

THE PILGRIM'S SONGBOOK

Psalms 120-134

The Songs of Ascents



"Let Us Go . . ."

BROOKY R STOCKTON

The Pilgrim's Songbook



Brooky R Stockton, PHD
Pastor / Professor Theology, ret.

PO Box 884

Tijeras, New Mexico (87059)

October 2023

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Preface

Who can put into words the difficulties the exiles faced returning to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild their lands, Jerusalem, and the temple?

These “Song of Degrees” were written by Levites struggling to believe God and find strength to meet the challenges of their time. This is called the “Pilgrim Songbook.”

Likewise, we are living in “best of times” and the “worst of times.”

Study these Pilgrim Songs to develop a positive view of the LORD God and find strength to tackle the duties God has given you.

Dr. Brooky Stockton, ret. pastor / teacher

Psalm 130:7 Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.

The Pilgrim's Songbook



“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.” (Psalm 122:1)

Introduction

The “Song of degrees” - Psalms 120-134.

The Pilgrim’s Songbook



The title "A Song of degrees" is given to fifteen Psalms, 120-134.

The Hebrew word *maalah* signifies, “going up, ascent.” It is translated “stairs, steps, and going up.”

We picture Levitical choir armed with swords and adorned in white robes harmonizing in base tones praises to the LORD at various times during the required festivals.

Tradition has it that the all-male Levite choir would sing these hymns as they ascended the steps of the temple in the Women's Court leading into the temple proper.

Psalm 134 was the pinnacle psalm – an encouragement to praise God during the night . . . and, no doubt, many a Pilgrim would stay in the temple rejoicing and talking with friends past midnight until their eyelids slid downward.

These Ascent Psalms have been grouped together: four are by David, one by Solomon, and the rest are without a name. Psalm 135 is added because it fits the theme and purpose of these songs.

The background to all these psalms is the Babylonian Exile (606-536 B.C.) and the Order by God for Cyrus in 539 B.C. to release the Jews so they could return to a devastated Land and to build the LORD God a house at Jerusalem.

Furthermore, these psalms are sometimes called the “Pilgrim’s Songbook.”

Pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem during festival seasons would mix groups and sing these choruses together as they approached the holy city – songs that shed light on the Lord while generating hope for believers.

Keep in mind all the psalms and Hebrew symbols belong to the church, the True Israel of God; that is, these are our songs.

No antichrist Jew has a legitimate claim upon these precious choruses of faith. The Jews belonging to the 12 tribes of Israel were blessed to see the coming of their Messiah in the first century, but they rejected Him by crucifying Him on a Roman cross.

Modern Ashkenazi so-called "Jews" joined the spirit of ancient, unbelieving Israel. Therefore, they have no claim upon these songs.

But, the faithful Jews received Christ as the Messiah Savior, namely: Peter, Paul, and John et al. As the gospel went into the Roman Theater, gentiles believed on Christ and were "baptized" (placed into) into this holy community we call the "remnant," or "the true Israel," or "the New Israel", or the church. Our Lord transferred the stewardship of Israel's holy symbols (the candelabra et al.) to the "seven lampstands" in writing (Revelation 1:19-20).

It is written! These are our songs! Therefore, let His people sing them as they go to their "holy temple in the Lord" we call the "church" (Ephesians 2:19-22).

"I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the LORD'" (Psalm 122:1).

Psalm 120

Keep Me From Lying Lips



Ever feel like you are surrounded by hornets?

A righteous man having to share the same neighborhood with liars and deceivers pains the soul.

Wounded by stinging wasps, the psalmist pours out his pain in a hymn. His misery is our misery -- the grief of every pious man.

Thus, the Spirit pulls back the curtains so we can see the character of a righteous soul.

Psalm 120: 1 <A Song of degrees.> In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me.

The word "distress" (*tsarah*) refers to the agony of having to work alongside obnoxious people who take pleasure in jabbing you with their tongues (slander).

The word *tsarah* describes the anguish of Joseph's soul when his brothers betrayed him and sold him as a slave to a caravan going to Egypt (Genesis 42:21); and, of "Hannah's grief of sharing her house with a odious, critical woman: "her adversary also provoked her sore" (1 Samuel 1:8); and a "time of tribulation" in Judges 10:14); and, "vexed" in Nehemiah 9:27.

2 Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue.

Lies and deceit were so common this righteous man had to pray to the LORD for deliverance. Lying lips include exaggerated reports, false promises from business associates, and slander by adversaries.

Consider our time. Is it possible to find out the truth in the news, in history, in medicine (vaxxines), and in science? The doctrines of evolution, climate change, homosexuality, gender-bender wokeness, and UFOs choke optimism out of our soul. We are surrounded by fake news, lying politicians, indoctrination, false advertising, feminists' hoopla, Zionist's propaganda, and social media censorship. The Christian man in

search of truth finds himself in the company of hostile minds, gossips, and slanderers. Even the church is filled with deceived people who are comfortable with their sophism.

War involves the art of deception, and the Scripture warns us not to be deceived.

“Deuteronomy 11:16 Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them;” (Deuteronomy 11:16).

The verb “deceived” (pathah) means “to be spacious or wide open.”

The adverb “not” nullifies the probability of being deceived; i.e., the believer must doubt enemy propaganda.

And, the wretched thing about deception is the deceived does not know he is deceived.

Moreover, deception is a fact of war after a war is started, but the international laws of war prohibit propaganda to start a war.

The first casualty of every war is the truth.

During the Hamas-Israel War (October 7, 2023), Israel illegally and immorally published a report about Hamas beheading children. Though it wasn't true, the report went around the world. Notice the language of deception in the following report

“It's been about four days since this incredible and tragic escalation of violence and the level of misinformation — even disinformation — seems near unprecedented . . . Women, children, toddlers, and elderly were brutally butchered in an ISIS way of action and we are we are [sic] aware of the heinous acts Hamas is capable of,” the spokesperson wrote in response to questions from The Intercept about the viral reports. **“We cannot confirm it officially, but you can assume it happened and believe the report,”** she reiterated in a follow-up phone call.” (Israel Defense Forces, Reported by “the Intercept” October 10, 2023).

Without going to primary sources, it seems difficult to find the truth about the Civil War, WWI, WWII, and the death cult in the Municipal

Corporation of Washington D.C. Winners write the history to make their enemies look like the Devil incarnate and themselves like Virgin Mary. The Bible is smeared, Christ blasphemed, and pastors portrayed as mumbling idiots by Jewish Hollywood. O Lord, keep me from lying lips!

3 What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?

Ellicott translates the text, "What more can be added to thee (i.e., in the way of epithet), besides lying and false, thou deceitful tongue?"

He is correct. What more can be said about the lying, deceitful, duplicitous tongue of politicians, the media, and gossips?

4 Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper.

Struggling to describe the pain in his soul that these liars caused him, this righteous man employs two metaphors: (a) being pierced by sharp arrows from a skilled archer; and, (b) being intentionally tortured by burning coals – horrific vexation every faithful pastor understands. O, the pain of defamation, slander, and libel spoken maliciously behind the back that comes by a report from a friend.

Be clear, the psalmist is not talking about deserved criticism due to a moral failure or the helpful criticism of a friend, but undeserved aspersions from careless and reckless souls.

5 Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!

The psalmist employs two more metaphors to describe his extremity and girdle of adversaries plaguing him: Mesech and the tents of Kedar.

Mesech refers to Israel's traditional enemies from the north: Canaanites, Amorites, Syrians, Assyrians, Babylon, Gog and Magog.

The *tents of Kedar* describe adversaries from the South: Edomites, Moabites, Arabu tribes; and, Nabatu tribes.

Compare the pain in the soul to Virgin Mary being forced to share a house with Fanny Porter and other prostitutes; or Mary Poppins having neighbors like Scrooge; or Sleeping Beauty having to live in the Bronx with drug addicts. This author is a lamb among wolves, a rabbit among coyotes, an elephant ringed in by big game hunters.

6 My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace.

"It is very grievous to a good man, to be cast into, and kept in the company of the wicked, from whom he hopes to be forever separated." - Matthew Henry

7 I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war.

Before us is the description of a righteous man being pushed and shoved by wicked men. He is for peace, they are for war; He loves life, they love death; he helps the weak, they crush the innocent; he is reasonable, they are fanatics; he loves truth, they embrace lies.

America has changed! The Christian suffers grief in his soul because he is surrounded by abortionists, feminists, transvestites, fake media, fake science, and warmongers that smile when you mention "nuclear war."

O, the pain of having to live on this earth with Sodomites, fornicators, fraudsters, communists, war hawks, gluttons, and the superrich who believe you should own nothing and be happy.

O, Lord, deliver my soul . . .

Psalm 121

The LORD is My Keeper



It is believed by many that the "Songs of degrees" were written after the exile (586 B.C.) by Jews in Babylon struggling with issues of the faith connected with their deportment. And, it is this perspective we must consider as we seek to uncover the beauty and mystery of these glorious hymns.

The key word in this psalm is the word "keep" or "keeper" (shamar). Used six times, the word "shamar" sheds light on the nature of our Lord and His work for us. Because He keeps us, we cling to Him.

Another key word is the noun "help" (ezer) or "helper." Nouns are facts, not presumptions. Employed two times by the Spirit, the psalm shines light on the character of our Creator-Savior. It is possible the Lord permits us to experience trouble that we might discover His assistance? This psalmist thinks so.

We do not help Him, but He helps us.

Psalm 121:1 <A Song of degrees.> I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

The psalmist gives us the conclusion first; and, the question second.

The word "whence" (ai'yn) is an interrogatory and **not** an interjection.

The latter part of the text is a single question. "Where will my help come from?" After he ponders the question, he comes to the conclusion his help comes from the LORD – the One who chose the hills of Jerusalem for His dwelling.

The word "help" (ezer) refers to assistance, comfort, support, and aid. The first usage of the term "help" is when the LORD made the woman Adam's helpmeet (Genesis 2:18). As history progressed, pious men learned that God was their helper. Jacob promised his sons that the LORD would be their Helper after his passing (Genesis 49:25). After the deportation, the exiles rediscovered the LORD as their Helper.

Feeling the loneliness and confusion of the exile, those banished from Jerusalem were asking, "Where do we look for help?" This question did not embrace pure optimism. . . It was a sincere question by those struggling with confidence and doubt, faith and fear, hope and unbelief.

"How can I trust him that ruined my comfortable life and exiled me to Babylon?" may be the bigger question.

The plural noun "mountains" (har'im) informs us that after looking around the plains of Babylon which had no mountains, the psalmist was thinking of Jerusalem, the temple mount, and the hills surrounding the capital city. "He lifted up his eyes unto the hills" but he could not possibly see them from the plains of Babylon; that is, lifting up his eyes is a spiritual expression that refers to his hope in the Lord and his faith in the character of God.

This is one of the greatest spiritual comebacks in history. In the dust pits of Babylon, many Hebrews placed their faith in Israel's Protector and Provider.

The word "hills" is a metonym for the LORD'S house in Jerusalem; that is, following his quest, the author concluded that He would look to his God for help . . . the same God who destroyed Jerusalem and deported the survivors to Babylon. The God who chastised them now became their hope for salvation. The hand that holds the rod of discipline also holds the key to freedom.

2 My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.

This confession of faith is also part of his conclusion. It did not come easily. The psalmist spent many years contemplating this question before he found his answer. My help comes from the LORD . . . not from men . . . not from totem pole rituals . . . and not from the matrix of government . . . but from the Creator of heaven and earth.

Is there a greater Helper than this - the all-knowing, every-present, omnipotent Maker of earth and sky?

