with God's holy presence in the Temple and acknowledge that he was a sinner before a holy God. Because of this, he knew his doom was sure by saying, *"woe is me, for I am ruined" (Isa. 6.5)*. This writer of Psalm 130 recognized that he and his peers were truly in the hands of God's justice and mercy because of sin. Paul states in Romans that *"for the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6.23)* and again Paul states in Ephesians 2, *"and you were dead in your trespasses and sins..." (Eph. 2.1)*. Yet, despite of this, there is mercy with the Lord. In verse 4, the writer introduces the "gospel conjunction" by stating, *"but there is forgiveness with You" (v.4)*. The writer is not only fully aware that the Lord has it fully in His right to exercise His judgment on him, yet at the same time he is also aware that there is "forgiveness" with the Lord so that He may "be feared." Meaning, so that he may be in awe of God's grace and give glory to Him alone. The idea

here is "pardon" and "perfect sanctification." If God were to exercise His justice upon all, none would be left to fear Him. It is by His grace alone that leads us to regard the Lord with holy fear and reverence towards Him.

A challenge to wait (vv. 5-6): *"I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait..."* - The writer makes his desperate plea to the Lord to hear his voice. He also acknowledges before the Lord that none could stand before judgement, yet "forgiveness" is found in Him. Because of "forgiveness" the writer eagerly "waits for the Lord" (v.5). This is a challenge for us all. Waiting for things, waiting for people, waiting in line, waiting in traffic. We do not like to wait, especially when we are waiting in the pit of despair of life.

The word "wait (qavah)" is used three times in verses 5-6. The word expresses "expectation, hope, and patience." The writer illustrates this "waiting" as a "watchman for the morning" (v.6). Like one who stands guard from the watch tower on the city wall through the night. He waits patiently on the Lord as the morning light that rises over the horizon. The psalm writer is stating that he expects the Lord to come to his aid and will quietly wait for His appearing. God's people should be use to "waiting" on the Lord. His people waited for His first advent and now we wait for His second.

What are we waiting for? The complete and perfect sanctification and consummation relationship with the Lord. We are waiting for a happier condition that is to come for us in the Lord. Perhaps you are waiting today in the darkest place of cancer that has ravaged your body. One day your waiting will be worth it. One day this mortal and perishable body will be replaced with an immortal and imperishable body. This will happen when the Lord comes back to call us to Himself, and thus we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thes. 4.17b). When that day comes and in that moment we will all be changed (1 Cor. 15.50-57). The church today is described in scripture as a bride waiting for her husband (2 Cor. 11.2; Matt. 25.1-13). By way of application what the writer of this psalm is saying is what Isaiah also stated that: *"those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soared on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint"* (Isa. 40.31).

A call for hope (vv. 7-8): *"O, Israel, hope in the Lord;..."* - This expectation leads the writer to exhort all of Israel to "hope in the Lord" (v.7). He is setting the example for all to follow. Just like Israel of old (Jacob) waited on the Lord and wrestled with Him all through the night. In the end Israel went his way with the promise of hope for all his offspring because the Lord has great things in stored for His people. Likewise, those this psalmist exhorted should have big expectations of hope in the Lord.

This hope is coupled with His "lovingkindness" and "abundant redemption." Despite Israel's sin of idolatry, there is mercy in the Lord to deliver them effectually from their sin by God's own love and abundant redemption. Paul says in Romans 5.8 that: *"But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* Again Paul states: *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us"* (Eph. 1.7-8a).

What the psalmist and Paul are saying is that no matter the depth of your sin, God's grace can forgive and save you from all sin *"for nothing will be impossible with God"* (Lk. 1.37). The psalm writer concludes to all of Israel this promise, *"And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities"* (v.8). Abraham was promised by the Lord that in him (Abraham) *"all the families of the earth will be blessed"* (Gen. 12.3b). Meaning through his seed, God will work salvation out for all He calls His own through His only Son, Christ Jesus our Lord (Jn. 3.16; Acts 3.25; Gal. 3.8).

- C. LIVE IT:** Today, God's redeemed saints can call to him out of the depths of their affliction. We can find encouragement in the fact that God has forgiven us all sins past, present, and future. However, we can also look forward to our full, ultimate redemption when we see Him. Until then, we should hope in the Lord, as a watchman waiting for the dawning of our new day, namely: our glorification.

