The Psalms or Songs of Ascent

On the Steps of the Southern Steps in Jerusalem

Why study this?

#1 – Feasting on the Riches of His Word is Important

#2-Understanding the history in the Bible helps us understand the reality of the times we are living in today.

#3-For those traveling with us to Israel-We will be re-creating the events where Jews did at least 3 times a year to attend festivals and feasts. Walking up the same steps Jesus walked over 2,000 years ago.

What are the Psalms or Songs of Ascent and who wrote them?

Psalms 120-134 were written by King David.

1. We are reading Jewish Poetry. Not Jewish law, the Torah or Jewish History. It is simply poetry.
2. These are also called the STEPS of Ascent -Consider these as steps you would take on a journey.
3. It begins with steps that are far from God and ends as the psalmist gets closer to God. Psalms 120-134). It is like a pilgrimage.
4. Most of the Psalms of Ascent remind us of God’s providence, His goodness and provision and how He delivers and protects us. How He leads and strengthens us.

History: Under the old Covenant, Jews were told by God that they had to go up to Jerusalem 3 times a year for the three main feasts. (Deut 16:16).

*For Jesus and His disciples living in the region of the Galilee, they would WALK DOWN the Jordan Valley, following the Jordan River, as it descends to the Dead Sea, there where the river enters the Dead Sea, at a place where Israel had crossed into the Promise Land after the Exodus out of Egypt, and after 40 years of wandering; there, at the lowest place on earth, then they would turn right to go to Jerusalem. Note, they don’t go all the way “down” to the dead sea. Turning off the path that leads to death.*

The Levitical priests would sing these songs as they entered the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s temple, singing each song as they got closer to the presence of God. The Priests and Jews on pilgrimage to the Holy Land during the Passover Festival would sing these songs. The priests would sing one psalm for each step into the Temple.

Psalms 120: 1 “To the Lord in my trouble I called” (*Recognizing his need for help*), “and He answered me.”

*Psalmist at his lowest distress, every pilgrimage to God begins; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Slaves in Egypt- how lost you are before you can be found. He is surrounded by people who are talking bad about him, evil, people with deceitful tongues and lying lips.*

12:2 “LORD, deliver my soul from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue. (Confession of my sin -v.6)

v.3 What will He give to you, and what will He add to you, deceitful tongue?

v.4 Sharp arrows of a strong man, with coals of retem plants. (Description of what the plant does. It is a “broom tree. When burned, the coals stay hot for a long time. They may look like they are burned out, but there is still heat in them. Touch them and get burned. Without the Lord, my words may overflow hurtfully at any time. (Luke 6:45)

v. 5 Woe is me because I sojourned in Meshech; I dwelt with the tents of Kedar. (Doesn’t know where he needs to go. Dwelling in the tents of Kedar…who was the 2nd son of Ishmael. (Refers particularly to Bedouins.) He feels like a foreigner in his own land because of the ungodly people, living in the values of a fallen world and it brought grief.) 1 John 2 we read, Do not love the world, or the things of the world……)

v.6 Too long has my soul had its dwelling with haters of peace. (Note: Selfishness at the center)

v.7 -we see how King David had to deal with deceitful enemies and times of distress but realized that his sure source of help was the Lord when he says, “I am at peace. And because I will speak, they are for war.) He confesses, then He is “at Peace and because I will speak, they are for war.”

The song speaks to individuals to come to Jerusalem and Worship.

Psalm 121: I lift of my eyes to the hills.

*Set the stage here:*

What did the writer see on those hills? Pagan idols

Where comes my help? From God, maker of Heaven and Earth.

Remember in ancient times, the gods of earth were often depicted lazy, or asleep. He who keeps Israel never sleeps.

V.3-The Psalmist speaks of God helping us to be surefooted.

Phase: “Where the tribes go up.”. – It is thought that the 15 Psalms of Ascent represented the 15 steps going up to the Temple Mount. 3 times a year, you would gather up toward the Temple on the steps. They would begin to sing with others as they got closer.

When reading, we are reminded to humble ourselves and to rest in the Lord and put our Hope in Him. Psalm 131 focuses on HOPE. “O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forever.”

The very end verse 134:3 is a blessing, “The LORD who made heaven and earth bless you from Zion!”

Psalms 113 to 118 – The Hallel Psalms and between the Psalms of Ascent (120-136) is Psalm 119 the longest chapter of the Bible. It exalts the Law. And the Law is good, it reveals God’s Holiness and His perfect standard. But we are sinners and cannot keep the law. Jews can’t keep the Law. The Law points to our need and Our Savior. The Law reveals Jesus. Jesus kept the Law. Jesus has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves.