

# Songs Of Hope

Meditations on Psalms 120 to 134

Romans 5:5 NKJV

Now hope does not  
disappoint, because the  
love of God has been  
poured out in our hearts  
by the Holy Spirit who  
was given to us.



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There are Fifteen Psalms included under the title "A Song of Ascent".

The word ascent translates *Shir Hama'aloth* which describes a procession, singing and going upwards (as to the hill of God, Zion). This group of Psalms is usually linked with the Israeli people returning to their land after Seventy Years in slavery in Babylon.

**Isaiah 51:11 NKJV So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.**

The content can resonate, strike a chord in our hearts, as we press on in our journey to our Home! Also, we might see a parallel in our moving out of the Covid "lockdown". We keep on keeping on with "hope in our hearts".

Although the commentary includes just one verse from each Psalm, please read each Psalm all the way through. This will provide you with a better understanding of the comments.

So, we proceed to some meditations on Psalms 120 to 134.



## A Procession of Praise

**Psalms 120:1 I call on the LORD in my distress, and he answers me.**



This Psalm begins in distress and ends with a determination to be "for peace". The lament between is about the conflict caused by words. Too much said without thought. James, in his letter, warns us that even a Christian believer can say bad things. Captive Israel had been distressed by racism and false religion - lying lips! The writer admits his own need to guard his tongue.

A strange place to begin a procession of praise? Maybe not. The direction is the main thing - to march towards PEACE.

## Looking Beyond the Mountains

**Psalms 121:1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from?**



So, the journey begins - out of darkness into God's marvellous light. Perhaps we see a small family group journeying "Home" and another joins them coming up from a different area. Their focus is PEACE. This brings the people into blessing, grace covering them. They experience God's Peace, Presence and Protection. No longer are the hills or mountains a threat (a possible hiding place for thieves and robbers). Now the pilgrims take confidence, living under the shadow of the Almighty. He will watch over their coming out and their going in. We can take courage from this. A time will come for us to step out of lockdown and press on towards our home in heaven together! It will be different, new dangers (maybe) but we will continue to look to the Lord our helper and Saviour.

**Why do you need a voice when you have a verse?**

**Jim Elliot**

## A Peaceful Procession

**Psalms 122:1** I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."

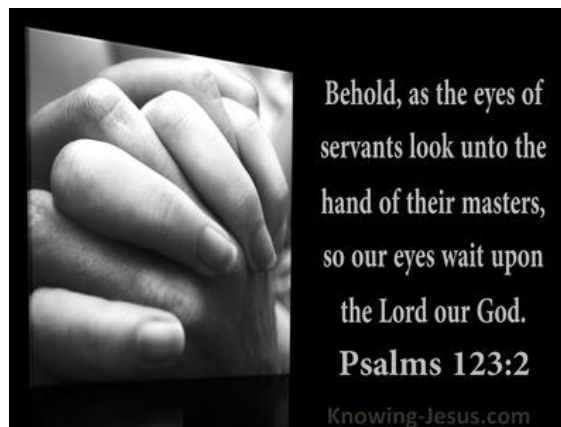


The journey onwards and upwards continues. New groups join the main procession and swell its numbers. They share a common goal - to go up to the House (Home) of the Lord. They share a common purpose - PEACE in God's House; praying for peace (for Jerusalem). As they talk together, they realise that unity and love must prosper "for the sake of my family and friends." Jesus said, "**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**" [Matthew 5:9 ]

There is a high note of anticipation here. Even though they are on the way, they speak as though they are standing at the gates. This is the way of faith - taking hold of things as yet unseen!

## Looking Up!

**Psalms 123:1** I lift up my eyes to you, to you who sit enthroned in heaven.



Readers of the KJV will note that these Psalms are called Songs of Degrees. The Hebrew word describes making steps onward and upward. A bit like Jacob's Ladder (Stairway). Each "step" shows spiritual growth. Note that the procession has learned to look to God (as opposed to the threat of what is near (in their faces). In fact the attitude is one of humility and willing service. Their hearts are hurt! No end of ridicule and contempt has damaged them. However, they look as slaves to a Master Who will only do them good. In fact they need only see God's Hand move and they obey. Which means they understand their Lord's Will and Ways.

**He is no fool who gives to God what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. Jim Elliot**

## The Lord Has Been Our Helper

**Psalms 124:1 If the LORD had not been on our side**



As the procession grows, more join, so the people come to appreciate how God has been their Helper. Sharing their experiences of captivity will have brought to light how God had not allowed things to overwhelm them. God has always provided a way of escape. This is what Paul writes about:

**1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.**

Yes, they admit that they had been hurt, attacked, maligned BUT GOD had brought them through. Hindsight is a great encouragement to faith for the future. We don't live as though God is justifying bad actions and violent behaviour (Bob Dylan challenges such an attitude in his song "With God on Our Side" - where he challenges the rulers and rich of this world), rather, we understand that God cares for us.