The One Who permits the sorrows of life also provides the comforts of life. The LORD Who created life has the power to save life. The King of righteousness is also the King of mercy. The One who judged Israel is also the one that can save Israel. *The One with perfect grace will never let his righteous decrees destroy His imperfect people.* The One Who is righteous

must punish sin; yet, the merciful One is also driven by His grace to save His troubled ones.

At the cross, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other"(Psalm 85:10).

3 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

The psalmist speaks for God to Himself. Having considered the character of God, he instructs his own soul: "He (God) will not suffer thy foot to be moved (shaken)."

When difficulties are greatest, we need to comfort ourselves by reflecting on the attributes of the LORD. Though the winds blow and the seas roar, He will not permit our vessels to capsize or run aground. The One Who watches over us does not slumber. He is on guard duty day and night, seven days a week.

Satan used this text in the temptation of Christ. God protects, but beware of presumption. There is no promise of protection for the self-governed man.

We who teach children to pray, "Now I lay me down to sleep," ought to rest because He never sleeps.

4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The word "behold" is a particle of interjection -- the voice of a holy hawker, "Hey there, come and see."

The word "keepeth" (shamar) is a Qal participle referring to the work of God on our behalf. The term "keep" means "to keep, maintain, or to protect." We get the words "scorekeeper," "goalkeeper," "doorkeeper," and "wicketkeeper" from this English word.

He that "keepeth Israel" refers to God's supervision, maintenance, and protection of the nation . . . even backsliders in the foreign lands of Babylon. Many of them were not only protected, but promoted. Think of Daniel and his companions.

Typical of accent songs, the psalmist repeats the previous statement for emphasis. The One who keeps Israel . . . and me . . . does not catnap, hibernate, or take a siesta. He is always on duty. His office is always open; and, He never has a sign outside his door that reads, "Do Not Disturb!"

5 The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand.

Arresting the word "keep" from verse 4, the psalmist amplifies the thought in verse 5. The LORD keeps us, and retains us in His possession. He will not and cannot let us slip out of His hand or be hurt under His supervision.

He calls the LORD "thy shade upon thy right hand." He protects us from the heat of the day, and the cold by night; from the burning sun and from the freezing nights. He blocks all that would injure us. He is the filter that removes impurities that would harm us.

The Great Keeper of Israel sent His people to Babylon, but the Chaldean wolves were not permitted to harm His lambs nor was the blazing Babylonian sun permitted to damage the bodies of His people.

We should thank God for all the good He does for us, and for all the bad that doesn't happen to us.

6 The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

Building on the word "shade" from verse 5, the composer amplifies the fact that the LORD protects His people from heat stroke during the day and from chills at night in verse 6.

The dangers of the sun by day and the dangers of the moon at night are so well known there is little need to comment. We get the word "lunacy" from the moon, and the words sunstroke, sunburn, and sunbaked from the sun. UV radiation from the Sun can damage the skin even causing skin cancers. But, here the psalmist proclaims God's protection from both.

7 The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.

The word "preserve" (shamar) should be translated "keep." The word "keep" (shamar) is used six times in this psalm and is one of the beauties of this hymn.

Our Keeper keeps, maintains, and protects His own. Consistent consideration of the word "keep" (shamar) will enlarge our appreciation of all the marvelous things the LORD does for us.

That He as our Keeper is a fact; that He keeps shows us insight into His work for us. He Who saves, keeps on saving; He Who sanctifies keeps on sanctifying; He Who provides, keeps on providing.

Natural dangers are one matter; moral evils are another.

Keeping one from "evil" is an advanced thought in this psalm. The word "evil" can refer to "moral evil" or it can refer to calamity. While God is not the creator of moral evil, He is the author of calamity (Isaiah 45:7). While He forbids His people from indulging in moral depravity, He does permit tragedy and adversity -- not to harm us, but to wean us away from our idols. The One who protects us from natural dangers also protects us from iniquity and calamity.

Let us rest. There is no evil designed by men or the Devil that can separate us from our salvation in Christ. We are immortal till our work is completed. And, what we deem as evil for us, God works to turn troubles into riches and bad into good into our lives (Romans 8:28).

8 The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

The word "preserve" (shamar) should be translated "keep."

"going out" and "coming in" is a common Hebrew idiom referring to all the events of life. He keeps us from evil when we leave home and come home; when we work, and when we rest; on the sea and on the land; at home or abroad; when we walk and when we sit; at night and during the day. He is our Protector and Provider; our Guide and our Guard.

The noun "for evermore" (olam) includes matters on earth and in heaven, in now time and eternal time.

An atheist was criticizing Christianity to a believer saying, "The trouble with you Christians is that you use God as a crutch." The saint said, "You don't understand. He is not my crutch. He is my whole wheelchair!"

Psalm 122

Let Us Go to the House of the Lord



The theme in this chapter centers on the House of the Lord in Jerusalem and the tribes that make pilgrimages to the city during the Israel's festival seasons.

While wolves howl in the night, the heart cry of every pious saint is, "Let us Go the House of the LORD."

Possibly, this desire burned in the heart of the exiles, but more likely it was a psalm composed after the exile or maybe even during the times of David and Solomon. We just don't know for sure.



Jerusalem is mentioned three times and peace three times. The House of the Lord is mentioned in the first and last verse of the psalm. Terms like "tribes" "city" "gates" and "LORD" stand out in the psalm as

they highlight the material substance associated with the joy of traveling to Jerusalem during festival seasons.

This psalm exposes the fragrance of life within the soul of every faithful man -- the joy of being in the House of God with the Family of God. In the Old Testament the House of the Lord was the temple proper; in the New Testament the House of the Lord is the church, an assembly of He people meeting to gladly worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

The invitation by others, "Let us go into the house of the Lord" cheers the heart of every true saint.

Psalm 122:1 <A Song of degrees of David.> I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.

These are the words of the people exhorting one another to go and worship the LORD in the temple during the three great festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

"I was glad" expresses the happiness of heart and the smile on the cheeks of every "true Israelite" when friends and family invited the psalmist to travel to Jerusalem to venerate the LORD in the House of God.



"Let us go" is inscribed over the porch doors of St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

2 Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.

We must imagine in our minds ear the comments of the pilgrims when they entered the gates of Jerusalem after traveling miles to join the festivities: "At last, we are here standing in the gates of

our capital city."

3 Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together:

Surely, the country folk from the villages within the nation must have raised their heads and stared with amazement at the architecture of Jerusalem and the temple proper while commenting to one another about the beauty of its walls, the charm of its gates, and the handsomeness of its structures.

4 Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD.

"Whether" is not a question, but a statement meaning "There the tribes go up . . ." Tribes is mentioned twice -- a reference to pilgrims around the nation.

The "testimony of Israel" refers to the "ark of testimony" which contained the Ten Commandments a.k.a. the "testimony" because the words expressed the character of God. The ark was placed in the tabernacle which was called the Tabernacle of Testimony (Numbers 1:48). The focal point of meditation were the words on the two tables . . . laws . . . words that which reflected the character of God:

Psalm 119

111 Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.

125 I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.

137 Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments.

140 Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.

142 Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.

160 Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.

Benson adds this comment: "Unto the testimony of Israel — Unto the ark, called the testimony because of the tables of the covenant laid up in it, which are called God's testimony, and the tables of the testimony."

Thankfulness for God's provision and His protection graced the lips of the worshipers entering the city.

"Its not how much we have, but how much we enjoy that makes happiness" - Charles Spurgeon.

5 For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.

Jerusalem was not only the nation's religious hub, it was Israel's capital. The term "thrones" is mentioned twice. It reminds us Jerusalem was the nexus of the nation's theocratic government. Great Kings like David, Solomon, and Hezekiah set up their administrations in this city.

6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.

It was perfectly appropriate to call the people to pray for the peace of Jerusalem when the House of the Lord was in this holy city between 1000 B.C. and 70 A.D. But, it is unfitting for Zionists to call Christians to pray for modern Jerusalem. Modern Jerusalem is no more holy than London or Kansas City. The temple of the Lord is His church . . . and men should pray much for the prosperity of the church.

7 Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.

"Peace be within thy walls" points to the fortifications of the city and the sense of peace people felt as they entered into it. Peace in the fortress and peace in the presence of God in the holy city.

8 For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee.

"Peace" (shalom) is a common greeting much like the English salutation "hello."

The greetings on the lips of the residents announced "shalom" to the visitors entering the city, and "shalom" as the proper response from the pilgrims to the residents in the capital.

Let the church in America learn a lesson from the ancient Israelites. They were peace-lovers and not saber-rattlers. Shalom ought to be on the lips of the American people as madmen seem hell bent on turning the country into a nation of war hawks.

9 Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good.

Because the LORD dwelled in the temple, and Jerusalem was the capital, every Hebrew wanted only the best for their beloved city. Faithfulness to the LORD and fidelity to the nation filled the hearts of the pilgrims. Who wouldn't pledge allegiance to the city that housed the living God?

Matthew Henry provides this application: "Love of the brethren and love to God, ought to stir us up to seek to be like the Lord Jesus in fervent prayer and unwearied labor, for the salvation of men, and the Divine glory."

Benson also says it well, "I desire its influence to be perpetuated and extended that I seek thy prosperity. This expresses a deep feeling in the mind of a pious man. To him the church of God is the most important of all objects, gives the principal interest to a place, and is everywhere to him the chief attraction."

"I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the LORD.'"

Psalm 123

Have Mercy Upon Us



It is not difficult to imagine an anxious Levite in Babylon composing this hymn. Moreover, it is the stand of every saint waiting for God to provide the answers to their prayers.

The key word in this psalm is "eyes" – a metaphor describing the Christ-centered heart, an expression of the hope of every pious man, and a statement of the mental anguish and the renewed focus of every Christian.

Psalm 123:1 <A Song of degrees.> Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.

The word "dwellest" could be translated "enthroned," or the "One ruling from heaven." That the LORD reigns is the gospel of the Old Testament (Psalm 87:1; 99:1).

"Behold how not only I, but the rest of thy faithful people wait upon thee, submitting ourselves to this severe punishment, as poor slaves do to the stroke of their offended master or mistress, and resolving to bear it patiently till thou, our Lord, who dost inflict it, wilt be pleased to show thyself our most gracious God, and in much pity toward us remove it." - Bishop Patrick (Quoted by Benson).

Many times in life, the struggling servant finds himself with his eyes locked on to Lord like magnets. His hope is not in men, not in government, and not in a better economy, but in the Lord.

2 Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us.

The word "eyes" is mentioned four times in the first two verses.

As the eyes of a servant study the expressions of their master, the eyes of the pious are often narrowed to slits staring at the Lord. They wait with the patience of a nun for God to have mercy upon them.

3 Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly filled with contempt.

The word "mercy" is mentioned three times in the psalm. The LORD's grace reveals the hope of the psalmist.

Mercy is an act of God that relieves stress, tension, and the pain of chastisement. It is God acting to restrain judgment that a man so justly deserves.

If God dispensed pure justice, who would be left standing?

Have mercy up us . . . upon the church . . . upon our nation . . . and upon me, O Lord.

4 Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.

Now we learn the reason for all this waiting and cries of mercy. This saint along with all his fellow pilgrims felt the pain of proud mockers howling, "Where is your God? Why doesn't He help you?" Ouch!

The psalmist uses the article "the" to refer to "the scorning"; i.e. to a particular season of mocking taking place against God's people in Babylon.

We learn there are periods of contempt in history against the faith whether it be from Yankees mocking the faith of Southerners, or liberals jeering the Holy Scriptures in the early twentieth century. Today pseudo-scientists shove evolution, the Big Bang, and global warming down the throats of Bible believing Christians as if there is the only viable opinion in the debate. Every age has its proud scoffers which in time are shown to be fools. Ludicrous theories like the efficacy of "flue shots" or "man evolved from monkeys," or the earth is "billions of years old" have exhausted the patience of true science.