II. THE PILGRIM'S FAITH (Psalm 131)

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 131.1-3)

1. Knowing this Psalm is written by King David, a great warrior and of great power, what do you find remarkable concerning David's personal prayer? List and explain.
2. What do you notice about his soul in verse 2?
3. How long is exhortation to hope in the Lord to last? (v.3)

- B. LEARN IT:** In reflection of Psalm 130 which finds the writer in the pit of despair, this Psalm finds its writer (David) possibly in the prime of his life. Both Psalms conclude with the same exhortation that all Israel, rich or poor, high and lowly, are to put their hope alone in the Lord. In Psalm 131, David speaks of his humble trust and hope in the Lord. These are remarkable statements for a powerful king to have written.

A humble heart (v. 1): *"O Lord, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty..."* - One must be careful how he approaches the Lord concerning himself. The Lord is not one to be trifled with and omnisciently knows all things concerning the condition of one's heart. Jesus gives light to this when John wrote that Jesus Himself *"knew what was in man"* (Jn. 2.25). David begins this brief psalm by declaring to the Lord that his *"heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty"* (v.1). Both words, "proud" and "haughty" indicate "exaltation." As David approaches the Lord, he begins where we all should begin when we examine ourselves before the Lord, with our heart. David is making an honest assessment of his heart before the Lord by indicating that he has not sought after elevated places where he might gratify his ego. Nor, in his estimation, has he looked down on others in more lowly positions. The heart and the eyes of the proud only gratifies itself. It is the proud that presents themselves as being better than others. This high estimation of self usually leads to letting their personal desires run free. Where desires run free so do their eyes look, *"for as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, 'Eat and drink!' But his heart is not with you"* (Prov. 23.7).

David also tells the Lord that he did not *"involved myself in great matters, or in things too difficult for me"* (v.2). David could be thinking of his involvement with Saul. As David waited to be crowned as king, he did not attempt to remove Saul from the throne. Instead, David waited for the Lord to determine when he would become the king of Israel. Not only did David wait, David also did not make any plots against Saul's life. David spared Saul's life twice (1 Sam. 24, 26) as David said to his men, *"Far be it from me because of the Lord that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the Lord's anointed"* (1 Sam. 24.6). David could only have this attitude because of the humility in his heart.

A peaceful soul (v. 2): *"Surely I have composed and quieted my soul;..."* - David's soul was "composed and quieted" because of restraint and reverence for the Lord and Saul (v.2). David mastered his own spirit so that he would not be rebellious towards the Lord. David, like a child, placed his trust in the Lord. He did not venture out from himself, but nestled himself against the Lord as a "weaned child rests against his mother." David, in the midst of trials found in the Lord *"the peace of God, surpassing all understanding"* (Phil 4.7).

We are easily not at peace. In fact, we can have noisy souls. When we face trials and difficult people, we can become irritated, disappointed, angry, and agitated. We can even get depressed when because we can not control people or things. This lack of control can take us to very dark places we do not want to be. David helps us by revealing that the key to a peaceful spirit first comes by humbling and resting ourselves in the Lord. Jesus told His disciples to take on the His yoke, for His burden is much easier to carry than ours (Matt. 11.29).

Eternal hope (v. 3): *"O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forever."* - Finally, David concludes this short psalm with an exhortation that eternal hope is not found in anyone or thing other than the Lord. David found it a blessing to live by hope and encourages all his people to do the same. This is the mark of a "weaned" man. David was not focused on himself, but others. He actually had the mind of Christ. Jesus could have use His position in being God and seized it for His own purpose. Instead, Jesus although He was fully God, He became fully man. In doing so, Jesus humbled Himself on the cross for our sin (Phil. 2.1-8). Because of this act of selfless grace, we have eternal hope in and through Him.

- C. LIVE IT:** All God's people are taught to humble themselves by not only submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ (Eph. 5.20), but also by dying to self (Lk. 9.23). The mark of the true Pilgrim of the Lord is one who is "poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5.3). This will aid us in many difficult situations we may face with others. Think about the times your soul was not at rest. It was probably do to the fact that you were agitated by someone or thing. Perhaps it was a co-worker or spouse. Walk through this little exercise by Mark Dutton when you are tempted to be angry:
1. What were the circumstances that tempted me to be angry?

