**The Book of Psalms—Study Guide (Psalm 120-134 and 135-136)**

The Bible always takes precedence in our study of God’s Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). This guide is just a “help” compiled from the Soncino commentary, Ambassador College notes, & personal study.

The following 15 Psalms (120-134) are called the Songs of Ascents (meaning: to go up to). In the temple area, there were 15 steps that led up to the court of the Israelites from the court of the women. Upon each of the steps it has been suggested that one of these songs was sung by the Levites. But the more common understanding is that these songs were also on the lips of those ascending toward Mt. Zion during their pilgrimages to keep the Festivals (especially the Feast of Tabernacles).

**Psalm 120: A Song of Ascents.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “The slanderous tongue.” The Soncino also notes the following: “The Psalmist laments that his sensitive soul has been so long obliged to be a sojourner where he has heard nothing but lying and strife. Weary of these, his soul stretches…towards a land of rest.”

1-2: In my distress, I cried to the Lord, and He heard me. Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and a deceitful tongue (as his enemies used against him). James 3:8-10 shows the destruction caused by the tongue.

3-4: What shall be given and done to you O false tongue? Answer: Sharpened arrows of the warrior, with coals of the broom tree (the roots of the broom tree are still used as fuel and throw off much heat) will strike the one who lied. See Jeremiah 9:7-9, and Psalm 140:9-11.

5-6: Woe is me that I dwell in Meshech (a son of Japheth—Genesis 10:2—those who once lived between the Black and Caspian Seas), and among the tents of Kedar (second son of Ishmael—Genesis 25:13—the Bedouin Arabs). They were typical barbarians. He had dwelt too long among warring peoples who were haters of peace.

7: I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war. (The discordance between the peaceful man and his neighboring warring environment is clearly noted, hence this pilgrim Psalm is his desire to seek a better home).

**Psalm 121: A Song of Ascents.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “God the Helper.” The Soncino also comments that it is “a perfect expression of trust in God.”

1-2: I will lift up my eyes to the hills (upon which Jerusalem is situated—Psalm 87:1-2). From whence comes my help? Answer: My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth (Psalm 124:8).

3-4: He will not (cannot possibly) allow your foot to be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold (for emphasis) He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. See 1 Kings 18:27—God is not Baal.

5-6: The Lord is your keeper, and is your shade at your right hand (the position taken by one’s protector—see Psalm 109:31; Isaiah 25:4). The sun shall not strike you by day (the danger was sunstroke), nor the moon by night (the danger was the old belief of lunacy--derangement). See Isaiah 49:10-12 about the second exodus.

7-8: The Lord shall preserve you from all evil (calamity). He shall preserve (guard or keep) your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in (Deuteronomy 28:6) from this time forth (especially during the Feast pilgrimages), and even forevermore (See Isaiah 35:8-10 regarding the second exodus).

**Psalm 122: A Song of Ascents. Of David.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “The Pilgrim’s Joy.” Soncino also notes that it describes the pilgrim’s sensations after arriving and standing within the Temple precincts.

1-2: I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go up (or we will go up) into the house of the Lord.” Our feet have been standing (with awe and memories) within your gates, O Jerusalem.

3-4: Jerusalem is built as a compact city (as in a close human association); where the tribes of the Lord (not just Judah, but all of the tribes who honor God) go up (during the Festival seasons) to the Testimony of Israel (the Ark of the Covenant—Exodus 16:33-34; 25:21-22) to give thanks to the name of the Lord.

5: For thrones are set there for judgment, the thrones of the house of Israel (Jerusalem was the home of the monarchy of King David and his descendants, and all regal functions occurred there).

6-7: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem (a condition of wholeness in which nothing is lacking. Isaiah 62:6-7 refers to the Millennium). May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces.

8-9: For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, “Peace be within you.” Because of the house (temple) of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

**Psalm 123: A Song of Ascents.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “A Hymn of Faith.”

1-2: Unto You, we are to lift up our eyes—to the One enthroned in the heavens. As the eyes of the servant look to the hand of their masters (which supplied their needs), and as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress; so too our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us.