Which of us has not ran ourselves breathless waiting for the Savior's deliverance?

If you are weary from tarrying for the Lord, you are not alone. Like waiting for the sunrise, you wait for that which is sure to come. God is seldom early, never late, and always on time.

Join the saints and lift up your bleary eyes to Him who shows mercy
again, and again, and again.

Psalm 124

The LORD is On Our Side

The "if not" Syllogism of a Confident Saint.



Psalm 124:1 <A Song of degrees of David.>

The presumption this psalm was penned by an exile in Babylon has merit.

Note the dual terms and repetitions in this chapter: "*side, side;*" "*LORD, LORD;*" "*swallowed, wrath;*" "*overwhelmed, gone over;*" "*waters, stream, proud waters;*" "*prey, snare;*" "*gone over our soul, and gone over our soul.*"

This psalm is written by a saint that had listened to the doubters among the captives in Babylon that felt like God was not on their side . . . that He has not been fair with them . . . that He didn't love them.

Carefully observe the accurate deductive reasoning of the psalmist.

A reference to "what if"

Psalm 121:1 If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say;

The problem pounding the exiles was a prevailing doubt about whether God was with them or had abandoned them.

If you have never doubted whether God was on your side, you are not human. The greatest of saints during fluctuating tides of life has asked this question, "Is the Lord on my side?"

The psalmist addresses the confusion and unbelief of his people, a fallacy in their reasoning that was invalid. By employing a deductive argument called a "hypothetical syllogism" - an "if not" type of reasoning He was able to persuade many that the LORD had not abandoned them. When one has an invalid presumption, the conclusion will be invalid.

In contrast to the skewed thinking of his peers, the psalmist reasons that if God had not been on our side, then we would have been devastated, but

we weren't. Instead of poverty, we experienced prosperity; instead of hate and rejection, we experienced kindness and acceptance among the Babylonians. So, the conclusion that God was not with us is deeply flawed.

Deductive reasoning is a logical approach where you progress from general ideas (our blessings and lack of hardship) to specific conclusions (The LORD must be with us).

Correct premise: Our sins deserve death, but we are alive.

Correct conclusion: Therefore, the LORD must be with us.

The psalmist is saying, "suppose for a moment the Lord had not been on our side, then . . ." No doubt many of the exiles looked at their "enslavement" in Babylon as evidence the LORD was not on their side, but on the side of their enemies. But, their prosperity and popularity among the Chaldeans was proof that God had not abandoned them.

The good news of the psalmist is that the doubters were dead wrong, and that the LORD was on their side guiding, guarding, and giving peace to them.

Therefore, in the rest of this psalm, the author rebuts the fundamental conclusion of the doubters that God was not with them by engaging his "if not . . . then" syllogism.

2 If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us:

This godly author repeats the premise of his argument - "If not . . . then . . ."

The psalmist rebuts the presumption of the doubters by using an "if not" syllogism: *If the LORD had not been on our side, then this would have happened.*

A reference to the heathen's harassment potential.

3 Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us:

If the LORD had NOT been on our side, then the Babylonians would have plundered us with their power and abused us with their anger and wrath . . . but, this never happened.

The Chaldeans treated us decently and fairly. Therefore, this fact led the psalmist to conclude the LORD was with them.

4 Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul:

If the LORD had NOT been on our side, then our captors would have chained us to millstones and thrown us into the Euphrates. But, this didn't happen, so the LORD must be on our side.

5 Then the proud waters had gone over our soul.

If the LORD had NOT been on our side, the current of adversity by the proud would have carried us out to sea. But, this didn't happen, so the LORD must be on our side.

A reference to deliverance

6 Blessed be the LORD, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.

The fact of the matter is that the LORD did not abandon us. He did not give His sheep to the wolves. We were not mutton in the teeth of the Chaldeans. The only explanation for this fair treatment is that God restrained the pagans in Babylon from harming us.

7 Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.

If the LORD was not on our side, we would have been like doves snared by trappers. The fact of the matter is that we escaped the snares, nets, and nooses of the Babylonian officials (fowlers). In fact, it is better than this. There were no snares laid to capture and plunder us.

A reference to the Source of help

8 Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

Those doubters among us who say the LORD is not on our side are dead wrong. The LORD helped us, protected us, and provided for us. Look at the evidence. It is in plain sight. Most pagans treat us like we are "nuts," but the Babylonians accepted us with grace and kindness.

Moreover, the LORD Who created heaven and earth exercised His power to give us a good standing in the community where we experienced peace and prosperity. And, in 536 B.C. Cyrus released us to come back and to rebuild our temple in Jerusalem. This is of God, not man.

A better question might be, are you on the Lord's side?

If you doubt whether God is on your side and are tempted to conclude He does not love you, employ an "If not" argument.

Yes, the LORD is on our side! Amen!

Personal note: As I was thinking and writing about this psalm, my lovely wife walked in the door with happy tears in her eyes. She shared with me how she did not have enough money to pay for our grocery bill.

Consequently, she had to put some vitals back on the counter. As she was in the parking lot, the lady behind her in line handed her a bag of the things my wife had put down on the counter. The two women smiled and exchanged thank yous. I was able to assure my bride, "If the Lord had not been by your side, this kindness would not have happened to you."

Psalm 125

The Righteous Cannot Be Moved



Feel vulnerable? God protects those who trust Him. You are invincible until your work is done.

Psalm 125:1 <A Song of degrees.>

The song of degrees are called the Pilgrim's Songbook because the worshipers sang these songs while they traveled to Jerusalem on the way to yearly festivals. The melodies are lost in history, but the lyrics remain.

Surround by hills in all directions, Jerusalem is protected from chariot-rich invaders. Two valleys provide a means of traveling to Mount Zion. But, this hymn is not about the valleys, but about the mountains placed like cupcakes around Israel's capital.

Imagine in your mind's eye pilgrims coming over the crest of a hill and beholding the mountains surrounding Zion for the first time. When seeing the eternal hills around the walled city, the worshippers break into song with smiles on their faces and gladness in their hearts?

Psalm 125:1 They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.

The psalmist draws a spiritual lesson from the topography of Jerusalem: "They that trust in the LORD shall be like Mount Zion" - stable, permanent, resolute, strong, steady, and enduring.

"cannot be removed" expresses the invincibility of the believer and of the church, for "we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28).

The phrase "abideth for ever" stretches this promise beyond this veil into eternity.

2 As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.

The "mountains" are the subject of the sentence and the adverb "round" (cabiyb) is used twice. It means "to be placed around."

These mountains gave Jerusalem a strategic military advantage against armies composed of charioteers.

The psalmist draws a second spiritual lesson from the topography of Jerusalem. Not only does the LORD brace those that trust Him, these mountain inform us that God borders His people on all sides like the mountains encircle the capital city. Our Lord stands above us, below us, and around us. How secure it that?

Galatians 3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from ("out of" or "away from") the curse of the law, being made a curse for ("over") us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree:

The first promise compares the mountains to the stability and permanence to those who trust the LORD; the second promise compares the security the mountains afford Jerusalem militarily to the protection the presence of God has over one's precious all.

The protecting care of Jehovah is likened to a wall round the city, instead of the two valleys that lead to Jerusalem. - Ellicott.

"As Jerusalem is thus protected by the hills around, so the people of God are protected by Yahweh." - Benson

Those minds who are in covenant with God shall be like Mt. Zion -- like mountains that cannot be displaced by winds, rains, and armies. "God so surrounds His people, and they cannot be moved" - Matthew Henry.

Again, the term "forever" assures believers that His care is not only for this age, but for the age to come.

What God did for ancient Israel, He does for the New Israel, the church. He surrounds his called out ones, protects them, and supports them. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church nor shall the church succumb to the tensile and glitter thrown at her by the world. The church will not only survive the terrors of our time, the church will thrive and succeed in her mission to reach the lost.

3 For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.

The word "rod" (shebet) would better be translated "scepter" or "ruler's staff." The "righteous" are believing Hebrews that cling to the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – that believe His promises and not the “we are doomed” message barking at them from their circumstances.

The noun "lot" refers to the work and station in life that God gives His people.

The word "rest" does **not** refer to sleep, but to the passing placement of grating governance over a people.

"put forth their hand unto iniquity" refers to the capacity or weakness within His people to engage in wrongdoing while being mistreated by secular regimes. Righteousness is not contagious, but sin is like leaven that permeates everything it touches.

The "rod shall **not** rest" refers to a reign of tyranny -- to a death grip of some oppressive regime over Israel (or the church). . . and, particularly unrelenting, continuous absolutism over the Holy Land.

God does **not** tolerate long periods of despotism over His people. The exile ended after 70 years (586-536 BC). Tyranny will **not** linger long lest God's people be seduced into complicity by pagan allurements or beaten into submission by the iron-hand of autocrats.

The Rod of the Wicked may indeed touch the bodies of the righteous, their families, and assets, but it cannot touch their soul - Matthew Henry.

Individual believers may suffer the indignities of tyrants, but the church of Christ will prevail unto the coming of our Lord. Their house is built on the Rock, not upon shifting sand.

God may use the wicked as a rod to chastise the wicked, but He will **never** use the wicked as sword to punish His own. Disciplined, yes; punished, No!

Moreover, the Apostle Paul informs us that God is at work making good come out of individual troubles (Romans 8:28). How can a man be strong in life without tests of his faith? The strongest among us are those who have been tested the most.

4 Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.

The psalmist addresses the LORD. Since You have promised to keep your people from evil, be pleased to grant them Your blessing for good so they can do good. Deal graciously and bountifully to those who seek to walk honorably before you. Reward their faith and simple acts of obedience.

Nothing can frustrate the grace of God, not even the failure of His people.

Psalm 89:30-33.

“. . . Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail" (Psalm 89:30-33).

5 As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.

The ways of the righteous are straight, but the ways of the wicked are crooked.

Just as the LORD seeks the good of His people, the Lord seeks justice for the workers of iniquity; i.e. He treats them as transgressors of His law: "for they shall soon be cut down as grass . . . for the seed of the wicked shall be cut off" (Psalm 37:2, 28).

Psalm 126

We Are Glad



How do think the captives in Babylon felt when they first heard the news that they were free to return to their homeland (539-536 B.C.)?

So great was their jubilation the psalmist had to commemorate the miracle in song. Great events call for great songs to a great Lord.

Psalm 126:1 <A Song of degrees.> When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.

Ellicott translation: "when Jehovah brought back the returned of Zion."

How can you possibly put into words the bubbling joy that burst from the clouds over the exiles in Babylon when they heard the command by Cyrus that the Jews could return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple?

We were like them that dreamed . . . like skinny men made fat . . . like vagrants given a mansion . . . like inmates released from prison.

2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them.

What a reversal of fate: from languish to laughter; from sorrows to songs; and, from condemnation to justification among the heathen.

"All that the people around us say is true. We see it; we feel it; we acknowledge it."- Barnes.

The heathen saw the salvation of God and were glad for the Jews; but the exiles felt it from the top of their head rippling to the bottom of their feet.

What a transformation: A nation deprived now revived. Doubt dwindled, faith improved; fear diminished, courage flourished.

3 The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.

The psalmist continues his rags to riches story and attributes the reversal of the nation's destiny, not to fate . . . not even to Cyrus, but to the LORD.

The euphoria of the exiles is simply described as "we were glad."

Of course, this is an understatement. We might amplify and compare their bliss to finding lost love; something as sweet as "the look of a lover saluting the eyes of a maid" (Ambrose); as lovely as matrimony; as delightful as finding a shade tree at high noon; as refreshing as being rescued off a sinking ship; or, as the elation of a soldier returning home from war.

