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Psalm 120 - 134

“The Pilgrim’s Progress – Part 1”

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Psalms 120 through 134 have the subtitle “Song of Ascents,” because these songs would have been sung by Jews as they made pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year for the major Jewish Feasts. These chapters were also referred to as the “Pilgrim Songs.” We are also on a pilgrimage, but it’s not to the earthly city of Jerusalem; it’s to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.¹ In a new series called “Pilgrim’s Progress,” Pastor Gary takes us through these psalms so that we can learn important principles in the journey of life until we reach our final destiny.

Historical Background

1. There were two reasons people would always “ascend” to Jerusalem:
 - a. Elevation – It was a hilly place.
 - i. There are four main hills or mounts that surround Jerusalem: Mount Moriah, Mount of Olives, Mount Zion, and Mount Scopus.
 1. Jesus was crucified on Mount Moriah.
 2. Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives, and Jesus’ return to earth will take place at the Mount of Olives.
 3. The palace of the king was built on Mount Zion.
 4. The average elevation is about 2,600 ft. above sea level.
 5. If you travel from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, which is about 18 miles south of the city, there is a drop of some 4,000 feet!
 - b. Consecration – It was a holy place.
 - i. The Temple of the Lord was in Jerusalem.

¹ [Hebrews 12:22a](#) – “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.”

- ii. The Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD, and it was never rebuilt.
- 2. When families traveled to Jerusalem, they traveled in groups for fellowship and personal safety.
 - a. In [Psalm 23](#), David wrote about the dangers of traveling the road to and from Jerusalem.
 - i. [Psalm 23:4](#) - *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...”*
 - ii. According to [Luke 2:41-52](#), Jesus, who at that time was only 12 years old, was left behind by Joseph and Mary when they returned home after having made pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
 - 1. The ancient historian, Josephus, wrote about the vast numbers of people who gathered in Jerusalem for the feasts, and he indicated that the number was somewhere between 2 million and 2.5 million, so it would have been easy to “lose” Jesus in the crowds.
- 3. The fact that Jesus sang these songs when he traveled to Jerusalem, makes these psalms even more remarkable.

Psalm 120

Exercise Endurance And Influence In This World

- 4. The psalm writer is in distress because he was conflicted by his culture, which was opposed to his values and his faith.
- 5. [Psalm 120:2](#) - *“Save me, O LORD, from **lying lips** and from **deceitful tongues.**”*
(Emphasis added)
- 6. [Psalm 120:7](#) - *“I am a man of **peace**; but when I speak, they are for **war.**”*
(Emphasis added)
- 7. When the psalmist wrote that he lived *“in Meshech,”* and that he lived in *“the tents of Kedar,”* he was indicating two geographical extremes, which would demonstrate the fact that the writer and his culture were “miles apart,” so to speak.
 - a. Meshech would be in what is modern-day Russia.
 - b. Kedar would be in what is modern-day Saudi Arabia.
- 8. Christians experience the same kind of conflicts as the psalmist, because there are so many cultural changes that are immoral, unethical, and unbiblical.

9. The Lord's answer to the writer was not to take him out of the culture, but to help him endure and influence the culture.
10. The Lord was encouraging the psalmist to represent him in the mission field, which was his culture.
11. Jesus made reference to the "occupy until I come" calling that Christians need to understand, in the parable he shared about the kingdom of God.
 - a. **Luke 19:11-13** - *"While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. He said: 'A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. "Put this money to work," he said, "until I come back." ' "*
12. **1 Peter 2:11-12** - *"Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. ² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."* ³
13. Lot was a man who lived in a culture that conflicted with his faith in God.
 - a. **2 Peter 2:7-8** - *"... Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)..."*
14. We should be encouraged to know that the Holy Spirit will not only help us to endure, but he will also help us influence people too!

Psalm 121

Look To The Lord For Help

15. **Psalm 121:2** - *"My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."*
16. Pastor Gary said: "When we seek [help] from the Lord we must always remember... as Creator, the one who created the heavens and the earth in six days, [he] can probably handle one of [our] bad days!"
17. Pastor Gary said: Please, friends, do not put your confidence and trust in a place or a thing [or] people. Put your ultimate, truest confidence and trust in the

² Pastor Gary said this was part of the call for Christians to endure.

³ Pastor Gary said this was part of the call for Christians to influence.

Lord! People, with all good intentions, will, from time to time, fail you, because no one is perfect and people make mistakes. And if you hang all your confidence on another person, ... then when they fail, there goes your confidence, but the Lord will never fail you, and the Lord will never leave you, and the Lord will never forsake you.”

18. The watchful care of the Lord – day and night without distraction or sleep – as described in this psalm, is something that we should be eternally thankful and grateful for!

a. **Psalm 121:6** – *“[The] sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.”*

Psalm 123

Appeal To The Mercy Of God

19. **Psalm 123:3** – *“Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us, for we have endured much contempt.”*

20. The Hebrew word for mercy is *chanan*, which means, to bestow favor and to bend or stoop in kindness to another, who would typically have been someone who was inferior.

21. The Lord shows his kindness, which we don’t deserve, and he bestows favor on us that we didn’t earn!

22. Pastor Gary said: “The only place that you will typically hear the word, mercy, outside of the church [or] outside of the Bible... is in a court of law... When [the] accused has... been found guilty of [a] crime, the one who has been convicted and found guilty, will sometimes ask the court for leniency. And the phrase that is used [by the guilt person] is that they ‘throw themselves on the mercy of the court.’ ... The one who convicted of a crime is hoping [and] asking and appealing to the judge to go easy on them... [Even] though he or she deserves punishment, the request is, ‘Please do not enforce the full punishment that I rightly deserve, and please show leniency!’ ”

23. **Ephesians 2:4-5** – *“But, because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.”*

24. **Daniel 9:9** – *“The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him...”*

25. [Micah 7:18](#) - *“Who is a god like you, who pardons sin and forgives... You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.”*
26. [James 5:11c](#) - *“The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”*
27. [Hebrews 4:16](#) - *“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*
28. [Luke 1:50](#) - *“His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.”*
29. God is a merciful God, and we can always appeal to his mercy!

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. What are some of the ways worship music has been a blessing to you and a source of encouragement, either in a church service, Night of Worship at church, etc.?
3. Read Psalm 120.
4. What are some of the ways our culture is changing?
5. How are you dealing with these changes?
6. How should we pray and what should we do or say in response to the seemingly endless ways people are moving farther and farther away from the Lord, biblical principles, morality, etc.?
7. How would you describe the ways the Holy Spirit is helping you not only endure the culture, but influence the culture?
8. Read and discuss [1 Peter 2:11-12](#) and [2 Peter 2:7-8](#).
9. Read Psalm 121.
10. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about placing our confidence in the Lord. (See #17 above)

11. Read Psalm 123.
12. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about the mercy of the Lord. (See #22 above)
13. Read and discuss [Ephesians 2:4-5](#), [Daniel 9:9](#), [Micah 7:18](#), [James 5:11c](#), [Hebrews 4:16](#), and [Luke 1:50](#).
14. What are some of the ways you are personally experiencing the mercy of the Lord?
15. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).