2. What were my thoughts?
3. What was my desire or need?
4. What was I tempted to do?
5. What did I do?
6. What would God have wanted me to do?
7. How can I be better prepared for this temptation in the future?

I think we would all agree with a hearty amen that if we follow David's perspective then we would have a quiet soul. Most times we can be noisy people, clamoring out loud. If this is the case, perhaps we are thinking more of ourselves than others. Trust and hope in the Lord "from this time forth and forever."

A PSALTER: Psalm 130
C.M. 0

(1) Lord, from the depths to thee I cried.

2 My voice, Lord, do thou hear:

Unto my supplication's voice
give an attentive ear.

3 Lord, who shall stand, if thou, O Lord,
should'st mark iniquity?

4 But yet with thee forgiveness is,
that feared thou mayest be.

5 I wait for God, my soul doth wait,
my hope is in his word.

6 More than they that for morning watch,
my soul waits for the Lord;

I say, more than they that do watch
the morning light to see.

7 Let Israel hope in the Lord,
for with him mercies be;

And plenteous redemption
is ever found with him.

8 And from all his iniquities
he Isr'el shall redeem.

PSALMS OF ASCENT
Lesson #12: "The Pilgrim's Joyful Song"
Psalm 132

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND:

Few individuals are honored by God in Scripture. Take for an example, Enoch, because he walked with God (Gen. 5.21-24). Noah, because he was a righteous man during evil times (Gen. 6.5-13). Abraham, because he was a friend of God (Jms. 2.23; 2 Chron. 20.7). These are a few that were mentioned in the Bible. There is another, his name is David. The Bible describes David in being a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13-14). What do all these men have in common?

First, God is always the initiator in the relationship. The Lord invites us to fellowship with Him because He first loved us (1 Jn. 4.10). He created man in His image (Gen. 1.26). The Lord initiated the relationships with the patriarchs. He led the Israelites through the wilderness. He also invites us today to have fellowship with Him through His only Son (Jn. 1.12-13; Eph.1). *Second, those who followed the Lord longed for Him as a deer pants for water (Ps. 42.1; 63.1).* They also abandon their life to follow the Lord (Matt. 6.24; Lk. 9.23; Phil. 3.8) even to death (Gal. 2.20).

Third, those who walk with the Lord depend on the Lord. They have a high view of God and do not consider themselves to be at the center of the universe. They submit their will to the Father's will and find rest in Him (Ps. 62.5-6; Ps. 23)

Fourth, they have an abiding relationship with the Lord (Jn. 15.5). They nurtured themselves in His Word (Jn. 8.31-32) as they seek to be in His presence daily (Ps. 91.1).

Fifth, obedience, reverence, respect and fear are essential to abiding in the Lord (Ps. 25.14). David describes those who walk with the Lord as those who are blameless, speak the truth, and do what is right (Ps. 15.1-2). Jesus confirms this by saying " you are my friends if you do what I command" (Jn. 15.14).

Finally, there is assurance and peace. One can only feel complete joy and peace when they know the Lord. Such joy and peace can be felt even during times of affliction and persecution (Jms. 1.2). This peace comes by not trusting in your own might, but God's. To means putting on His armor, being steadfast in His word and constant prayer (Eph. 6.10-20).

Psalm 132 is the longest of the psalms of ascent. The writer leads the Israelites to pray that God would bless Israel for David's commitment to Him (cf. Ps. 98). Psalm 132 falls into the genre of the Song of Zion which proclaims the glories of Zion in universal and eschatological terms (Expositor Bible Commentary, p. 804).

In view of its content, this psalm may have been composed for the dedication of the temple in Solomon's day. The backstory of this dedication begins after David becomes king over all Israel (2 Sam. 5). One of his first executive orders was to bring the "ark of God" to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). The ark was then brought into Jerusalem and placed inside a tent which David had pitched for it (2 Sam. 6.17). David saw that as he lived in a house of cedar, the ark of God lived in a tent of curtains. Because of this, David wanted to glorify the Lord for all He had done by building Him

a proper house to dwell in. The Lord would deny David in building the temple, but promised that one of his descendants would (2 Sam. 7.8-17). That descendant was David's son, Solomon.