The English term "glad" comes from the Old English word "glaed" which means "to shine."

In our minds eyes we can see the released captives smiling from ear to ear, with eyes sparkling like the stars, and feet kicking up dust dancing the Hora like brides and grooms.

4 Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south.

The news of Cyrus's command impacted the exiles like sunshine on a cold day. In this text, the psalmist remembers other exiles dispersed among the nations. He prays for another gracious manifestation of redemption -- an act of Providence that might be as refreshing to them as streams in the Negev.

5 They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.

Employing another metaphor, the psalmist contrasts the songs of the fall harvest with the tensions of planting in the spring sowing season -- the sweat and anxiety of seed time with the gaiety and joy of harvest time.

The jubilation of the Return provides a spiritual lesson - that corn must be planted before bread arrives on the table; that toiling in prayer precedes the comfort of answered prayer; that sowing the gospel seed comes before the harvest; that study leads to competence in any field; that toil and sweat usher in success.

6 He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

The psalmist expands the lesson the exiles learned: sowing comes before reaping; weeping precedes laughing; that the pleasure of gleaning is built on the patience and perseverance of the sower; that the gladness of harvest time is in proportion to the toil and trouble of seedtime; possessing the product follows paying the price; that enjoying the fruits at cropping season depends on hard work during the planting season.

Psalm 127

The Great Exception



Solomon built the first temple and gave the glory to God.

Those who returned from Babylon rebuilt the second temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua -- leaders who learned that completing the temple project was not by might, but by My Spirit (Zechariah 4:6).

Observing these facts, the psalmist draws a lesson for all of life, "**Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it.**"

Psalm 127:1 <A Song of degrees for Solomon.> Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

The "house" could be any house, not just the temple. It is a general statement, not a specific one.

From the context the "house" represents the family, but it could apply to building a business or a church or a school.

The word "except" in English is defined as "a person or thing that is excluded from a general statement or does not follow a rule."

The work of most men ends in vanity. This is the rule. But, there is an exception to the norm. Occasionally, a man comes along who seeks God's help to assist him in building his house and prospers in doing it. This is the exception to the rule . . . and, in breaking from the pack and trusting the LORD, the man succeeds.

The particle or conjunction "except" (im) can be translated "but" in English. It eliminates all possibilities of success without the help of the Lord. Building anything without God ends in calamity, but with Him is prosperity.

Duties as simple as "watching" during guard duty are doomed to fail unless the Lord is part of it; i.e. there can be no joy or happiness in a project unless the Lord adds His blessing to the enterprise.

2 It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.

"Rising up early, staying up late, and eating the bread of sorrows" are examples of the sacrifices men make to succeed in their ventures. Yes, men work to achieve their ambitions, but ultimate success in the project on all levels depends on God's blessings and not upon men's sacrifices of burning the late night oil.

While He gives His beloved sleep, He prospers and protects the proposals of those trusting Him.

3 Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

Now we learn that "the house" referred to in verse one refers to the family.

The Biblical mind sees children as a "heritage of the LORD" - as a "reward" and not a burden, a decree and not an "accident;" a legacy and not a product of nature (Genesis 30:2).

Children are a precious gift of God. Godly couples invest in children and not in stuff. Things perish! Children not only endear, they endure.

4 As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.

In military terms arrows are instruments of war; ordinances commanding enemies to surrender. Likewise, a mighty man sees children as His ordinance launched into the future admonishing men to bow their knees to Christ. We cannot live forever. The mighty man gives the gospel to his children as his inheritance for them with the expectation they will pass it on their sons and grandsons.

The Christian father with a love for God and family is called a "mighty man" - an *el gibbor* -- a warrior armed for battle. "Children" are not sons only, but godly daughters with sugar and spice and everything nice.

The need of the hour is men . . . manly men who will lead their families with a global vision of Christianizing the nations. Godly children are a mighty man's gift to the world -- arrows launched forward to build a highway so future generations can find their way into the kingdom of God.

5 Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.

Quivers are carried by warriors and hunters. Arrows are a metaphor for children. The more powerful the man, the more arrows he has in his quiver. Happiness and honor of a man are not found in his business, but in his family. The joy of seniors is their children and grandchildren.

At the end of life very few men say, "I wish I had worked more." Happy men find joy and pride in their family. Children make the man, honor the man, and are the power and joy of a mighty man.

The city gate represents the market place, government, and the city courts. The enemies of mankind gravitate toward centers of power.

Family men do not hang their head in shame. With chin up, they confront the lawless vying for power in the city gate.

The way to destroy enemies is not to kill them, but to "speak" with them; to enter the debate and to defeat bad ideas with good ideas; to defeat idolatry with allegiance to God; to defeat idealism with pragmatism; to defeat lawlessness with law-keeping; to overthrow criminals with a proper execution of law; to win sinners to the Lord by proclaiming the gospel.

"Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it."

Psalm 128

The Man God Blesses



If chapter 27 informs us that success cannot be achieved apart from God's blessing, this chapter informs us about the man God blesses.

Fearing the Lord

Psalm 128:1 <A Song of degrees.> Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways.

God intends to bless every man who "fears the Lord." The "fear the Lord" mirrors the NT call "to believe in Christ." And, if you are "in Christ," you are blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places - Ephesians 1:3.

God does not bless a man because of his fortitude or franchises, but because of His faith.

While "fear" includes respect, fear is primarily an attitude of mind that fears being out of God's will; that fears being judged for one's sins; that fears breaking His law. Fear is a faith produced by studying Bible theology, God's attributes, and His work in history.

The opposite of "fearing the Lord" is personal autonomy -- "doing it my way."

"And now the end is here
And so I face that final curtain
My friend I'll make it clear
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain
I've lived a life that's full
I traveled each and every highway
And more, much more

I did it, I did it my way" (The antichrist Song by Frank Sinatra) – See Isaiah 53:6.

In this Bible text "fear" is defined as "living life His way" under His laws in dependence upon him.

The whole sentiment that New Testament commands are great suggestions is a product of being raised in a permissive society. Few things are more reprehensible than the notion that men are free to choose their own law, their own values, and their own religion. Study His law and His gospel to fear the Lord. Fear the Lord and be blessed. Go your own way, and be cursed.

The Fruits of Fearing the Lord

2 For thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.

The fear of the Lord produces labor: The word "labor" is a metonym for "fruits" or "products" of one's work. The man who fears the Lord works; work transforms into money; money is exchanged for commodities; and supplied needs infer happiness and contentment.

3 Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.

The fear of the Lord leads to a happy marriage and a happy family.

"Fruitful vine" is a metaphor for unity and happiness -- an image of a happy housewife employed in her duties at home. She is not like the idle gossip, sitting "at the door of her house on a seat in the high places of the city" (Ellicott) or like modern women slaving away in some high rise complex chasing the feminine ideal.

"Olive plants" are images of growing, happy children that beautify and adorn the home.

4 Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD.

The interjection "behold" (he'gey) means to stop what you are doing, look up, and study how the LORD blesses the man that fears Him.

5 The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life.

A man that fears the Lord not only blesses his family, he blesses his nation.

"Seeing the good of Jerusalem" is a reference to the prosperity of the state. Zion was not only the religious center of the nation, but the capital of its theocratic government.

We learn from this text that the strength of a nation is not only in its economy, but in its families.

When the family is blessed, the nation is blessed; i.e. when families are strong, the nation is strong.

The Hebrews understood that the welfare of the state rests on the health and prosperity of the family. The family does not need the government, but the state needs the family. A state that taxes the family into poverty commits suicide. The modern transfer of wealth from the family to the state weakens the nation and makes it vulnerable to conquest by enemies foreign and domestic.

6 Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel.

The blessing of a man that fears the LORD includes a full, abundant life even to the point of seeing his grandchildren grow and prosper.

Not only does a man who fears the LORD see God's blessing on his family, but he is a blessing to all the tribes in the nation. Shalom on the man; shalom on his family; shalom upon the church; and shalom upon of the nation.

Psalm 129

He Cuts Asunder the Cords of the Wicked



This post exilic psalm considers the temporal state of affliction by Israel combined with the confident assurance of the Lord's deliverance from oppression.

Psalm 129:1 <A Song of degrees.> Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say:

The "me" is the voice of the nation Israel – also true of Christ and His holy church.

"Many a time" can be translated "much."

"Youth" refers to Israel as a young nation. Glancing over their enslavement in Egypt to their exile in Babylon, the psalmist personifies Israel as a literary device to address the nation's afflictions at the hands of pagan empires.

The godly among true Israel have always been a target for oppression. They were not persecuted because of their race, but because of their faith.

Biblical faith is a mystery to the world and for this reason rulers oppress gospel preachers.

Moreover, it would be a mistake to confuse modern manufactured antisemitism and fabricated racism for political advantage with the genuine maltreatment of outspoken Christians. The former is artificial; the latter is authentic.

2 Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me.

The psalmist recalls the nation's oppressions by Egypt, the Amorites, Midianites, Ammonites, Philistines, Syrians, Assyrians, and now Babylon.

He repeats his primary thought in verse one to impress upon the mind of the exiles that maltreatment by foreign federations was nothing new. It is as if the psalmist is saying, *we've always been unwelcome and treated unfairly. Our present predicament is not a national emergency. Our enemies*

have attempted to hurt us, kill us, and destroy us, BUT they have never prevailed! Our present experience is not unlike the troubles our fathers endured, so do not fear or be discouraged. We will prevail again. We will not only survive, but thrive. Don't panic. Accept the trials. Trust the LORD for His remedy. Shalom.

3 The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.

Continuing his theme of national suffering, the psalmist compares Israel's distress to an abused slave whose back has been brutally beaten with whips and cords - a back that looks like a furrowed field with long, deep grooves.

Modern scholars inform us that over 50 wars have been fought at the gates of Jerusalem . . . more than any other city in the world.

What happened to Israel, happened to our Lord Jesus Christ by whose wounds we are healed.

1 Peter 2:24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Let us remember that one of the callings of Christians is to suffer as He suffered, not for suffering sake, but that we might be perfected instruments for the healing to others.

1 Peter 2:21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

"The enemies of God's people have very barbarously endeavoured to wear out the saints of the Most High. But the church has been always graciously delivered." - Matthew Henry.

4 The LORD is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.

Righteousness has the sense of faithfulness in this passage.

The verb "hath cut asunder" (qatsats) is a Piel Perfect implying intense historic deliverances by the LORD. Something all Christian would do well to consider when they are going through distressing circumstances.

The author does not play the blame game nor does he plunge into self-pity. He does not accuse the LORD of wrongdoing. He infers the

sovereign LORD ordains periods of persecution to come upon God's people for their good and perfection.

The "wicked" include God-haters, antichrists, and persecutors of the church. Consider Nero and the martyrs of the early church.

During the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211), Clement of Alexandria reported "... *we have exhibited before our eyes every day abundant sources of martyrs that are burnt, impaled, beheaded.*" - Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, ii. 20.

"cut asunder the cords" is likened unto a rescuer cutting the cords and nets that trap little animals and birds.

"he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked" informs us that enslavement is only temporary; that our righteous Lord breaks the chains that bind and sets us free. The history of Israel is like nets being broken and birds escaping. Likewise for the church! It has been built on the rock and shall prosper until the Lord returns.

5 Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion.

The word "confounded" (buwsh) means "to be ashamed, confused, and deeply disappointed."

"turned back" (cuwg) means "to be moved back." The idea is that the persecutors will suffer utter defeat and frustration.

Israel suffered much, but in all her affliction the faithful LORD set her free; that is, be assured that no enslavement is permanent.

