

THE PSALMS OF ASCENT

JOURNEYING WITH JESUS
TO JERUSALEM

Part 1

"Psalm 120 & the Temptation"

5 January 2025

Introduction

As we begin a new year, we do well to consider that our lives can be understood in terms of a journey. Where did we begin? What things have altered the course of our journey? Where are we going? As Christians, we recognize that we are not journeying through life alone. Rather, we journey together with our brothers and sisters, led along the way by the Lord Jesus. As we introduce this new study, we want to consider how a particular portion of the psalter (Psalms 120-234) speaks to the life of the Lord Jesus and how it can to us as well, particularly in the lead up to the celebration of Easter.

Key Point: As believers, we live as God's people in a _____ land where we at times experience the opposition of our enemies even as we journey on towards our true _____.

The Psalms of Ascent

1. The psalms of Ascents each share a common _____.

Each of these psalms begins with the superscription, "A Song Of Ascents." Some are additionally attributed to a particular author ("Of David" in 122, 124, 131, 133 & "Of Solomon" in 127).

"ascents" — *ma'alot* (Heb.) - 'steps' or 'ascents' (i.e. 'roads going up').

2. These psalms appear to have had a particular _____ significance in the life of Israel.

* *These psalms have some relationship to the pilgrimage to _____ commanded of the people.*

"...legislation...required the tribes of Israel to make pilgrimage to worship together three times a year. So central was this to Israel's life that it is legislated in four of the five books of Moses." —David C. Mitchel, The Songs of Ascents

* *They were also likely used as a part of the celebration of the Feast of _____ (Tabernacles).*

"...the Chronicler cites a song sung at the Feast of Sukkot in Solomon's time: *Arise, LORD God, to your resting place, you and the ark of your power* (2 Chron. 6:41-42). Since these words are from the Ascents Psalm 132:8, it looks like this song was sung at the Feast of Sukkot...the Songs of Ascent [also] abound in imagery of harvest time." —David C. Mitchell

⇒ The connection between the number of Ascents psalms (15) and the number of steps in the temple has long been noted. Rabbinical writings identify the recitation of these psalms with the ascending of the steps into the temple at the Feast of Booths.

Key Point: The Ascents psalms function to bring God's people along a journey that culminates in them _____ together in His _____.

"The Songs of Ascents share one name, one serene mood, one theology of blessing, one heart for Jerusalem and the king of David's line, one common language, and one single story..." —David C. Mitchell

Psalm 120

The ascent psalms begin with the story of an Israelite dwelling in a foreign and longing for peace even as he is surrounded by enemies who revile and slander.

• **The psalmist turns to the Lord and calls upon Him because of the _____ nature of his circumstances.**

Psa. 120:1-2—¹*In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me.* ²*Deliver me, O Lord, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue.*

"*distress*" — *tsârâh*—tightness (i.e. figuratively, 'trouble')...adversity, affliction, anguish.

⇒ He longs to be delivered from the _____ assaults of his enemies.

"*lying lips*"

"*a deceitful tongue*"

"...the psalmist is not just speaking about having his feelings hurt, but about the danger of having his life destroyed by his enemies." —Bradley C. Gregory, The Theology & Spirituality of the Psalms of Ascent

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Key Point: As believers, we live as God's people in a 'foreign' land where we at times experience the opposition of our enemies even as we journey on towards our true home.

The Psalms of Ascent

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* *These psalms have some relationship to the pilgrimage to Jerusalem commanded of the people.*

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Key Point: The Ascents psalms function to bring God's people along a journey that culminates in them worshiping together in His presence.

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Psalm 120

The ascent psalms begin with the story of an Israelite dwelling in a foreign and longing for peace even as he is surrounded by enemies who revile and slander.

• **The psalmist turns to the Lord and calls upon Him because of the distressing nature of his circumstances.**

Psa. 120:1-2—¹ *In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me.* ² *Deliver me, O Lord, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue.*

"*distress*" — *tsârâh*—tightness (i.e. figuratively, 'trouble')...adversity, affliction, anguish.

⇒ He longs to be delivered from the verbal assaults of his enemies.

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- **The psalmist continues his prayer and speaks of those who afflict him with their words.**

Psa. 120:3-4—³What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue? ⁴A warrior's sharp arrows, with glowing coals of the broom tree!

⇒ His question and answer are a call to the Lord to bring about justice on his behalf.

“sharp arrows”

“glowing coals”

- **The psalmist laments his ongoing presence amongst those who provoke conflict.**

Psa. 120:5-7—⁵Woe to me, that I sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar! ⁶Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace. ⁷I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war!

⇒ The imagery is of being far away from the place of God's presence.

“Meshech” ←————→ “Kedar”

⇒ The psalmist longs for the peace of God which can only be found among His people and where He dwells.

Key Point: In times of conflict and spiritual anguish, God's people can call upon Him in prayer, knowing that He hears us and will give to us His peace.

Gospel Parallel: “The Temptation” — Matt. 4:1-11

1. **The circumstances of the temptation served to identify the Lord Jesus with those He ultimately came to save.**

Jesus faces the Tempter as the new Adam

Jesus faces the Tempter as the faithful Israelite

2. **Satan assaulted the Lord Jesus with lies and deceit.**

(1) “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.” *Is your Father really good?*

⇒ Jesus responded by quoting Deut. 8:3, showing that He recognized that what He was experiencing was to teach Him of God's faithfulness and sustaining power.

(2) “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down...” *Shouldn't your Father prove Himself to you?*

⇒ Jesus responded to Satan's misuse of Ps. 91:11-2 by quoting Deut. 6:16, showing that He trusted in God's provision and protection and would not demand it of Him.

(3) “All these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.” *Wouldn't you like a kingdom without the cross?*

⇒ Jesus responded to Satan's offer by quoting Deut. 6:13, showing that He feared the Lord and had come to accomplish His plans and purposes in accordance with His will.

Key Point: The Lord Jesus overcame the Tempter on behalf of His people so that He might save us from the times that we have failed and have ourselves been overcome by temptation.

Concluding Thoughts

1. **As we journey through life, we can rely upon the Lord Jesus for His strength and for the peace that He gives to us when we face opposition and experience times of discouragement.**
2. **It is the truth of God's Word alone that overcome the lies and slander of our enemy.**