The work on the house of the Lord began during the fourth year of Solomon's reign and four hundred and eighty years after Israel left Egypt (1 Ki. 6.1). After twenty years the temple was built and the ark of God rested in the holy place (1 Ki. 8.1, 10-11; 9.10). Solomon then dedicated the temple and spoke of David's vow to the Lord, and of the Lord's oath to David (1 Ki. 8.14-21). This temple stood for over four hundred years from 946 B.C. to 586 B.C. when the Babylonians destroyed it.

KEY THOUGHT:

God's people sing for joy over God's commitment to Zion and His throne.

I. DAVID'S VOW TO GOD

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 132.1-10)

1. What is the writer asking God to remember about David?
2. What was David's vow and desire for the Lord?
3. What do you suppose "it" was in verses 6-8?

B. LEARN IT:

The psalm begins with David's selfless dedication to the Lord. In some ways, this psalm rebukes us because of our own apathy towards the Lord. The writer recalls to the Lord's memory of David's vow. His vow was to abstain from living in his own and sleeping in His bed until the Lord had proper dwelling place (v.5). This selflessness reveals how superficial our dedication to the Lord can be at times. Our own personal comfort often leads to God's work put off.

David's Suffering: (v.1) - This verse expresses the theme of the psalm. The writer is praying on David's behalf that the Lord would remember David's vow to build a place for the ark of God. The theme not only expresses David's vow, but his suffering too.

David's Sacrifice: (vv. 2-5) - David underwent personal discomfort because he wanted to build a temple for the Lord (cf. 2 Sam. 7). David's well meaning selfless gesture revealed His heart for the Lord. His desire to erect a magnificent temple was to glorify God. In the ancient Near East, people associated the splendor of a temple with the greatness of the deity it honored. Likewise, David wanted to build the most glorious temple he could for the Lord. David's desire to build God a house resulted in God promising to build David a house or dynasty.

David's Success: (vv. 6-8) - The old name for Bethlehem is "Ephrathah (Ephratah)" [cf. Gen. 35.16, 19; 48.7]. Jaar refers to Kiriath-jearim, "Jearim" being the plural of "Jaar," the town where the ark rested for 20 years after the Philistines returned it (cf. 1 Sam. 7.1-2). It was at that time that some Israelites in Bethlehem heard that the ark was in Kiriath-jearim and went there to retrieve it. From there, David brought the ark into Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam. 6). This is the only mention of the ark in the psalms.

The Israelite pilgrims who sang this psalm resolved to go to worship God on Mt. Zion, to the place in Jerusalem where the ark rested (v.7), referred to here as God's footstool." That was where God dwelt in a localized way among His people. It was His earthly throne. They called on God to meet with them there. They spoke of the ark of God's strength: because it represented God's strength in Israel's previous battles.

David's Sake: (vv. 9-10) - The writer also asked the Lord to cloth His priest with righteousness and to let the godly ones sing for joy. The first attempt in bringing the ark of God to Jerusalem had begun in carelessness and ended in tradedy (1 Chr. 13.11f). The second attempt began with righteousness and ended with joy which ended with a festival (1 Chr. 15.12). They asked God to remember His promises to David, His anointed king.

C. LIVE IT:

There are several themes presented in these verses:

First, prayer. For believers today, we can go before God's throne with confidence to receive mercy and grace (Heb. 4.16).

Second, request. The writer is basing his request on David's vow rather than his own. This is a great example of praying the word of God so that both the one praying and the Lord are in agreement. If you desire to pray the will of God, go to His Word.

Third, position. This prayer reveals which side writer is on. As others stand up against the Lord, we stand with the Lord and His anointed (Ps. 2.2).

The key to prayer is seeking God's will not our own. This happens by not conforming to the culture desire, but being transformed by God (Rom. 12.1-2).

I. II. GOD'S OATH TO DAVID

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 132.11-12)

1. What had the Lord sworn to David? Read 2 Samuel 7.12-16
2. What condition was God's promise based on?
3. How long would the Lord's promise endure?