3-4: We have hope that His mercy will be upon us, for we are exceedingly filled with contempt (being humiliated by persecutors), and our soul is filled with the scorn from those who are at ease and with the contempt of the (proud ones who are oppressors). A similar occurrence happened in Nehemiah 2:18-20.

**Psalm 124: A Song of Ascents. Of David.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “Song of Deliverance.”

1-2: If it had not been the Lord who was on our side (It is then repeated). Let Israel now say, if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us (enemies in contrast to God who was with Israel),

3-5: then they (enemies) would have swallowed us alive, when their wrath was kindled against us. Then the waters would have overwhelmed us, the stream (as a mountain torrent swollen by heavy rains) would have gone over our soul; then the swollen waters (likened to the arrogance of the enemy) would have gone over our soul.

6-8: Blessed (praised) be the Lord who has not given us as prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers (Psalm 91:3). The snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help (as the Protector of the weak) is in the name of the Lord who made the heaven and earth.

**Psalm 125: A Song of Ascents.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “Security in God.”

1-2: Those who trust in the Lord are like Mt. Zion (a symbol of permanence) that can’t be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds (encircling and protecting) His people from this time forth and forever (for all eternity). See Zechariah 2:5.

3-4: For the scepter of wickedness (foreign domination and injustice) shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous (during the millennium), lest the righteous reach out their hands to that iniquity again. Do good, O Lord, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts.

5: As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways (renegades), the Lord shall lead them away with the workers of iniquity. (See Ezekiel 20:38). Peace be upon Israel. (Soncino commentary: “Peace is the end of tyranny, hostility, division, disquiet, alarm; peace is freedom and harmony and security and blessedness.”)

**Psalm 126: A Song of Ascents.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “A Disappointed Hope.” (The hope, though, will come true when the surrounding nations and Israel acknowledge that God has intervened—no longer a dream).

1-2: When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream (as if it wasn’t real). Then our mouth was filled with singing. Then (the surrounding peoples) said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.” (When the heathen say these things, then Israel will as well—it won’t be a dream).

3-4: The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad (repetition for emphasis). Bring back our captivity (restore our fortunes), O Lord, as the streams in the South (in the dry, desert areas of the Negev).

5-6: Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. (Notice Jeremiah 31:7-9, 12).

**Psalm 127: A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “God’s Help Essential.”

1: Unless the Lord builds the (or any) house, they labor (toil until one is weary) in vain who build it. Unless the Lord guards the (or any) city, the watchman stays awake (keeps watch) in vain.

2: Just as God builds or guards any house or city, He is to be involved in our own personal lives. So, it is vain to rise up early, to sit up late; to eat the bread of sorrows (toil). God gives His beloved sleep (free from anxiety).

3-4: Children are a heritage (blessing) from the Lord. (The Jews believe that a child has three parents: God, in addition to the mother and father). Parents are to teach children about God: Deuteronomy 11:19. Jesus had a deep concern for children: Mark 10:14. The fruit of the womb is a reward, like arrows in the hand of a warrior.

5: Happy is the man who has a quiver full of them. They (fathers with grown children) shall not be ashamed, but shall speak (with boldness) with their enemies in the gate. See Proverbs 27:11.

**Psalm 128: A Song of Ascents.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “Happiness of the God-Fearing.” This Psalm is a companion of the previous one. Soncino also adds: “This Psalm teaches that the welfare of the State depends upon virtuous family life, and virtuous family life must be founded upon active religious principle.”

1-4: Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, and who walks in His ways. Blessings include eating from the labor of your hands (the dignity of honest work), being happy, and it shall be well with you. Your wife shall be a fruitful vine in the heart (innermost) of your home; your children will be like olive plants around your table.

5-6: The Lord bless you out of Zion, and may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Yes, may you see your children’s children (thus attaining to an old age). Peace be upon Israel! (See notes--Psalm 125:5).

**Psalm 129: A Song of Ascents.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “A Sufferer’s Plea.”

1-2: Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth (even from Egypt. This is repeated for emphasis—same construct as in Psalm 124:1-2), yet they have not prevailed against me.

3: The plowers plowed on my back (as the land is gashed by the plows, so too were the backs of the Israelites from the whips of the taskmasters). They made their furrows long (represents the brutality of the oppressors).

4-5: The Lord is righteous, He has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked. (See Job 39:10. The cords were ropes which harnessed oxen to the plow. Israel, under subjection to oppressors, is likened to the ox yoked for work in the fields—God broke those bonds). Let those who hate Zion be put to shame (by their failure) and turned back.

6-7: Let them be as the grass on the housetops (similar to Isaiah 37:27), which withers before it grows up.

(Some seed from a field would settle on a roof, but with no depth of soil, the grass withers). Neither the reaper, nor he who binds sheaves, would be able to fill their arms with it. (Psalm 92:7—the wicked sprout, but will die).

8: Neither let those who pass by say: “The blessing of the Lord be upon you; we bless you in the name of the Lord!” (This was a customary blessing said to reapers—see Ruth 2:4). No blessing will be given to the wicked.

**Psalm 130: A Song of Ascents.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “A Sinner’s Cry.”

1-2: Out of the depths (of waters) I have cried to You, O Lord! Hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. See Nehemiah 1:6 for a similar prayer.

3-4: If You Lord, should mark (take account of) iniquities, who could stand (in the judgment)? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. See Acts 5:31.

5-6: I wait for the Lord, my soul waits. In His word I do hope. My soul waits for (is toward) the Lord more than those who watch for the morning (the phase is repeated and emphasized again producing an effect of urgency).

7-8: O Israel, hope in the Lord. For with the Lord there is mercy (love), and with Him is abundant redemption (plenteous and unlimited). And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. See Psalm 25:22.

**Psalm 131: A Song of Ascents. Of David.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “The Humble Spirit.”

1: Lord, my heart is not haughty (proud), nor my eyes lofty (arrogant). Neither do I concern myself (walk about) with great matters, nor with things too profound (difficult) for me.

2-3: Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul (inner serenity) like a weaned child (also weaned from the desire for prominence). O Israel, (follow this example –not longing for imperial power, but instead) hope in the Lord from this time forth and forever.

**Psalm 132: A Song of Ascents.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “God’s Promise Will Be Fulfilled.”

1-2: Lord, remember David and all his afflictions (especially with his efforts of preparing for the temple—see 1 Chronicles 22:14); how he swore to the Lord, and vowed to the “Mighty One of Jacob” (Genesis 49:24).

3-5: Surely, I will not go into the chamber of my house, or go up to the comfort of my bed. I will not give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob (2 Samuel 7:1-3; Acts 7:46).

6-7: Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah (Bethlehem), we found it in the fields of the woods (“the district of Jaar”—near Kirjath Jearim, where the ark was for 20 years—1 Samuel 7:1-2). Let us go into His tabernacle: let us worship at His footstool.

8-9: Arise, O Lord, to your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength (see Psalm 78:60-61—the ark, His strength, had been taken in captivity). Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness (not only with the physical clothing, but with moral virtues), and let Your saints (“chasid” godly men) shout for joy.

10-11: For Your servant David’s sake, do not turn away the face of Your Anointed—the Messiah (from David, his descendants, or from Israel). The Lord has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it. I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body. See Psalm 89:3-4.

12-13: If your sons will keep my covenant, and My testimony which I shall teach them, their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore (2 Samuel 7:12-16, 28-29; Jeremiah 17:24-25). For the Lord has chosen Zion. He has desired it for His dwelling place (Psalm 78:67-70).

14-16: (The following five verses are God’s words): “This is My resting place forever. Here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision. I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy...

17-18: There I will make the horn of David grow (He will be strong and victorious). I will prepare (and order to burn perpetually) a lamp for My Anointed (The Messiah--when He returns). His enemies I will clothe with shame (unlike the priests who are clothed with salvation), but upon Himself (Christ) His crown will flourish.”

**Psalm 133: A Song of Ascents. Of David.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “Blessing of Unification.”

1: Behold, how good (fine and beneficial, making for social happiness and national vitality—*Soncino*) and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity (not be scattered, but live together as a compact body--*Soncino*). God and Jesus are One and are totally unified (John 10:30). God’s spirit produces unity (Ephesians 4:3).