Based upon the LORD's frequent rescues, the psalmist lays down his **first ordinance** (a jussive): *Let the oppressors who hate Zion "be confounded and turned back;" i.e. be broken and ashamed like Pharaoh who drowned in the Red Sea.*

6 Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up:

The homes of Israelites had roofs made of sticks, mud, and grass. Consequently, when turf sprouted the hot sun baked the grass turning it brown.

Likewise, the psalmist delivers his **second ordinance**: *let those that hate Israel dry up and wither away like the grass on housetops.*

"*which withereth afore it groweth up*" implies the psalmist wished Zion-haters to dry up before they mature and produce seedlings.

"While God's people shall flourish as the loaded palm-tree, or the green and fruitful olive, their enemies shall wither as the grass upon the house-tops" - Matthew Henry.

7 Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom.

The "mowers" are gleaners who take their scythe, cut the grass, and bundle it into sheaves to feed the sheep and cattle during the winter months. Uncut grass remained, withered, and was good for nothing; that is, may the enemies of true Israel be like reapers with empty hands and with no grass to cut because of withered grass and empty fields.

Building on the wilting grass metaphor, the psalmist expands his ordinance in verse six wishing that the God-haters might be like the grass left behind by the mowers that withers and dies . . . like farmers with no bales of hay in their barns.

8 Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the LORD be upon you: we bless you in the name of the LORD.

We learn from Ruth 2 that farmers in Israel pronounced daily blessings upon the reapers - "The blessing of the Lord be upon you"; and, that reapers returned the greeting. Such courtesy and grace made Israel a worker's paradise.

Can you imagine going to work and saying to your boss, "The Lord bless you," and your boss responding with, "The Lord bless you. I am thankful for your service to this company"?

The psalmist wishes that the God-haters might never hear or experience the pleasantries common to the business climate in Israel; that is, may the wicked never experience the blessing of the LORD. *May they be mowed down like grass and be left to rot in the open fields.*

Good men do not pronounce blessings over pagans: feminists, secularists, atheists, humanists, and antichrists. Our best prayer for the wicked is, "May God have mercy on your soul." The benediction "May the Lord bless you" belongs to the righteous for the righteous.

Psalm 130

There is Forgiveness with Thee



The exiles saw themselves in deep distress and mired down with Babylon customs.

Who among the exiles did not think they were deported to Babylon because of their sins?

In a foreign land, without a temple, without a sacrificial system, all doubted if God could or would forgive them.

Possibly, this psalmist wrote this psalm after the temple was rebuilt. We just don't know for sure.

Wrestling through centuries of guilt and the distress because of the exile, this Hebrew concluded, "There is forgiveness with God;" "that the LORD shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

Psalm 130:1 <A Song of degrees.> Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.

The psalmist employs a popular image "Out of the depths" to characterize the grave circumstances under which he uttered his prayer to the Lord.

Like Jonah in the belly of the whale, the Levite felt squeezed by the despotism of a severe trial. Possibly, his cry to the LORD involved the crushing consequences of the Babylonian Captivity.

2 Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

The Lord hears many prayers, but the psalmist pleads with Him to hear his prayers and to be attentive to his voice in his dire distress. The psalmist has confidence in the Lord, but appears to be suffering from waves of doubt due to the storm raging in his soul.

Possibly, in the surf and foam of the "depths," he remembered his sins and becomes anxious about securing the LORD's forgiveness.

3 If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

A soul weighed down with a millstone of guilt hanging around his neck appears on stage. In his torrent of distress, sins come out of the grave like ghosts to haunt his conscience. Sins of the passed came to life and flashed before him causing the psalmist to question God's forgiveness and his standing with the Lord.

His faith taught Him that sin has negative consequences. What he doesn't know is whether his distress is a form of punishment for his personal sins or a tool for sanctification. Discipline often feels like punishment.

Remember, the Jews were a profoundly religious people. Misfortune stirred a deep sense of contrition. Faithful Hebrews did not blame the Lord for their circumstances, but they did question the reason for it. The question, "Is it my sins?" plagued the mind of every trouble soul.

The word "mark" means "to guard or to watch." If the Lord was a fastidious judge Who demanded justice for every sin, what man would be left standing on earth? The answer, of course, is no one.

Consider the patience of God and His grace towards sinners. He doesn't strike men dead when they sin. Rather, He patiently endures transgression and defers judgment. Moreover, He forgives penitents resting on the accomplishments of Christ and the power of His blood (1 John 1:5-7).

4 But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

In distress, this burdened soul seems anxious to secure God's forgiveness.

Other religions offered no forgiveness, but there is forgiveness with the LORD. Up all night with worry, the distressed man cannot wait till dawn so he can go to the temple to offer the appropriate sacrifices and plead his case to the Lord.

The duty to live righteously is a bedrock of Jewish theology, but studies in the Torah also taught the Hebrews that the LORD was forgiving . . . that blood on the altar enable this holy God to forgive His people . . . not only for their acts, but the pain it causes Him.

The psalmist is not in the least way talking about some kind of automatic, sugar-sweet, Fairy Godmother-type forgiveness.

Israel's sacrificial system taught the nation that God forgives sinners, but only upon the grounds of blood sacrifice (Genesis 4; Exodus 12; Leviticus 16). This fact is not some kind of spiritual insurance program that justifies

reckless and careless living. Rather, God's forgiveness created fear in the hearts of the pious.

Likewise, for the church! That the Son had to die to pay the blood bond generates love for our Lord and procures our obedience to Him.

Ellicott adds another color to this rainbow of blessing: "the manifestation of Divine mercy to Israel may strike fear in the heathen."

5 I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.

This text is usually interpreted as a saint waiting on the LORD in prayer for some type of relief. But, it is much more than this!

The "I" refers to the psalmist who is in dire straits . . . a man burdened down by his own sins . . . a man anxious to be right with God -- something very rare among modern men.

Mark the double use of the word "wait" -- the method of emphasis in Hebrew: I wait, my soul waits. Note the patience at work in the soul of the author: *I waited, I wait, and I will wait . . . and while I wait, I take comfort in the promises of His Word. I wait for assurance of forgiveness . . . a right standing with God . . . for His deliverance from my distress.*

Benson adds this insight: "I wait for him in sincerity, and not in profession only; with fervency, and not in a spirit of lukewarmness and indifference."

6 My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

Barnes has this translation insight: The Septuagint and Latin Vulgate render this, "My soul hopeth in the Lord from the morning watch until night."

This text is usually interpreted as a man anxiously waiting for an answer to a prayer for relief. *But, the context of this psalm informs us this man was waiting for the gates of the temple to be opened at dawn so he could obtain forgiveness from God.*

The psalmist, probably a Levite, was familiar with the duties of night watch in the temple where the first rays of light signaled the commencement of temple rituals which secured God's blessings upon the nation -- sacred services which comforted anxious souls eagerly waiting to enter the temple and to offer the required sacrifice to obtain relief for their souls which were battered by an agitated conscience.

Benson adopted a natural approach to this text: *"Levitical guards being wearied with hard service and want of rest, earnestly desired and eagerly expected the break of day, that they might be discharged from duty."* But, this approach alone fails to reflect the context of a man burdened down with his sins.

Benson quotes Hammond who sees anxious penitents waiting patiently at the temple gates burning with ambition to worship God; to offer prayers of thanksgiving to the Lord; and, penitents earnestly seeking forgiveness from the Lord for their sins that had separated them from Him.

This seems to be the correct and beautiful perspective of this psalm.

7 Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.

"Let Israel hope in the LORD" is the rallying cry of Israel -- an ordinance for the nation.

The word "plenteous" means "great, abundant, multiple" -- a term describing one super rich in mercy. God is so rich in mercy his silk-stocking treasure chest has no bottom or ceiling - "For as the heaven is high above the earth, *so* great is his mercy toward them that fear him" (Psalm 103:11)

"There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still." -
Corrie ten Boom

The psalmist does not see the Lord as some scrooge-like, dis-inclined Benefactor . . . but a Lord that delights in saving and comforting His people; that warms to a boil in showing mercy; that shines with eagerness to grant forgiveness; that remains resolute and undisturbed in hearing our pleas or sharing His wealth with sinners.

Is our view of God this positive?

Years can go by where nothing happens, then there are days when a year of changes happen for the delight of the saints.

8 And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

The word "redeem" (padah) means "to rescue, redeem, and deliver."

He redeems men not only from the penalty of sin, but from the power of sin; not only from the consequences of sin, but from its dominion over the man; not only punishment of sin, but from the problems that sin causes;

not only from feelings of guilt, but from true guilt; not only from sins known, but from sins unknown; not only from the height and width of sin, but from its "depths" (130:1)

The psalm ends with hope. Not only does the psalmist gain assurance the LORD forgives his sins, but he blossoms with confidence that God will redeem Israel from all their iniquities . . .

. . . and He did redeem the elect of Israel at Calvary with "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19) "for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22).

Psalm 131

When Accused



As did this psalmist, every man of God will find himself the target of criticism. And, like this author, he must walk on the path of patience with humility.

Psalm 131:1 <A Song of degrees of David.> LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.

Body language experts tell us that proud people have their chin up and nose in the air while looking down with disdain at the lower classes.

Possibly, the psalmist spoke his mind on the political issues of his time and his opponents accused him of being arrogant and talking about matters "above his pay grade." Quite possibly, the Levite was correct and his opponents wrong; that his critics walked by sight, and the psalmist walked by faith; that the nitpickers determined reality based on circumstances and human reason, and the Levite evaluated matters using the Word of God. Unable to refute his logic, his adversaries conceivably recoiled with an ad hominem attack on this man of faith.

More than likely, the psalmist expressed hope that God would bring the exiles back to the land of Israel. Perhaps, brazen doubters blasted his optimism that the LORD was going to pave the way for the Jews to return to the Holy Land -- a lofty, heavenly faith to be sure.

The accusers of the psalmist charged him with the very thing they were guilty of doing -- being proud and arrogant.

In his own defense, this writer claims not to have a proud heart; that he did not envy the higher class nor show contempt for the less fortunate. It was not his habit to arrogate to himself things above his station in life nor to speak of matters outside of his study and experience. He aimed at nothing extreme; rather, he expressed contentment with his place in life.

"The love of God reigning in the heart, will subdue self-love. Where there is a proud heart, there is commonly a proud look." - Matthew Henry

The goal of knowing God and doing our duty in all things challenges most of us. Let us be content with pursuing God and carrying out the assignments He gives us.

Let us be humble and content with our calling in life -- something hard for Americans who are conditioned by idealists to do the impossible and to reach for the stars. Christians need to be weaned from idealism to focus on realism; from fantasy to connect to reality; from fiction in order to focus on the Great Commission.

Contentment does not mean complacency. The former gives thanks and looks up; the latter looks down and gives up.

Contentment makes poor men rich, and discontentment makes rich men poor.

A woman clothed with cheerfulness will never be cold.

A grateful heart is the beginning of greatness; a complaining heart is the beginning of smallness, puniness, powerlessness, and meanness.

2 Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.

To describe his repose, the psalmist draws a lesson from the first crisis of a child -- that of being weaned from his mother's breasts. A baby fusses at first, but then calms down and learns to be content in his mother's arms. The psalmist had his complaints with the exile, but after a while he calmed down and accepted his predicament.

The word "behaved" (shavah) means "agree with" or "to resemble."

Apparently, this Hebrew idiom infers, "I made myself as a contented as weaned child;" that is, he willed himself to stop fussing about matters he could not change and to quiet his soul. Behind every crime you will find untamed ambition; and, behind an honest, likeable man you will find a contented soul.

An application: When accused, stop talking, and listen. Zip it! See yourself as a "Question Machine" and not an "Answering Machine." What you say can and will be used against you. Silence is good. Let your soul rest in the comforts of the Lord.