B. LEARN IT:

This psalm rests on David's vow and profound conviction unto the Lord. This conviction cannot secure ones' hope unless the Lord promises to do something more profound.

God's Covenant: (v.11) - God responds to David's vow with His own oath (2 Sam. 7.12-17; Ps. 89.3). David's desire was to build a place for the Lord. The Lord's concern was in establishing the throne of David. This throne was in connection with God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 17.6). The Lord fulfilled this promise during David's and Solomon's reign.

God's Condition: (v.12) - The Lord promised David an unbroken succession of his throne based on the condition his descendants remain faithful. This did not happen because David's descendants were not faithful to God. Yet, the Lord preserved David's dynasty as He said He would (Ps. 89.35).

- C. **LIVE IT:** The Lord responded to a well meaning gesture of building Him a perishable house. The Lord in return gave to David an imperishable gesture, an eternal throne. Isn't this how the Lord deals with His own. To exchange this perishable temple for an imperishable one? No matter how well meaning we may be, we have nothing we can offer to the Lord that can match His divine love for His own. We often take for granted the great act of salvation provided to us by the work of Jesus Christ. While the Lord may receive our well meaning gestures, these faint by comparison to God's eternal promise.

III. GOD'S PROMISE TO ZION

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 132.13-18)

1. Where had the Lord chosen to dwell?
2. What promises did the Lord make about Zion?
3. What promise did the Lord make about the throne of David and his enemies?

B. LEARN IT:

The promise of God to David and Zion is greater than David's vow to God. The temple that Solomon built was beautiful and glorious. Yet, it still fell short of the glory that God has for us. David, Solomon and the Israelites only got a glimpse of God's glory. One day we will stand before the eternal glory of God all because God's plan is much greater than ours. Paul reminds us of this when he writes: "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us" (Eph. 3.20).

God's Sovereign City: (vv. 13-16) - God promised to make Zion His special habitation (2 Chron. 6.6; 34-39). He said He would bless it by providing food for the poor, salvation for the priests (cf. v.9), and joy for the godly. From the Lord, righteousness is but one feature of God's blessing. Salvation is the whole of it.

When the Lord's glory is in the midst of His people, they cannot help but to praise Him before His throne (Rev. 7.9). This is the joy of those who are clothed with salvation. God's people cannot help but to shout and sing. This is the proper worship of the Lord. The God of our salvation.

God's Sovereign Reign: (vv. 17-18) - The "horn of David" that God promised refers to a ruler that He would raise up from David's descendants (cf. Dan. 7.24; Lk. 1.69). The "lamp" is a figure for a leader (cf. 2 Sam 21.17; 1 Ki. 11.36). It refers to the same person God said he would prepare for His anointed, David. In other words, God promised to raise up one of David's descendants who would defeat his enemies. This promise finds

partial fulfillment in some of David's successors. Jesus, the Messiah will fulfill it ultimately (cf. Isa. 4.2; Jer. 23.5; 33.15; Zechariah. 3.18; 6.12).

- C. LIVE IT:** This psalm should encourage God's people that He will fulfill His promises. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, David and Solomon trusted in God's promises. Though they did not see them fulfilled in their time, the Lord has fulfilled many in regards to His covenant. The greatest is when Christ comes again to take His place on His earthly throne (Rev. 19-20). We are like them in that though we have faith to believe now, there lies for us the promise of hope in the future in Christ. It will be there in the glories of heaven we will worship and serve the Lord (Rev. 21-22).

A PSALTER: Psalm 132

C.M. 0

- (1) David, and his afflictions all,
Lord, do thou think upon;
- 2 How unto God he sware, and vowed
to Jacob's mighty One.
- 3 I will not come within my house,
nor rest in bed at all;
- 4 Nor shall mine eyes take any sleep,
nor eyelids slumber shall;
- 5 Till for the Lord a place I find,
where he may make abode;
A place of habitation
for Jacob's mighty God.
- 6 Lo, at the place of Ephratah
of it we understood;
And we did find it in the fields,
and city of the wood.
- 7 We'll go into his tabernacles,
and at his footstool bow.
- 8 Arise, O Lord, into thy rest,
th' ark of thy strength, and thou.
- 9 O let thy priests be clothèd, Lord,
with truth and righteousness;
And let all those that are thy saints
shout loud for joyfulness.

