

Psalms of Degrees (Part I)

A. The Songs of Degrees - Psalms 120-134

1. Unlike other groups, these run consecutively
2. Each is entitled "a Song of degrees"
3. What is the meaning of these titles?
 - a. Old Jewish tradition - called so because they were sung in order of the 15 steps of the temple.
 - b. Luther - "A Song in the higher choir"
 - c. Calvin - "Sung in a higher key"
 - d. Bishop Jebb - sung in connection with the "going up" of the Ark to Mt. Zion.
 - e. Other Scholars - "ascents" instead of "degrees" supposing that a series of ascents in the poetic parallelism is indicated. (This means that each line of a parallel carries the meaning of its predecessor a degree further.)
* Not all 15 have this feature.
 - f. Others suggest these are associated with Israel's going up to the three annual feasts at Jerusalem.
 1. None seem to have "pilgrimage" themes.
4. A Song of "Degrees"- Any other "degrees" in the Bible?
 - a. "Hezekiah & The Song of Degrees" – Isaiah 38:1-8
Hezekiah - remarkable man
 1. Soldier, statesman, architect, poet, godly king
 2. Only man who knew exactly how long he would live
 3. Chapter 36 - we read of Assyria
 - 14th year of Hezekiah reign, Assyria attacks
 - Hezekiah's godly behavior, shining example to people in faith & trust (2 Kings 18:5-6; 2 Chronicles 29:25-30 restored temple worship)
 - At the same time Isaiah comes - "Set thine house in order"
 - * sick unto death - vs. 1
 - * turned to wall, prayed - vs.3
 - * Lord gave a lease on life of 15 years

QUESTION: Why? Was Hezekiah someone special? Special job for him?
What did he do during those 15 years.?

1. Proverbs 25:1
 - a. "Men of Hezekiah" - guild (or group) of men used for devout literary work, up God's Word.
 1. Copied God's Word perhaps

2. Psalm 120 - 134 Songs of Degrees

- a. Song of Degrees - refers to well known degrees.
 - 1. Ahaz's sun dial - only degrees in Bible (2 Kings 28:8-11)
 - 2. Explain sun dial - God turns it back 10
 - 3. Hezekiah was interested in songs (Isaiah 38:8-9)
 - 4. See Isaiah 38:19-20 – Note 2 things
 - a. To the stringed instruments = *neginoth* (one word in Hebrew)
 - b. “All the days of our life” = Hezekiah’s 15 years
 - 5. 15 songs of degrees
 - a. 15 years added to his life
 - b. 10 degrees
 - c. 10 of songs left anonymous
 - 6. Special order
 - a. 5 groups, 3 in each: 2 Hezekiah’s, 1 of another (David or Solomon)
 - b. First one of trouble, second one of trust, third one of triumph
 - 7. It is also interesting to note that if Hezekiah had died with his sickness that God’s promise to David in II Samuel 7:13 would have failed. Hezekiah didn’t have his first son until 3 years after his healing. (2 Kings 21:1 – son was 12 when he began to reign after Hezekiah died).

B. Spiritual Journey of the Believer

- 1. There seems to be a parallel in these Psalms to the spiritual journey of a believer from the time of conviction and his cry for salvation to the final exaltation in glory.
 - a. These could easily depict 15 stages of the ‘pilgrim’s progress’.
 - b. Great spiritual application

C. Some Numerical Features

- 1. The word Israel occurs 7 times in these Psalms
- 2. The word Zion occurs 7 times
- 3. The combination of Jacob and Jerusalem occur 7 times

D. An Overview Look of the 15 Psalms

Psalm 120 – The Cry for Deliverance and Salvation – **Trouble**

Psalm 121 – The Assurance of Salvation and God’s Preservation – **Trust**

Psalm 122 - Fellowship and Joy in the House of the Lord – **Triumph**

Psalm 123 – Fervent Prayer for Needs – **Trouble**

Psalm 124 – Answered Prayer only comes from the Lord – **Trust**

Psalm 125 – Growth in Faith finding safety in the Lord – **Triumph**

Psalm 126 – Sowing in Tears (captivity) and followed by Joyful Reaping – **Trouble**