The heart yearns for worldly things, but by the grace of God he is weaned of these things - Matthew Henry.

When our spiritual condition is not in tune with the cross; we must tune our minds by considering the cross.

Cruci Dum Spiro Fido

3 Let Israel hope in the LORD from henceforth and for ever.

While it is not good to have utopian ambitions, it is good to have spiritual passions and to trust God to accomplish them; to claim His promises and to hope in the LORD to fulfill them.

Apparently, the psalmist went through a season of criticism. He believed what others could not understand, dreamed of what others could not conceive, stood on promises that others had abandoned. He did not let the chilly hearts of his brethren cool his own faith. He simply gave them reasons why they too should hope in the LORD.

"David is the model of the state of mind which the poet expresses here. He did not push himself forward, but suffered himself to be drawn forth out of seclusion. He did not take possession of the throne violently, but after Samuel has anointed him he willingly and patiently traverses the long, thorny, circuitous way of deep abasement, until he receives from God's hand that which God's promise had assured to him." - Keil & Delitzsch

Accused of being too lofty and optimistic, the psalmist rested his case, "Let Israel hope in the LORD" in the nowtime and forever.

When accused, be humble or stumble; be content or experience resentment; be silent or begin to fragment. Defend principles, and then rest in the LORD. Sometimes, the best we can do is to state our case, and then trust the Lord with the results.

"For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." - 2 Timothy 1:12

Psalm 132

Remember the Afflictions of David



The exile tested the faith of the nation of Israel as to their standing in the eyes of the Lord.

Moreover, when the exile ended and Cyrus issued the order for the Jews to return to Israel to rebuild a temple and a nation out of the rubble must have seemed like God was calling them to resurrect the dead - a task that called the people to forsake all and follow Christ.

The Jews, however, were not united in their faith before the great decree of Cyrus, nor were the Jews united after the order was issued.

Some Levites must have seen Cyrus' decree as a huge opportunity to rebuild the temple. The psalmist wrote this hymn to encourage the nation to accept the duty and to rebuild the temple out of the ruins of the city. The psalmist compares to the opportunity of the Jews in Babylon to bring the ark back to the dilapidated city to David's troubles in bringing the ark from Obed-Edom to Jerusalem in his day.

Psalm 132:1 A Song of degrees. LORD, remember David, and all his afflictions:

The psalmist addresses his prayer to the LORD requesting him to remember the difficulties that King David experienced in shuttling the ark to Jerusalem in his day when there was no vision to do so.

Think of the difficulties, the organizational challenge, the squabbles among the people, the death of Uzzah when he touched the ark, and the order to cease the procession. It took time to heal and great courage to issue a second order for the sullen Levites to organize and to escort the Ark to Jerusalem.

Consider how David had to endure squabbles among his cabinet members, military officers, and standing soldiers. David even deflected "flak" from his wife Michal who shamed him for celebrating the Ark's entrance into the city.

The plea to remember is not so much for the LORD as it was for the Jews in Babylon to remember David's troubles in bringing the ark to Jerusalem. As David faced difficulties, so did the Jews. Leaving their homes and family in Babylon, and caravanning a thousand miles to the ruins of Jerusalem was no "cake-walk" in the park.

King David found strength in the LORD to issue the order and to organize the nation to bring the ark to the capital city. Likewise, the exiles in Babylon needed a downpour of grace to return the Ark of the Covenant to its home which in their day was an archaeological ruin.

Consider the difficulties these Babylonian Levites faced: leadership, selling their homes, halting their careers, raising funds for the impossible task, organizing the Levites and the settlers in a caravan, obtaining supplies, saying good bye to family and friends, and dealing with the nitty-gritty problems of traveling a thousand miles to a land in shambles.

2 How he swore unto the LORD, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob;

David had a vision to bring the ark to Jerusalem and to make the city the religious center as well as the civil hub of the nation -- to organize his people around the worship of YHWH rather than the work of government.

Preparing a suitable place for the ark in the city, raising funds, answering the skeptics, and organizing the Levites and 30,000 chief men was such a daunting assignment, David placed himself under duty to accomplish the task.

So important was this project, David took an oath to stay focused on the operation. This vow was made in the Name of YHWH the sovereign God of Israel and in the Name of the God of Jacob, the One Who gives grace to the weak -- the One Who defended Jacob in all his afflictions -- the One who gives strength to accomplish the task.

Taking an oath is a serious undertaking as it binds a man to a "do or die" obligation. Get it done or perish!

In other words, David placed himself between a rock and a hard place; between God on one side and the duties of a military king on the other side.

Remember, the people were very content with the tabernacle being in the west, out of the way, as a peripheral part of national life. David, on the other hand, wanted the worship of YHWH to have center stage in Israel.

His pragmatic generals weren't so enthusiastic about the project (Vows: Numbers 30:2; Ecclesiastes 55; Matthew 5:33).

Consider the afflictions of David

Take time to examine the price young king paid to escort the ark from Shiloh-Kiriath Jearim, Obed-Edom to Jerusalem in order to construct a temple in the nation's capital.

3 Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed;

Figuratively speaking, David did not go home to rest or relax. He worked 24 hours a day until the ark-project was accomplished.

4 I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids,

Figuratively speaking, David refused to sleep or close his eyes until the Ark was brought to Jerusalem.

5 Until I find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.

During this period, King David bypassed all family and administrative duties focusing on one task -- to enthrone the LORD as the true King in Israel by bringing the symbol of His authority to the nation's capital.

Only the LORD was strong enough to unite the divided tribes and to defend the nation from its powerful enemies in the east, north, south, and west.

Likewise, only the LORD is strong enough to unite husband and wife, citizens and princes, and the warring interests in the church.

Consider the flak David received from pushing aside his military and governmental duties; his loss of sleep, his deprivation of food, his disregard for a social life, his abandonment of intimacy with his wives, and his postponement of fatherly responsibilities.

David must have also alienated statesmen and tribal dignitaries. Who can imagine the angst and hullabaloo storming in the king's court over this "pointless" religious project? He even lost his wife (Michal) who meant the world to him in discharging his ministry assignment.

6 Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood.

"Ephratah" was the ancient name of Bethlehem in Judah (Genesis 35:16, 19; 48:7). "Ephratah" means "place of fruitfulness" because Rachael and Leah faithfully mothered the tribes of Israel. Prior to the Israelite conquest of Canaan, Jerusalem was inhabited by Canaanites.

In Ruth 1:2, it is called "Bethlehem-Judah," but the inhabitants are called "Ephrathites;" in Micah 5:2, "Bethlehem-Ephratah;" in Matthew 2:6, "Bethlehem in the land of Judah." (Christiananswer.net).

We have to ask, "Where did this vision to develop a God-centered nation come from? Where did the idea of bringing the ark to Jerusalem originate?"

Apparently, the hope of a God-centered nation with Jerusalem as the capital and the ark as the symbol of the LORD's authority as the paramount nucleus of national life was birthed by Caleb . . . Ruth and Boaz in Bethlehem -- in the hill country of Ephratah.

Later, Mary the mother of our Lord gave birth to Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords in Bethlehem of Ephratah (Luke 2:1-4).

Micah 5:2 But thou, **Bethlehem Ephratah**, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is **to be ruler in Israel**; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

7 We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at his footstool.

"tabernacles" and "footstool" are metaphors for the Ark, God's throne, and God's temple in the Holy City.

So important was bringing the ark to Jerusalem that David took an oath to overcome the obstacles and to accomplish this mega-task.

Likewise, the psalmist speaking for the people grounds the commission of bringing the ark from Babylon to the Holy City with a profound commitment: "We will go . . . we will worship at His footstool" in Jerusalem!

8 Arise, O LORD, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength.

"Arise" (imperative) is a holy invocation pronounced by God's people before they enter holy duties and formidable tasks. In any undertaking for the Lord, men need His Wisdom, His power, His strength, and His patience to accomplish the task: "Arise, O LORD" was a call for God to assist the Jews in returning to Israel to rebuild the temple . . . a setting of the stage for arrival of the Messiah.

Consider the "Song of the Ark"

Numbers 10:35-36 And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel. (Pronounced by Moses, not Aaron)

Psalms 3:7 Arise, O Lord and save me . . .

Psalms 7:6 Arise, O LORD . . .

Psalms 9:19 Arise, O LORD; let not (sinful) man prevail:

Psalms 10:12 Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble.

1 Chronicles 22:19 . . . arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God . . . (Solomon)

"rest" is a metonym for "home" – a reference to God's home among his people who enjoy His peace and His presence.

9 Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy.

This is a call for Israel to rebuild the temple and re-establish worship services in Jerusalem.

"Clothed with righteousness" refers to priestly garments ordained by God for the sons of Aaron fitting for worshiping Him in the "beauty of holiness" (Psalm 96:9).

Repairing Jerusalem and constructing a second temple with regular Levitical services was not only a duty . . . but the joy of the people. Shouting with joy could not happen until the temple was finished; and, it was completed by the grace of God in 516 B.C.

10 For thy servant David's sake turn not away the face of thine anointed.

Petition three: "turn not away . . . "

The word "anointed" (maschiah) refers to Israel – the exiles in Babylon. Israel enjoyed a perfect position before God as part of his elect, but their spiritual condition was another matter. Positionally, Israel was His firstborn, the apple of his eye. Conditionally, the nation was tattered and full of doubters and complainers. Concerned about the defects of the

people, the psalter pleads with the Lord not to abandon His flawed people.

"Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." - Zechariah 3:3-4

He offers the Messianic Promises to David as the main reason the Lord should honor his prayers: ". . . appoint a place for His people Israel that they may dwell in a place of their own . . ." and, "I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom . . ." (2 Samuel 7:10ff).

The psalmist did not plead the goodness of the people. Rather, he pleads the good promises of the sure Word of God.

Since the Messiah (Christ) had to come through the family of David, Israel had to survive the captivity in order for the Christ to appear in history.

His reasoning is sound. The LORD's integrity was at stake. If the Jews did not return from Babylon then all skeptics had a reason to consider God's promises as frivolous and fraudulent.

11 The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.

Like a competent advocate, the psalmist reminds God of His promises to David, and holds Him to it. The LORD also has a blood-bond rooted in the promise to set the son of David upon his throne.

And, our Father did it in the "Christ event" with one difference. **The fulfillment was greater than the promise!!** Not only did the Father set the Messiah on the throne of David . . . the throne of David was mysteriously merged with the throne of God (Acts 2). The son of David, the Son of God, and our Savior is sat down on the Throne at the right hand of the Father in and through the resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

12 If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore.

The psalmist continues to plead his case based on the covenant. The covenant contained a conditional cause; that is, that blessing is delimited to the nation's obedience.

But, even so, the Lord promised not to remove his love from His people nor let them utterly fail; that is, *human failure will not frustrated the purposes of God* (Psalm 89:30-33).

“. . . Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.

Oh, how vast is the love of God, deeper than the deepest ocean. The LORD placed Himself under oath and **“man's faithlessness cannot finally defeat God's purpose”** (Cambridge).

13 For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation.

The marvelous promise to David is connected with establishing Mt. Zion (Psalm 78:67-70); that is, for God to keep his promise to David, Jerusalem and the temple had to be rebuilt.

Jehovah speaks. The expression of His Will in the facts of history is translated into the form of an utterance. Observe the stress laid on the Divine choice: in making Jerusalem the religious center of the nation (and ultimately of the world) David was fulfilling Jehovah's purpose. (Cambridge)

Broadly speaking, the reconstruction period was the setting of the stage for the appearance of the Christ of God in this drama we call prophetic history.