- 10 For thine own servant David's sake,
do not deny thy grace;
Nor of thine own anointed one
turn thou away the face.
- 11 The Lord in truth to David sware,
he will not turn from it,
I of thy body's fruit will make
upon thy throne to sit.
- 12 My cov'nant if thy sons will keep,
and laws to them made known,
Their children then shall also sit
for ever on thy throne.
- 13 For God of Zion hath made choice;
there he desires to dwell.
- 14 This is my rest, here still I'll stay;
for I do like it well.
- 15 Her food I'll greatly bless; her poor
with bread will satisfy.
- 16 Her priests I'll clothe with health; her saints
shall shout forth joyfully.
- 17 And there will I make David's horn
to bud forth pleasantly:
For him that mine anointed is
a lamp ordained have I.
- 18 As with a garment I will clothe
with shame his en'mies all:
But yet the crown that he doth wear
upon him flourish shall.

PSALMS OF ASCENT
Lesson #13: "The Pilgrim's Final Songs"
Psalm 133-34

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND:

The word "unity" is like an utopian word. In a perfect world we would love to see "unity" among nations, peoples, marriages, and in personal relationships. Unfortunately, the world we live is broken. The broken relationships we see today have their genesis in the book of Genesis. Since the fall (Gen.3), every human has lived in broken relationships with others and God.

How is the word "unity" defined? Merriam-Webster defines it as "the quality of state of not being multiple: oneness. The Oxford Dictionary defines it as "the state of being joined as a whole." In example, the United States or the European Union. Even, being joined together as a whole there is a sense of brokenness or dis-unity which means, "disagreement and conflict within a group."

For instance, this morning I was reminded in the news of Britain's cessation from the E.U..

In the effort to bring order and peace to the world there have been organizations promoting global peace and unity. One such organization is the United Nations. In 1942 twenty-six nations at war with the Axis nations met in Washington to sign the Declaration of the United Nations.

They pledged to use their full resources against the Axis and agreed not to make a separate peace. Even though these nations eventually defeated the Axis powers, wars and discord among nations have continued.

The writer of Psalm 2 ask the question that many have pondered throughout the centuries, "*Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing.*" The reason, we go back to the fall. The fall in the garden ushered into this world discord and disunity among man, created things, and the Lord. Not only were Adam and Eve cast from the garden of Eden, but soon after the effects of the fall this led to the first war and human death when Cain murdered Able (Gen. 3-4). Even creation at this very moment groans for the redemption of man, when the Lord will restore all things and peace and unity reigns through Christ Jesus (Roms. 8.19). Until then, the world will have to rely on the unity that can and does exist among God's people. When God's people humble themselves and walk in His Spirit, unity can exist among His people.

Psalm 133 is the final psalm of David in this collection. We are not sure when David wrote the psalm. It could be during a moment he had waited for or an isolated meditation. It could be David's reflection when became king over all Israel in 2 Samuel 5.1-10). During that occasion, all the tribes and elders of Israel came to David at Hebron and made a covenant with him, and anointed him as king over Israel. This event could have serve as the inspiration for, "*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.*"

Psalm 134, the final psalm of the ascent collection speaks of unceasing praise to the Lord as His servants serve Him day and night within the temple. In Deuteronomy 10.8, Moses summed up the role of the Levites who were to carry the Ark, stand before the Lord to minister to Him and to bless His name. When David finally brought the Ark of God to its resting place on Mt. Zion, he gave new orders to the priests to stand every morning and evening, thanking and praising the Lord (1 Chr. 23.30; cf. 26).

KEY THOUGHT:

When unity characterize believers, they bring praise to the work of God and enjoy His blessings.

I. THE BEAUTY OF UNITY**A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 133.1-3)**

1. Explain in your own words verse 1.
2. Is it a statement or a command?
3. How does David describe what unity among God's people is like?

B. LEARN IT:

This wisdom psalm is a classic description of the beauty of believer's unity and brotherly fellowship (cf. John 17; Acts 2.42-47; Eph. 4-6).