Psalm 127 – The Vanity of Labor and the Growth from God – **Trust**

Psalm 128 – Blessings of Walking with the Lord; Godly Maturity – **Triumph**

Psalm 129 – The Opposition from the Enemies – **Trouble**

Psalm 130 – Patiently waiting for the Lord's coming and deliverance – **Trust**

Psalm 131 – Humble and Complete Hope in the Lord – **Triumph**

Psalm 132 – Recognition and prayer for the King and His Kingdom – **Trouble**

Psalm 133 – The End of the Journey and Unity forever – **Trust**

Psalm 134 – Eternity of Praise and Blessing – **Triumph**

E. Let's add some details:

Psalm 120 – The Cry for Deliverance and Salvation – Trouble

V1 – The cry for salvation – the first step in the life of a believer.

V2 – Lying and deceiving – John 8:44, Revelation 20:10 – Characteristics of Satan

V3 – Sharp arrows of the Mighty – Psalm 7:13, Psalm 18:13-14

V5 – Mesech and Kedar – Reference to the North (aka Russia) and the South (aka Arabs). Both are enemies of Israel throughout the end times.

V7 – Current state of affairs in Israel vs. World

Psalm 121 – The Assurance of Salvation and God's Preservation – Trust

The seeking sinner of Psalm 120 becomes the secure believer in Psalm 121

V1 – Many change the wording, saying there is poor punctuation. Their position is that it should say "Shall I lift up mine eyes unto the hills,..?"

No need for this. A simple cross reference to the hills:

Psalm 68:16 – Dwelling place of the Lord

Psalm 95:4 – demonstrate His strength

Psalm 104:18 – The hills are a place of refuge provided by God

Psalm 125:1

Isaiah 2:2 – The Lord's house will be established on the top of the hills (prophecy)

V2, 5, 7 & 8 – The solution, help, security and preservation all come from the Lord. He alone is our Security and Preservation

Psalms 122 - Fellowship and Joy in the House of the Lord – Triumph

The very next step in the life of a new believer is to unite with the Lord's people for fellowship in the very institution God designed for that, the local church.

V1 – What a powerful declaration!!

V4 – The tribes go up to give thanks, just like Hezekiah did in Isaiah 38:14 and so should we.

V6 – Powerful verse that has been quoted a lot by USA leaders.

The entire Psalm focused on the national hope of Israel that will stand within "thy gates" with thrones of judgement.

Psalms 123 – Fervent Prayer for Needs – Trouble

For a young believer it is critical that they learn to call upon the Lord for deliverance from every enemy and trust the Lord for the supply of all their needs. "Wait on the Lord" Hebrews 12:2 – Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith.

V3 & 4 – Filled with contempt and scorning the Psalmist cries for grace. It is ALWAYS grace and never something deserved. Hezekiah endured the blasphemous scorn of Rebaheke and Sennacherib. Believers will deal with the same.

Psalms 124 – Answered prayer only comes from the Lord – Trust

The solution comes! Our help is in the name of the Lord! (vs 8)

V1 – As day follows after the night, so answered prayer comes after the desperate prayer of a believer.

V1 & 2 – If it had not been the Lord; Blessed be the Lord; our help is in the name of the Lord! Praise the Lord for this truth!!

Psalms 125 – Growth in faith finding safety in the Lord – Triumph

As we grow in our faith and learn that our rest is found only in God we will realize the powerful statement of assurance and security in vs 1.

V5 – "but peace"

We will deal with the last 9 next week:

Psalms 126 – Sowing in Tears (captivity) and followed by Joyful Reaping – Trouble

Psalms 127 – The Vanity of Labor and the Growth from God – Trust

Psalms 128 – Blessings of Walking with the Lord; Godly Maturity – Triumph

Psalms 129 – The Opposition from the Enemies – Trouble

Psalms 130 – Patiently waiting for the Lord's coming and deliverance – Trust

Psalms 131 – Humble and Complete Hope in the Lord – Triumph

Psalms 132 – Recognition and prayer for the King and His Kingdom – Trouble

Psalms 133 – The End of the Journey and Unity forever – Trust

Psalms 134 – Eternity of Praise and Blessing – Triumph