*JEHOVAH JIREH - Our Provider*

## Moving On

**Psalms 125:1 Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever.**



**The Will of God is not something you add to your life but a course you choose. Elizabeth Elliot**

The procession grows. More join. The upsets of the past and stories of narrow escapes give place to a quieter focus on trusting God. We read of security in God's loving care. The people trust God to sort out the wheat from the chaff: the good from the bad. Instead they encourage each other to see that our God is greater security than the shelter of a mountain. They rest content that the wicked will not have sway for ever. They will not inherit the PEACE that God promises to the Faithful.

## Restoration

**Psalms 126:1** When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed.



This Psalm rejoices in God's goodness and grace - His generosity. The procession is moving away from captivity and beginning to realise that the Lord was doing great things for them. Their mouths were filled with laughter expressed by words of joy and thanksgiving. The simple fact that seedtime in all its hardships is followed by a harvest encourages them to keep on keeping on. They could see that Jeremiah spoke truth - they had a hope and a future [Jer.29:11]. They were living the dream!

**2 Corinthians 4:15-16** All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving overflow to the glory of God. (16) Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

## Working On The Building

**Psalms 127:1** Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.



**Sometimes fear does not subside and you must do it afraid.  
Elizabeth Elliot**

There is a song that begins, "We're marching to Zion". Each of us is a worshipper in a growing crowd taking steps towards our Holy Calling - to be with Jesus eternally! Individual processions join the main path, and the numbers swell. Time for care - lest heads swell!

The people were heady with joy. God had delivered them from captivity and they were being blessed, protected and assured of God's Presence. They began to look to what they would do (build) when they arrived in Zion. Time to take care and consider that all they were enjoying was God's doing. It was not their efforts or loveliness that had persuaded God. It was, simply, that God was keeping His Word. God was building His House. It was not futile human effort that was fulfilling God's Great Purpose. After all, children are a blessing from the Lord.

The House is the people. The children are evidence of God's blessing. We press on and labour willingly and faithfully because Jesus has finished the work that God required. Now, we build on the ROCK and rejoice in the Grace of God that provides God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

## Obedience and Reverence

**Psalms 128:1-Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in obedience to him.**



The Great Procession to Jerusalem is growing ever larger. The conversation is spiritual yet involves the most basic things of earthly life. Faithful people expect blessings such as a happy Marriage and the Lord's provision for every need. There is the expectation of children and grandchildren. Above all there is the expectation of peace. All this depends on God's grace and our faithfulness. However, such blessings are not guaranteed! They are related to prayer and to the blessing we speak over one another. For the Christian, family is more than a blood ties, wealth is not in earthly things, long life is not measured in years but in quality. Our family is the Household of God.

**God always gives His best to those who leave the choice to Him**

**Jim Elliot**

## Afflicted

**Psalms 129:1 "They have greatly oppressed me from my youth," let Israel say; (2) "they have greatly oppressed me from my youth, but they have not gained the victory over me.**



Jesus was "ploughed".

**Isaiah 50:6 I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.**

You would expect the procession to be pretty well sorted by now? Almost there! Yet, at this point, the deepest pain is felt. The reaction is extreme. The pronoun is "me" but the speaker is "we". The whole nation is coming together to worship God in His Holy Place. They become aware of the suffering the nation has endured. They also affirm that they are "born free". The cutting of the chord refers to what happens once a baby is born. They had been knocked down but not knocked out! They had not lost! However, their attitude included the words of a curse.

What can I learn from this? Our Lord Jesus suffered, He was afflicted (oppressed), but He did not utter such words as these. He said, "Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing".

**Luke 6:27-28 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, (28) bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.**

However, we must understand that there will be a point in time where a world that has rejected God will need to face up to it. Whether that be the treatment of Israel as a nation, or the treatment meted out to the Lord Jesus. May God grant us grace to know forgiveness in Jesus Christ while it is still possible.

## Forgiveness and Hope

**Psalms 130:1 Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD**



We need to have in our minds that different family groups of captive Israel are journeying to Jerusalem. Gradually, groups meet up and the procession becomes bigger. We have seen that the nation is calling on the LORD as one people - one person. The previous Psalm involved harsh attitudes. Now they receive in their hearts the return of such condemnation of others. They are convicted of their sins. They all share in this regardless of individual levels of guilt. As one they come to understand the amazing grace of God. They can hope in His forgiveness and full redemption. God's love is unending. He is not limited by our failures. He can and will REDEEM His people. They cried from the depths but were raised to the heights. They were able to see beyond the present to a glorious future. That is what hope does!