Unity must be visible (v.1a) - The word "behold" is (hinneh). It can mean "to see," "if he sees" or "go." It is used for pointing out persons, things, and places, as well as actions. David is saying more than just "look." He is pointing out a significant occasion of how things can be or were when brothers of faith come together in the spirit of unity. This was rare in the Old Testament. We see a picture in the New Testament of the ingathering after Pentecost when all the believers of this new church had all things in common. There was a unity that took place among God's people that had never been witnessed before (Acts 2.42-47). Likewise, David could have been pointing out the occasion of unity when the elders and tribes came together with one common goal, to anoint David as their king. In the future, there will be a unity that will be everlasting when the Lord unites all His people in the New Heaven and Earth to worship and serve Him forever throughout the ages to come (Rev. 21-22).

Unity must be desired by the brethren (v. 1b) - Next, David tells us "how good and how pleasant" unity among the brethren is. Both words, "good" and "pleasant" denote an agreeable and delightful action to "dwell" together. This is the communion of believers. United in one heart, for one cause. The writer of Hebrews states: "let love of the brethren continue" (Heb. 13.1). Paul describes this desired unity this way: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality" (Rom. 12.10-13).

When this kind of "unity" is desired, David tells us, "how beautiful it is." He said it is essentially good and it is a pleasant condition. This was an appropriate thought for pilgrims to entertain as they anticipated meeting other worshippers in Jerusalem shortly.

The description of unity (vv. 2-3) - David then compares brotherly unity to the oil that Moses poured over Aaron's head when he anointed him as Israel's first high priest (cf. Lev. 8.12). That oil flowed down over his head and beard, and down onto the robe and breastplate that bore the names of the twelve tribes. As the consecrating oil covered

everything, so unity among believers makes them acceptable to God as a kingdom of priests.

The writer also compared brotherly unity to the dew on Mt. Hermon. Mt. Hermon rested to the north of Israel and was the highest mountain in the land. As such it enjoyed heavy dew. Dew was a great blessing in the parched land of Israel. As the dew refreshed and invigorated Mt. Hermon, so the blessing of unity among believing Israelites would refresh and invigorate Mt. Zion as they gathered for worship there.

C. LIVE IT:

The greatest testimony of God at work in the lives of His people is when they dwell together in unity. Nothing destroys the believer's witness when we are divided over selfish issues. Paul relayed this in several letters in the New Testament and urged believer to be diligent to keep the peace and unity (Eph. 4.3).

Believer's are God's people. We are His special chosen race, His royal priesthood, His holy nation, and a people for His own possession (1 Pet. 2.9). It makes since then that we should let our light shine in such a way for the world to see how beautiful the bride of Christ is. As His light shines, it beams on us like heavenly light arrayed with all the colors of heaven. Jesus says to His disciples, that we should influence our world like salt does for food and light does for a city on a hill.

I fear that the church in our western culture has become tasteless and her light has been snuffed out because of disunity and disobedience to His Word. Yet, when the church walks in unity, in the Spirit, by His Word, she influences her culture. She's a beauty to behold for all to see and glorifies the Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5.13-14). Therefore, as Christians and pilgrims in this world, let us be the beautiful feet of Christ that is both pleasant and agreeable for all to see in Christ alone.

I. II. THE CALL FOR PRAISE

A. LOOK IT UP: (Read Psalm 134.1-3)

1. What does the writer of this psalm imply by blessing the Lord?
2. Who are the servants who serve Him day and night? Read (Deut. 10.8; 1 Chronicles 9.33; 23.26,30; 25).
3. What does the writer ask the Lord to do for those who come to serve Him faithfully?
4. How does He describe the Lord? Why is that important?

B. LEARN IT:

This final pilgrim psalm called on the priests who served God at the temple to praise Him, and it called on God to bless them.

Behold continuous majestic worship: (v.1a) - The writer of this psalm prepares the pilgrim for what they will see when they arrive at the temple in Jerusalem. He begins as David did in the previous psalm with the word, "Behold." Allow me to paraphrase the three verses of this psalm:

"Come to the temple and see how the priest, the servants of the Lord, bless and praise Him who never sleeps or slumbers.

Come and hear hundreds of musicians accompany a four thousand voice choir as the priest and levites lift their hands towards the sanctuary.