14 This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.

The psalmist continues to quote the stipulations of the contract:

“Jehovah speaks. The expression of His Will in the facts of history is translated into the form of an utterance. Observe the stress laid on the Divine choice: in making Jerusalem the religious center of the nation (and ultimately of the world) David was fulfilling Jehovah's purpose. “ (Cambridge).

15 I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread.

The psalmist grasps the proposed blessing of the covenant with an iron fist. These divine blessings are extended to the people, kings, rulers, priests, and *even the poor*. The common, ordinary poor, sick, and aged are **not** left out of the promise! Even those “below average,” which includes half of us, are not considered pariahs in the eyes of God. Praise the Lord!

16 I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.

The term “clothe” is a verbal metaphor for sovereign action; and “salvation” is a general term implying God will save and bless His servants. Those ministers who do the hard work of ministry and faithfully perform their duties are marked for special blessings, healing, and reward.

17 There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed.

Use of the “term” horn refers to vigor and strength. It implies that God will restore the prosperity and might of the house of David. The LORD will bring the Jews back to the Holy Land; they will rebuild the temple and repair Jerusalem. The Messiah will come at the proper time . . . and, He did.

18 His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish.

As the LORD has a promise for His people, He also has a promise for antichrists.

“His enemies” are those that resist His authority and purpose.

God swore an oath promising to bless His people. Regardless of their past failures, God will not withdraw His love from them. There is nothing in history that can prevent His intent to bless. Furthermore, there is NOTHING the global elite can do to frustrate the purpose of God.

Clothing with shame is the opposite of being clothed with salvation. His enemies are marked for downfall, damnation, doom, and destruction (Psalm 37).

“but upon himself shall his crown flourish” refers to His eternal sovereignty and authority. He is the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Author and Finisher of the Faith. He reigns, and His purpose will be accomplished. Hallelu-jah!

Let us remember the afflictions of our Greater David, and what it cost our Lord to bring us into His kingdom so we can have an inheritance with the saints in the Jerusalem above (Hebrews 12:22).

Psalm 133

Sweet Oil of the Spirit



We can call this the viscosity of the Spirit psalm.

The exile tested the faith of the nation of Israel as to their standing in the eyes of the Lord.

When the exile ended and Cyrus issued the order for the Jews to return to Israel to rebuild a temple, the bar-bell task overwhelmed the exiles.

The Jews were not united in their faith before the great decree of Cyrus, nor were they united after it was issued. Their bickering, complaining, and whining smelled foul all through the Middle East.

Some Levites saw Cyrus' decree as a huge opportunity to rebuild the temple . . . others saw it as a mammoth difficulty . . . like pushing a 1000 pound boulder up Mt. Hermon nine thousand feet above sea level.

The psalmist penned this hymn to unite the squabbling tribes around the return and the back breaking task of rebuilding the temple out of the rubble in their ancient capital.

Psalm 133:1 <A Song of degrees of David.> Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

The Jews in Babylon were like all people: complaining, testy, and divided.

The injection "Behold" (hegeh) means to stop what you are doing and observe the wonder of unity around godly ambitions.

The word "unity" (yachad) is translated "together," "altogether," "alike," and "yea." Ellicott notes that the term is much like the French word *tous deux* which means "all two" (i.e., both).

The author of the hymn describes unity as "good" and "pleasant." The word "good"(tov) means excellent, healthy, and wholesome. The word "pleasant" (na'iym) conveys the idea of something delightful and sweet -- like candy to the soul -- like the taste of freshly baked bread -- like the pleasant fragrance of vanilla from a flowering orchid.

To the psalmist it was good for Israel to unite in rebuilding the temple . . . to overcome the naysayers . . . to come together at the yearly festivals . . . to triumph over the political division of the tribes. Unity is rare and difficult to achieve. Only the LORD is strong enough to overcome the divided interests of Jacob's irascible sons.

2 It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;

Unity is so precious it is compared to the one of a kind oil that flowed down Aarons beard, collar, shoulders, and ordination garments when He was anointed by God to the priesthood - "an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary" (Exodus 30:22-23).

Consider not only the lovely aroma of the anointing oil, but **the abundance** of it emptied on Aaron. While all the garments of the priests were sprinkled with the fragrant oil, it was poured upon Aaron.

In modern times we say about men's cologne - "a little dab will do ya." But, no less than a cup was decanted on the High Priest -- an olfactory rush he could never forget.

The words "run down" or "descend" (yarad) are used three times in this short psalm. Terms like "flowing," "streaming," and "cascading down with sensual delights" fail to describe this holy experience.

The oil became a symbol of "joy" and "fragrance," and "consecration" (verse one).

In this text, the emphasis is on **the abundance** of oil running down Aaron's beard and garments.

3 As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

The psalmist provides two more metaphors to describe the blessedness and unity among brothers -- the "dew of Hermon" and the dew "that gently descended upon the mountains of Zion" revitalizing all living things.

"This feature of the picture is taken from the natural reality, for an abundant dew, when warm days have preceded, might very well be diverted to Jerusalem by the operation of the cold

current of air, sweeping down from the north over Hermon. "
(Ellicott)

While dew refreshes, the emphasis in this text is **not** upon sweet "pleasantness" (sweetness) in verse one, or the "abundance of the oil" (verse 2), *but upon the cohesive "descension" (yarad) of the anointing perfume and dew* -- upon how every molecule of oil clings to each other with a stubborn refusal to separate from its brotherly molecules.

Consider the spiritual implications of the science behind the viscosity of oil: fluidity, density, and consistency - "the state of being thick, sticky, and semifluid in consistency" - the force resisting flow and separation.

"Oil is, without question, the finest emblem of union that ever was conceived! . . . beginning in the prince, and diffused through the people, is here illustrated by two images, the most apt and beautiful that ever were imagined." (Dr. Delaney quoted by Benson).

Notice **the triple reference** to the cadence of this anointing in verse 2 and 3: "ran down" (yarad) , "went down" (yarad), and "descended upon" (yarad) (verse 3) upon Aaron -- a triple emphasis on elemental structure, unity, and flow of oil gently rolling down the priest's beard and garments in a slow, unified stream that provided a banquet of fragrances to be enjoyed by the Lord -- a symbol of the believer being clothed with the virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit qualifying the minister to serve Him. (see Psalm 110:3)

The lesson here is that human nature stinks. Man's flesh, thinking, motivations, anger, fret, worry, wordiness, and best intentions stink. The stench of human flesh must not emanate from the pulpit. His ministers must be filled with the Spirit. Any and all work of the "flesh" defiles the ministry. A work performed by the power of the Spirit sweetens the aroma in every ministry.

"For there the LORD commanded His blessing." But, where is the "there"?

"the dew descending on Zion, in this latter clause, is to be taken allegorically for the favour or blessing of God" (Benson).

"No doubt the poet intended to write, 'As the oil poured on Aaron's head flowed down to his beard, and as the dew of Hermon flowed down on Mount Zion, so *let* the covenant

blessing descended on Jehovah's people;" (Ellicott). (Italics mine).

"We must evidently take "the dew of Hermon" as a poetical synonym for "choice dew" (Ellicott).

This is an OT Pentecostal Prayer -- a prayer that God's people would have the same mind, same tongue, same purpose, and the same faith -- that the cherished anointing oil might be poured on the remnant.

The "blessing" of the LORD is found in the pouring out of His Spirit upon God's people. Where the dew of the Spirit descends on God's covenant people, there is refreshing unity. Where there is unity in the gospel, there is blessings to be enjoyed. And, the remnant experienced a Pentecost in their day.

Ezekiel 39:28-29 Then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which caused them to be led **into captivity** among the heathen: but **I have gathered them unto their own land**, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

There are two Pentecosts: The Civil Pentecost in Numbers 11 that fell upon Israel and the spiritual Pentecost that fell upon the church in Acts 2.

Moreover, there were numerous civil Pentecosts in the Old Testament: Numbers 11, 1 Samuel 16, the times of Jehoshaphat (1 Chronicles 20:15) and those involved in the Return - Ezra 1:5, Ezekiel 39:28-29.

Where husband and wife are united to Christ . . . there the Lord commands His blessing.

Where the pastor is united to the Lord Jesus Christ and the people united with their pastor, there is a waterfall of blessing . . . 'for evermore' refreshing sinners who believe with the gift of eternal life. For "of his fullness have we all received . . ." (John 1:16). Like Mary's box of expensive perfume the house is filled with the aroma of our Lord Jesus Christ in and through gospel proclamation (John 12).

Let's remember that our Savior was anointed with the sweet fragrances of Spirit. Wherever He went men were pleasantly invigorated by his pantry of heavenly spices -- so fitting for the Son Who is "altogether lovely" (Song of Songs 5:16). Where ever believing men meet to remember Christ

in the breaking of bread, the whole church is reinvigorated by the bouquet of fragrances emanating from our Lord.

The priest worked in the temple complex, but they were not permitted to "sweat" because human sweat is obnoxious to the Lord. The Spirit forbids priests to wear wool turbans or cloakes lest they sweat and their odors offend the holiness of God. (Ezekiel 44:17-18).

There is a foul odor in many pulpits of America today. The pews are in need of the sweetness of Christ, an abundance of the Spirit, and a holy unity to descend upon the people.

In the beginning of Elijah's ministry, the Spirit commanded him: "Go hide yourself." And, good ministers of the gospel would do well to do the same.

May an aroma from an abundance of anointing oil of the Spirit descend upon pulpits today!

Oh, the joy when petty interests and division cease. When spiritual Israel and angels stand up and sing this song together.

Psalm 134

Praising God During the Night Shift



Psalm 134:1 <A Song of degrees.>

Psalm 134:1 Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD.

The psalm addresses "all ye servants of the LORD" working the night shift.

The Name "LORD" is repeated five times in this brief psalm. Imagine a tender Levitical commander touching the shoulders of younger guards on duty during the graveyard shift exhorting them to wake up and to bless the LORD.

Who can doubt these sentinels armed with swords and spears were a little bored and sleepy. Standing is hard. Standing at night while doing guard duty was triple-tough as these security officers tended to doze off.

Not only were these men charged with guard duty, the psalmist charges these sentries to "bless the LORD;" that is, to think great thoughts about Him and to praise Him while serving the night shift. *Our blessed LORD deserves praise during the night as well as during the day.*

So important is staying awake and blessing the LORD the captain uses the particle of interjection "Behold" or "Lo" (hey'geh); that is, "Hey there! Wake up. Remember the privilege of serving Him!"

"Bless ye the LORD!" "Bless" is a Piel imperative -- an intense command requiring maximum energy. But, it was more likely a deliberate kind touch on the shoulder by a Levitical captain gently reminding his fellow guard to awaken and to bless Him while on duty.

Many evils happen during the witching hour so do not fall asleep. Blessing the LORD keeps the Devil away.

Those of you who have the privilege of serving the LORD during the night shift must "Bless the LORD" and not grumble. "Bless Him" and not yawn. "Bless Him" and not doze off.

Praise Him in the morning: Praise Him at noon: Praise Him in the evening: and Praise Him in the dead of night. He is worthy of praise twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Can't sleep? Bless the Lord!

2 Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.

"Lift up your hands" is a Piel imperative -- a deliberate gentle order for the dozing guard to lift up his hands, stretch a bit, and wake up. But, more than this! Lifting up your hands implies fulfilling your vow to serve Him and to focus on the wonders of the great "I am."

The imperative "bless" is repeated a second time; that is, to consider his greatness and respond to Him with joy in the heart and praise on the lips -- even at night!

3 The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.

The Levitical captain gently gives the dozing soldier one reason to wake up and to bless the LORD -- the LORD created the heavens and the earth - - to praise Him for the rays of the Sun conquering darkness, and for the canvas colors of reds and yellows in the evening.