**To love God is to love His Will. It is to be content with His timing and wise appointment. Elizabeth Elliot**



## Quietness

**Psalms 131:1 My heart is not proud, LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.**



The great procession approaches their goal. Jerusalem is nearer. The horror of broken walls and a desecrated Temple are not in view. The idea of being in God's Presence is uppermost - they are filled with hope and joy because they are free from captivity. They are humbled before God and speak with one voice. Christian, our hope is in Jesus Christ and a heavenly City where there is no disappointment.

**1 Corinthians 15:19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.**

Do we speak as one? Are we humbled at the thought that God will receive us? The key thought of this Psalm is of an uncomplicated walk with God. Like a little child, fed and washed and loved and without a "care in the world"! So often we get wrapped up in "great matters", things of the world that are beyond our understanding. We try to solve problems for God! We tend to be clever in our own eyes.

These are days when trusting God with all our heart (not in our own understanding) are vital for a quiet and peaceful mind.

## Remember

**Psalms 132:1 LORD, remember David and all his self-denial.**



To pray "Thy Will be done", I must be willing, if the answer requires it, that my will be undone. Elizabeth Elliot

This Psalm is all about a plan to build a suitable dwelling place for God. David, in some ways, prefigured what Jesus would be like. This, mainly in his shepherd's heart and devotion to God's glory. Perhaps, in the request to remember David, we might see an echo of our Lord's request to remember Him? The Psalm outlines all aspects of what this would be. There is an emphasis on God's ANOINTED ONE. This can be translated as MESSIAH. David's descendant is mentioned, also a worshipping people, fed and "clothed with Salvation". A Christian "take" on this will be very different than that of the People of Israel, marching to Zion, 2,500 years ago! The place where God can rest is in the MESSIAH Jesus, His Son.

**Mark 1:10-11** Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. (11) And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

The Psalm ends with the ANOINTED ONE being adorned with a radiant crown.

**Hebrews 2:9** But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

We are made dwelling places of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Crown Him with many crowns  
The Lamb upon the throne  
Hark How the heav'nly anthems drown  
All music but its own!  
Awake, my soul And sing  
Of Him Who died for thee  
And hail Him as thy matchless King  
Through all eternity*

## Pleasant Unity

**Psalms 133:1-3** How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! (2) It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. (3) It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.



There is something that pretends to be Christianity which is mostly mood. The measure of its faith is merely the measure of its feeling. Elizabeth Elliot

This is a very well-known and much-used Psalm. Did you know that it was part of the songs of "ascents" - a part of the journey out of captivity and into the Promised Land? Its place in the progression is near the end, the goal. I don't think that the words about unity are expressed as something aimed for or aspired for but of something they were realising! The people were seeing and living this beautiful unity.

It troubles me that talk about unity often seems to be in a context of "not there yet", something that is almost out of reach! As though this Psalm is something to aim for rather than "BE"! It grieves me that so many talk about unity in a context of expecting people to adopt *their* ideas and attitudes. Another problem for me is that unity is spoken about in a context of mental, wordy, ideological things. The unity here in this Psalm is about being together, loving one another, appreciating one another, learning to understand and accept each other.

The key is DWELLING TOGETHER. These words emphasise a real experience of living gathered in one place. It is not about looking the same, or having the same tastes, it is about enjoying each other's company - even placing such companionship above daily demands. As we journey out of lockdown and its enforced remote meetings, will we truly want to express pleasant unity in meeting together?

### Having Done All - STAND

**Psalms 134:1-3 Praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD who minister (or stand) by night in the house of the LORD. (2) Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD. (3) May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who is the Maker of heaven and earth.**



The people have completed the journey. They are in the Promised Land. Read Ezra and Nehemiah and you will see that things had only just begun! There was a Temple and the City Walls to repair or rebuild. The Psalm is brief and clear. God wants His servants to praise Him. He wants them to be near Him (in His sanctuary). He wants to bless them.

**Eternity shall be at once a great eye-opener and a great mouth-shutter. Jim Elliot**

If you had thought about the songs of ascents as a picture of our journey to heaven, then I am painting a different picture. When we arrive in the Promised Land - the Kingdom of Heaven within and around us - then we can look at what it means to be safe from the attack of the enemy (within the walls) and being a suitable dwelling place for God.

Maybe this is something unobtainable until we are received into glory? The apostle Paul wrote about wanting to be in resurrection (completed) even while on earth! However, he understood that this was something to aim at, he couldn't claim to have "got there". However, he did not doubt that he would get there! Meanwhile he was content to press on, to STAND true - even in the dark times - by the power of God's Holy Spirit and the Grace of God.

**Ephesians 6:13** Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

**Philippians 3:10-12** I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, (11) and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. (12) Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

*David Chapman*  
*February 2022*

Father, make of me a  
crisis man. Bring those I  
contact to a decision.  
Let me not be a milepost  
on a single road; make me  
a fork, that men must turn  
one way or another on  
facing Christ in me.

Jim Elliot