

# Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

## Bible Study Notes Book of Psalms

12-14-11

### Psalm 120

#### The Story Behind the Psalms

These are called "Psalms of ascension." They were basically travel Psalms. They were used specifically for the three annual feasts. As the Jews would march to Jerusalem for the feast, they would sing these Psalms of ascension. From anywhere in the promised land, it was always "up" to Jerusalem, for Jerusalem was the highest point in the land. So as the people would ascend to Jerusalem, they would sing these songs one after another.

When they arrived at Jerusalem, they would go to the temple. These Psalms were sung on the steps of the temple. Psalm 120 would be sung on the first step, Psalm 121 on the second step, etc. until each Psalm had been sung. Since these were sung going up the steps, they were called "Psalms of ascension." As they are read it should be kept in mind that these were travelers going to the holy city for a feast. Read carefully Psalm 128 and imagine a great group of pilgrims journeying for a time of worship in the beloved city.

#### The Way They Were Used by God's People

Not only were they used for trips to the feasts and to Jerusalem, these were Psalms used for any journey. What a tremendous thing it would be for a Christian family to claim Psalm 128 as they leave on vacation or for a Christian businessman to claim its promises as he leaves for a business trip! In these days of advanced travel, these Psalms should be used over and over again as we journey to and fro.

**Theme:** A prayer for deliverance from false accusers. All believers must live with the tension of being in the world but not belonging to it.

**Author:** Anonymous, some suggest Hezekiah.

#### PSALM 120–134

Psalms 120–134 are called "pilgrim psalms" or "songs of ascent." They were sung by those who journeyed (and thus "ascended") to the Temple for the annual festivals. Each psalm is a "step" along the journey. Psalm 120 begins the journey in a distant land in hostile surroundings; Psalm 122 pictures the pilgrims arriving in Jerusalem; and the rest of the psalms move toward the Temple, mentioning various characteristics of God.

#### PSALM 120:5, 6

Meshech was a nation far to the north of Israel; Kedar a nation to the southeast. Both were known for being warlike and barbarian. Because the psalmist couldn't have been in two places at one time, he was lamenting that he felt far from home and surrounded by pagan people.

#### PSALM 120:7

Peacemaking is not always popular. Some people prefer to fight for what they believe in. The glory of battle is in the hope of winning, but someone must be a loser. The glory of peacemaking is that it may actually produce two winners. Peacemaking is God's way, so we should carefully and prayerfully attempt to be peacemakers.

## Psalm 121

**Theme:** We can depend upon God for help. Pilgrims must travel through lonely country to their destination; they are protected, not by anything created, but by the Creator of everything.

**Author:** Anonymous, some suggest Hezekiah.

PSALM 121:1

This song expresses assurance and hope in God's protection day and night. He not only made the hills but heaven and earth as well. We should never trust a lesser power than God himself. But not only is he all-powerful, he also watches over us. Nothing diverts or deters him. We are safe. We never outgrow our need for God's untiring watch over our life.

## Psalm 122

**Theme:** Stepping into the presence of God. What Jerusalem was for the Israelites, the church is to the believer.

**Author:** David

PSALM 122:1

Going to God's house can be a chore or a delight. For the psalmist, it was a delight. As a pilgrim attending one of the three great religious festivals, he rejoiced to worship with God's people in God's house. We may find worship a chore if we have unconfessed sin or if our love for God has cooled. But if we are close to God and enjoy his presence, we will be eager to worship and praise him. Our attitude toward God will determine our view of worship.

PSALM 122:5

The "thrones where judgment is given" are the courts of justice by the town gate. In Bible times, the elders in a town sat to hear cases and administer justice at the gate (Ruth 4:1, 2). Sometimes the king himself would sit at the gate to meet his subjects and make legal decisions (2 Samuel 19:8). Speeches and prophecies were also made at the city gate (Nehemiah 8:1; Jeremiah 17:19, 20).

PSALM 122:6-9

The psalmist was not praying for his own peace and prosperity but for that of his brothers and friends in Jerusalem. This is intercessory prayer, prayer on behalf of others. Too often we are quick to pray for our own needs and desires but neglect interceding for others. Will you intercede for someone in need today?

PSALM 122:6-9

The peace sought in these verses is much more than the mere absence of conflict. It suggests completeness, health, justice, prosperity, and protection. The world cannot provide this peace. Real peace comes from faith in God, because he alone embodies all the characteristics of peace. To find peace of mind and peace with others, you must find peace with God.

## Psalm 123

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**Theme:** Look to God for mercy. We are encouraged to be attentive to God's leading.

**Author:** Anonymous, some suggest Hezekiah

PSALM 123:1

The psalmist lifted his eyes to God, waiting and watching for God to send his mercy. The more he waited, the more he cried out to God because he knew that the evil and proud offered no help—they had only contempt for God.

## Psalm 124

**Theme:** God delivers us from those who seek to destroy us. God is on the side of those who seek him.

**Author:** David, probably written after his defeat of the Philistines (2 Samuel 5:17-25)

PSALM 124:7, 8

Do you ever feel trapped by overwhelming odds? With God, there is always a way out because he is the Creator of all that exists. No problem is beyond his ability to solve; no circumstance is too difficult for him. We can turn to the Creator for help in our time of need,

for he is on our side. God will provide a way out; we need only trust him and look for it. David compared this to a bird escaping the hunter's trap.

## Psalm 125

**Theme:** God is our Protector. The mountains around Jerusalem symbolize God's protection for his people.

**Author:** Anonymous, some suggest Hezekiah

PSALM 125:1

Have you ever known people who were drawn to every new fad or idea? Such people are unstable and therefore unreliable. The secret to stability is to trust in God, because he never changes. He cannot be shaken by the changes in our world, and he endures forever. The fads and ideas of our world, and our world itself, will not.

PSALM 125:3

Although the psalmist wrote, "The wicked will not rule the godly," often Israel had to put up with evil rulers. The psalmist was expressing what will ultimately happen when God executes his final judgment. Human sinfulness often ruins God's ideal on earth, but that doesn't mean God has lost control. Evil prevails only as long as God allows.