Because of the promotion of the "Big Bang Theory" by speculative scientists, many need to know that the LORD is the Creator of heaven with all its twinkling stars. He is the Creator of the green earth with its majestic mountains, calm valleys, and blue seas.

Remembering the Creator keeps one upright. Wake up, stand up, and Man up to bless the Lord. He is worthy of our praise and adoration.

Psalm 135

Reasons to Praise God



This is not part of the Song of Degrees, but it fits so well with the Pilgrim Themes, it is included here.

The more you contemplate the LORD, the easier life gets. The more you complain, the more your face looks like the front cover on the Book of Lamentations.

Yes, there is madness in the world that can suck joy and hope out of hearts. Consequently, the world needs praising pastors with their eye on the throne, who smell the roses, and who hip-hop to the dance of joy.

The Quadruple Command

Psalm 135:1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the name of the LORD; praise him, O ye servants of the LORD. 2 Ye that stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God,

The word "praise" is used four times in the first two verses.

"Praise" (halal) forms the root of "Hallelujah." Used three times as a triple emphasis in this text, it means "to rise and shine and to boast in the Lord" -- an expansion of the thoughts in Psalm 116 and 134:1. Repeating words is the Hebrew way of punctuating a sentence with an exclamation point. In this case, there are three of them (!!!).

The object of praise is "the LORD," the Great "I Am," – an inexhaustible subject of admiration and worship.

The verb "praise" is an imperative; i.e. it is not an option nor is it the caboose on the train. Look at this triple command as "the little engine that could."

Moreover, the verb is a Piel Imperative requiring intense, vigorous action. The Piel verb pattern acts like a fireman or stoker on a locomotive fueling the furnace of a steam boiler.

Complaining is natural; praise is supernatural. Grouchiness is as ordinary as rocks; thankfulness is extraordinary like diamonds on the sidewalk. Worry springs from common soil; trust emerges from a rare cultivated garden.

The fires of praise must be stoked to fuel the furnace of God's work. Praise performs like sunshine to the soul; like rains in a dry climate. The Lord loves it; the Devil hates it.

Addressed to the "servants of the Lord, "Ye that stand in the house of the Lord," the psalmist exhorts the priestly class to forcefully, energetically, and enthusiastically to reach deep into their soul and to press the praise button. Stand and praise; sit and praise; work and praise the Lord. "How beautiful are the feet of them" that praise the Lord saying, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:1-7).

With so much negativity in the world, men lose hope. Hope blooms when God's ministers sprinkle every conversation with the sweetness of Christ. Everyone talks about the madness of politics and the lunacy of government officials. Where are the men with an eye on the Lord boasting of His work on earth?

Reasons to Praise God

3 Praise the LORD; for the LORD is good: sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant.

This is the fourth time the Spirit exhorts His servants to praise the LORD.

The psalmist gives two reasons to praise in this text and at least ten reasons to do so in this psalm:

(1) Praise the LORD for He is good (tov). Praise leads to wholesomeness, health, righteousness, godliness. Manly men praise god; craven men act in their own self-interest,

(2) Praise the LORD for He is pleasant (na'iyim), delightful, sweet, lovely, agreeable, and satisfying.

4 For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure.

(3) Praise the LORD for His gracious election of Israel. Consider His mercies, and praise swells in the heart. Consider His election of us and we will spend our life praising Him (Ephesians 1:1-7; Romans 9; and 1 Peter 11-3).

Out of all the people ever born He chose us before the foundation of the world to share in the glories of His kingdom. Consider His love. He loves not because of who we are but because of Who He is -- a God of love.

God calls Israel a "Peculiar treasure;" that is, His valuable property; His joy and His riches. His election anoints us with value . . . with worth. Yes, we are sinners, but we are not trash. Moreover, His election beautifies us with dignity and honor as "sons of God." Praise His Name!!!

5 For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.

(4) Praise the LORD for His greatness. There is nothing petite about the LORD. He is great in tender mercy, great in infinite power, great in incomprehensible knowledge, great in perfect righteousness and great in inexhaustible grace. How could any of us be ashamed to call Him "our God"?

6 Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.

(5) Praise the LORD for His sovereignty. Objects in heaven and under heaven; on the earth and under the earth; in the seas and under the seas are His work. Man has yet to discover all of His works in the deep places, high places, and broad places.

Moreover, the LORD is pleased with His work and takes pleasure in His creation.

If we are honest, we get frustrated when the grocery bag breaks or a shoelace comes untied. In fact, ambitious men fight frustration all day long. Unlike us, the Lord is never frustrated, never disappointed, and never agitated. If He wills it, it is done!

His sovereign power and jurisdiction are universal. Unlike pagan deities who are confined by local customs, the Lord reigns freely over the skies, seas, land, and people.

The psalmist announces the supremacy of YHWH above all the gods of the nations. He makes plans, and carries them out. A moth can't stop a rolling semi nor can frail creatures among men hinder the purposes of God. There is not a prime minister, parliamentarian, major, or judge that can demoralize God's will.

The LORD created and formed those powers of nature which operate in the heavens, on the earth, and in the waters *nunc pro tunc* -- powers which

creatures are so quick to attribute to "Mother Nature" and the ostensible laws of science.

As the universal sovereign, He has a right to claim our praises.

"God is, and will be always, the same to his church -- a gracious, faithful, wonder-working God. And his church is, and will be, the same to him, a thankful, praising people: thus his name endures forever. He will return in ways of mercy to them, and will delight to do them good" – Matthew Henry.

More Reasons to be positive and to praise God

7 He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasuries.

(6) Praise the LORD for His power and the marvels of creation. The psalmist sees God as the Source of mists that watered the earth before the great flood; the lightning and the thunder that announce the coming showers that refresh land, man, and beast; and, the Source of the winds that spread seeds that act like giant fans that cool those working during the heat of the day. The twinkling stars at night, and the white lilies waving in the meadows are His work.

8 Who smote the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast?

The "who" refers to the LORD God, not Moses.

(7) Praise the LORD for His work of providence in history . . . for the power of God in judgment. Smiting the firstborn of Egyptian nobles broke Pharaoh's stubborn will -- the final act that motivated the tyrant to release the Hebrew slaves. Likewise, let us praise the Lord for His acts of providence in our times that makes wars to cease, rains to fall, and fields to grow.

The New Testament consideration of these events is the death of the Passover Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ, at Calvary.

9 Who sent tokens and wonders into the midst of thee, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his servants.

(8) Praise the LORD for His judgment miracles in Egypt. The psalmist showcases the plagues of Egypt as a reason to praise God - signs and wonders that exhibited the power of God; disasters that cannot be explained by natural law; selective judgments that fell upon the

Egyptians, but not upon Israel. Consider the death angel that struck the firstborn of the Egyptians, but "passed over" the firstborn of the Hebrews because of blood on their doorposts.

10 Who smote great nations, and slew mighty kings; 11 Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan:

(9) Praise the LORD for victory in war. The psalmist praises God for giving the young, tender nation military-success over Sihon king of the Amorites, Og king of Bashan, and the city-state kings in Canaan -- conquests over giants that can only be explained by the power of God.

[Note: Do not confuse modern military Ashkenazi Israel with ancient Israel: the latter was directed by the correctness of God; the former by the cleverness of man.

12 And gave their land for an heritage, an heritage unto Israel his people.

(10) Praise the LORD for the land. The hymn writer exhorts the Levites to strike up the drums, to strum the harps, and to carol praises to God because of His generosity and grace in giving them the land. He did not give the hills and meadows to Israel's government, but to families and tribes within the nation.

Having land is one of the four cultural foundations of a nation. The other three blocks include a common race, a common religion, and a common language. Having been given land and victory over the Canaanites, Israel had all the elements that make up a nation – a grand subject of praise.

A Contrast between the LORD and the gods of the nations

13 Thy name, O LORD, endureth for ever; and thy memorial, O LORD, throughout all generations.

How could any Hebrew forget the wonders of the exodus?

There is no verb in this verse, only nouns. Nouns are facts. It is a fact the Name of the LORD endures for ever and that His Name (YHWH) is a sacred memorial to the true Israel of God. Generations come and go, but the name of this unchanging, eternal God does not melt away, morph, or mutate. *He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

14 For the LORD will judge his people, and he will repent himself concerning his servants.

"God is, and will be always, the same to his church, a gracious, faithful, wonder-working God. " - Matthew Henry.

"will judge His people" does **not** refer to dishing out punishment, but to His salvic interposition (mediation) on their behalf.

If necessary "He will repent" and change His mind if a change of mind will benefit His people. The Lord is not so inflexible that He cannot reverse His course for the good of the nation. *He will not permit His decrees to destroy the people.* He has immutable principles that He cannot bend, but He also has tender mercy that will always find a way to preserve His people from ruin.

In 2 Samuel 15, David's sense of justice butted heads with his fatherly compassion. As a king, Absalom deserved to die for murdering his brother. Justice demanded death; but, as a Father, David could not issue the order to execute his own son. Remember the wisdom of the woman of Tekoa. She slipped in this advice to David during his moral conflict, "God devises ways so that a banished person does not remain banished from him." (2 Samuel 14:14)

"Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." - Psalm 84:10

Mercy and truth kissed at the cross, Praise the Lord!!! *Cruci dum spiro fido.*

15 The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. 16 They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; 17 They have ears, but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths. 18 They that make them are like unto them: so is every one that trusteth in them.

The psalmist contrast the impotency of idols with the Lord's marvelous sovereignty, power, knowledge, and mercy; that is, he romances the diamond attributes of the living God against the black velvet of lifeless idols.

"These verses arm believers against idolatry and all false worship, by showing what sort of gods the heathen worshipped." - Matthew Henry.

Men make idols from the gold and silver God created. While the LORD is self-existent, idols are the product of men's faithless hearts.

Thus, the psalmist mocks them because they are mute, blind, deaf, and breathless. Likewise, the craftsmen make idols because they too are mute, blind, and deaf to the true God.

The Triple Command Expanded

19 Bless the LORD, O house of Israel: bless the LORD, O house of Aaron:

20 Bless the LORD, O house of Levi: ye that fear the LORD, bless the LORD.

21 Blessed be the LORD out of Zion, which dwelleth at Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.

The psalm begins with four Piel (intense) imperatives for the servants of God – “Praise the LORD!!!” The psalmist ends the psalm with four Piel imperatives – “Bless the LORD” and one Piel imperative to “Praise ye the LORD” !!!

The term “blessed” in verse 21 is not a command but a fact. Because He is blessed in His attributes, men should recognize His greatness and “Bless” Him.

The command “bless” (barak) means to bow and adore while the command “praise” means to rise and shine with enthusiasm; the former refers to careful, reverent, accurate confession of His greatness; the latter refers to igniting the passions to proclaim the Excellencies of our Lord.

The Hebrew command “Bless” orders men *to speak well of . . . to honor . . . and to esteem the LORD*. A plural command, it applies to all men. The reason given is that the LORD has proved Himself exceedingly superior to the gods of the nations. i.e. He furnishes His claim of existence with infallible proofs.

Unlike verse one, this psalm expands the command from the house of Aaron to the house of Levi and to all those living in Jerusalem (Psalm 115:9)

Let the church and all those that fear the LORD, bless His holy name.

However, the fulfillment of this command is greater than the ordinance. Because the church took His commands seriously, redeemed men in every nation on earth “Bless the LORD” today. Hallelujah!!!

"Let us endeavour to glorify his name, and recommend his truth, not only with our lips, but by holy lives, copying the example of Christ's goodness and truth." - Matthew Henry.

Bless the LORD, O my Soul!

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