2-3: It is like precious oil upon the head (his anointing), running down the beard of Aaron, on the edge of his garments (Exodus 29:7). It is like the (heavy) dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion. (Dew is a blessing from God— Genesis 27:28). For there (Jerusalem) the Lord commanded the blessing—life forever.

**Psalm 134: A Song of Ascents.** Soncino titles this Psalm: “Greetings in the Temple.”

1-2: Bless the Lord, all you servants (especially the Levites: Deuteronomy 10:8), who by night stand in the house of the Lord! (Some Levites sang as singers in the temple day and night—see 1 Chronicles 9:33). The following instruction was given to all who were in the temple (all those who came to keep the Feast).

2-3: They were to lift up their hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord. A Prayer that the Lord, who made heaven and earth, will bless you from Zion. (This is the conclusion to the Songs of Ascents).

**Psalm 135:** Soncino titles this Psalm: “God in Nature and History.” This Psalm of praise to God was composed for use in the Temple.

1-2: Praise the name of the Lord, O you servants of the Lord! You who stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God.

3-4: Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good. Sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant (See Psalm 147:1). For the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure—see Exodus 19: 6-7. (Israel is also the apple of His eye—Deuteronomy 32:10).

5-6: For I know (this is an emphatic statement) that the Lord is great. He is above all gods (Psalm 97:9). The Lord does whatever He pleases—in heaven, in earth, in the seas and in all deep places.

7: He causes the vapors (sea mists) to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain. (It was always a mystery to the ancients that both water and fire came down together. The rain was not heated and the fire was not quenched). He brings the wind out of His treasuries (and snow/hail: Job 38:22). Jeremiah 10:12-13.

8-9: He destroyed the firstborn of Egypt—both of man and beast. He sent signs and wonders into the midst of Egypt, upon Pharaoh and all his servants.

10-12: God defeated many nations, and slew mighty kings—Sihon, king of the Amorites (Numbers 21:21-24); Og, king of Bashan (Numbers 21:33-35), and all the kingdoms of Canaan. He gave their land to Israel.

13-14: Your name, O Lord, endures forever (See Exodus 3:14-15). Your fame, O Lord, endures throughout all generations. The Lord will judge His people, and will have compassion on His servants (even while they are in captivity because of their sins. See Deuteronomy 32:36).

15-16: (The next four verses are repeated here from Psalm 115:4-8): The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but don’t speak. They have eyes, but they don’t see.

17-18: They have ears, but they do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. Those who make them are like them (unseeing, unhearing—as dead, spiritually). So is everyone who trusts in them.

19-21: Bless the Lord, O house of Israel, O house of Aaron, O house of Levi. (In addition) You who fear the Lord, bless the Lord! Blessed (praised) be the Lord out of Zion, who dwells in Jerusalem! Praise the Lord! (All will bless the Lord in Zion—Israel, the house of Aaron, the h ouse of Levi, and all who fear the Lord).

**Psalm 136:** Soncino titles this Psalm: “Hymn of Praise.” Purpose: To give thanks to God. The refrain: “For His mercy endures forever,” concludes each verse and was sung by the choir of Levites or by the congregation.

1-3: Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! Give thanks to the God of gods, to the Lord of lords! (See Deuteronomy 10:17).

4-9: To Him who alone does great wonders, who by wisdom made the heavens (Jeremiah 10:12), who laid out the earth above the waters (Psalm 24:1-2), who made great lights—the sun to rule by day and the moon and stars to rule by night (Genesis 1:16).

10-12: To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn, and brought Israel out from among them, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm (See Exodus 6:6; Deuteronomy 4:34).

13-15: To Him who divided the Red Sea in two, and made Israel pass through the midst of it, but overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea (This is a proof scripture that Pharaoh died in the Red Sea).

16-22: To Him who led His people through the wilderness; who struck down great kings; and who slew famous kings—Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and gave their land as a heritage to Israel.

23-25: To Him who remembered us in our lowly state, and rescued us (delivered, as in breaking a yoke from off the neck) from our enemies, who gives food to all flesh (even animals) It also means that God is merciful to all peoples—not just Israel.

26: Oh give thanks to the God of heaven! (This title of God is in Jonah 1:9). For His mercy endures forever.