Come and behold the greatest demonstration of honor and praise this side of heaven and be blessed by the God of Zion who made the heavens and the earth."

This great tribute to God gives a different perspective to Psalm 150 as the priests, levites, hundreds and thousands of musicians and singers continually worship the Lord:

"Praise the Lord!

Praise God in His sanctuary;

Praise Him in His mighty expanse.

Praise Him for His mighty deeds;

Praise Him according to His excellent greatness.

Praise Him with trumpet sound;

Praise Him with harp and lyre.

Praise Him with timbres and dancing;

Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe.

Praise Him with loud cymbals.

Praise Him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord!" - Psalm 150

The worship at the temple was loud, majestic, and continuous. This majestic honor and praise mostly began during David's reign, during the festivals and probably lasted through Solomon's reign. There has not been a greater demonstration of worship and praise before the Lord this side heaven since. We will not witness a scene like this until all the redeemed gather around to worship the Lord before His throne in heaven.

Dedicated service unto the Lord: (v.1b) - As stated before, those who led in this worship were the levitical priest. Their dedicated duty and responsibility was to care for, monitor, administrate and prepare all the worship and sacrifices that took place at the temple. The writer specifies those *"who serve by night in the house of the Lord."* The word "serve" is (amad) which literally means "to stand." They stood in their place of service at the temple, a duty that was continuous around the clock because they serve God who never sleeps.

I like how Warren Wiersbe summarizes this by stating: "Directed by the high priest, the temple priests and levites were responsible to make sure everything was in order for the next day's ministry. They also checked the building to see that nothing dangerous or defiling had gotten past the doorkeepers and was hidden in the sacred precincts. The pilgrims heard a temple choir singing the praises of Jehovah, and their ministry would

continue all night. Pagan temples were silent at night, because their gods had to rest (1 Ki. 18.27), but 'He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep' (Ps. 121.3-4). The Lord gives sleep to His beloved people, but He stays away and guards the city and watches over the family (127.1-2). He also hears the praises of His people" (BE Series Commentary).

A Prayer for blessing by the Lord (v. 3): - The pilgrim then asked God to bless these special servants of His. The reference to God being the Maker of heaven and earth recalls His greatness (cf. 115.15ff). This verse is also an appropriate conclusion to the collection of the psalms of ascent (Ps. 120-134).

C. LIVE IT:

Did you know that if you believe and receive Christ as Savior, you are a saint of the most high God? Read what Peter wrote:

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light..." - 1 Peter 2.9

Again, Paul addresses the believers in his letters to the churches as "saints." *"To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus:" (Eph. 1.1b).*

As living priest who have been set apart by the Lord, we have a special duty to stand and serve the Lord to bless His name and to make His name and work known to all the world. Paul urges believers to: *"...present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (Rom. 12.1b).*

All these verses above places a significant responsibility on believing pilgrims today as we traverse through the course of this world. As pilgrims, priest, and saints, we are to proclaim, praise, and bless the Lord so that all may hear and know how the Lord redeemed those He came to save.

As we conclude this journey from home to worship the Lord at Zion, keep these things in mind as you continue in your own personal quest through life.

1. You are a pilgrim, this world is not your home.
2. You are a priest called out by God to serve Him alone.
3. You are a saint set apart by God to live for Him alone.
4. You are His voice to proclaim to others His gospel.
5. You are to be one in spirit and purpose in Christ.
6. You are to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.
7. You will serve and bless the Lord, now and forevermore.

A PSALTER: Psalm 133-34

C.M. ()

Psalm 133:

- (1) Behold, how good a thing it is,
and how becoming well,
Together such as brethren are
in unity to dwell!
- 2 Like precious ointment on the head,
that down the beard did flow,
Ev'n Aaron's beard, and to the skirts,*
did of his garments go.
- 3 As Hermon's dew, the dew that doth
on Zion' hills descend:
For there the blessing God commands,
life that shall never end.

Psalm 134:

1. Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye
that his attendants are,
Ev'n you that in God's temple be,
and praise him nightly there.
- 2 Your hands within God's holy place
lift up, and praise his name.
- 3 From Zion' hill the Lord thee bless,
that heav'n and earth did frame.