

# Reading the Psalms & Proverbs

## *The Pilgrim Journey*

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Week 7

*Psalm 120-134*

Psalms 120 through 134 have been called by many a "mini-psalter," or a collection of psalms within the psalms. Most Bibles give the title of all fifteen of these psalms as *A Song of Ascents*. Most literally, the Hebrew phrase means *a going up*, and it has been applied to several interpretations by various commentators over the centuries.

### I. Four Views on the Meaning of These Psalms of Ascents

1. Gesenius, et.al. understands this phrase to mean the internal structure of the psalm itself wherein one phrase builds into the next in a literary rising fashion. The problem is that this rarely occurs in but a few of these psalms.
2. Some of the Jewish interpreters understand this to mean a series of psalms to be sung upon each step leading from the court of the women to the court of the men in the Temple (15 steps in all), but this is only mentioned once in the Talmud by comparison, not as an interpretation.
3. Other interpreters imagine that these psalms were sung by the exiles returning from Babylon and going up to Jerusalem, but these are not specifically post-exilic psalms.
4. A fourth, and perhaps most logical understanding, is that these were psalms sung by the bands of Israelites returning to Jerusalem for the three main festivals each year, reminding them of their past and anticipating their future when they are all home at last: *We're going up to Jerusalem!*

### II. Five Groups of Three Psalms Each Make Up the Fifteen Psalms (from New Bible Com., Guthrie, et.al., p.529)

In these psalms we may find hope and encouragement for every sort of difficulty and occasion of praise.

1. 120-122: External pressures on the godly soul (Part I)
2. 123-125: External pressures on the godly soul (Part II)
3. 126-128: Wisdom for the home and family
4. 129-131: The discipline of patience; very personal and devotional in nature
5. 132-134: The covenant, the community, and the sanctuary

### III. Examples from Each Group

1. In my trouble I cried to the Lord, and He answered me. Ps 120:1  
I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come?  
My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. Ps 121:1
2. So our eyes look to the Lord our God, Until He is gracious to us. Ps 123:2b  
Those who trust in the Lord are as Mt. Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever Ps 125:1
3. Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it Ps 127:1  
It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors, for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep. Ps 127:2
4. My souls waits for the Lord more than the watchmen for the morning; O Israel, Hope in the Lord Ps 130:6-7
5. For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation, "This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it." Ps 132:13-14