



Summary of Psalms 107-150

Psalm 107

With this psalm the members of the community call one another to give thanks for God's enduring steadfast love, which he has shown not only to the people as a whole but to the particular members as well.

The distinctive feature of this psalm is its four accounts of people in distress whom God rescued. Because the psalm concerns gratitude for Judah's return from exile, it is likely that these four accounts describe the activities of members of the tribe of Judah in their exile. Some scholars think that these are four descriptions of the same group, but the activities of the groups are different enough to make it easier just to take these as four ways in which God's people have been scattered away from their Promised Land, to which God has now brought them back.

Key repetitions in the psalm include: after the initial invitation to **<<give thanks to the Lord>>**, the psalm describes how each of the four groups cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them, and it calls on them to thank the Lord. The theme of God's steadfast love – his enduring kindness toward his people and his willingness to forgive them even in the face of their rampant unfaithfulness – recurs throughout as the topic of thanks and meditation. With this focus on the restoration of the exiles, the psalm is at first glance more concerned with the thanks of the whole community than of any individual; at the same time, the persons who sing this have themselves received the benefits of the deliverance, so that the individual gives thanks as a member of the community.

Even though this psalm begins a new book of the Psalter, there are clear connections with Psalms 105-106. For example, in Psalm 105:44 the Promised Land is the place God gave to his people that they might serve him there faithfully; Psalm 106:27 brings in the prospect of exile from the land for the people's unfaithfulness, and the prayer of Psalm 106:47, **<<gather us from among the nations>>**, is presented as being answered here in v.3. More broadly, all three psalms reflect with praise and hope on aspects of sacred history.

Psalm 108 - A Song. A Psalm of David.

It would appear that David composed this community lament using material from two other psalms, with small variations: vv.1-5 are from Psalm 57:7-11, an individual lament, and vv.6-13 are from Psalm 60:5-12, a community lament. Charles Spurgeon commented, "The Holy Spirit is not so short of expressions that he needs to repeat himself, and the repetition cannot be meant merely to fill the book: there must be some intention in the arrangement of two former divine utterances in a new connection." The result has its own flow of thought: in the midst of a dangerous situation, the members of the singing congregation express their confident hope of thanking God among the peoples, including the peoples who are the present threat. This confidence is based on God's own oracles about the land, and not on how things look from a purely human perspective.

These are David's words, but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, taken and applied to a present challenge. The enemies specified in vv.9-13 are Moab, Edom, and Philistia with the emphasis on Edom. It may be that the old foe, subdued in David's day, rose again and Israel must defeat her again. Or, it may be a different foe, the prior prayer and victory over Edom serves as an example and ground for faith in the present crisis. Psalm 108 shows that Christians can and should use the words of Scripture for their present prayers and praises, suitable to their present situation.

Psalm 109 - To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

This is an individual lament, geared to a situation in which a faithful Israelite is suffering the attacks of vicious accusers who return evil to him for the good he has done to them. It contains an extensive prayer that his accusers or their chief would receive what they deserve, and finishes with a prayer that appeals to, and rests confidently on, God's steadfast love. An important repeated word is 'accuse', indicating the invidious situation.

The tone and content of this psalm are reminiscent of Psalm 69. A major difference is that the sufferer in Psalm 69 acknowledges that wrongs he has done have played a role in his troubles, while the sufferer in Psalm 109 professes innocence. This facilitates its application to Jesus and to Judas. Although readers may instinctively feel that Jesus would not have said such things about his betrayer and those who plotted against him, the Gospels do include his harsh condemnations of Judas: <<***The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born***>> (Matthew 26:24 and Mark 14:21); and of Pilate and the Jewish leaders: <<***Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin'***>> (John 19:11). Jesus asked only for the soldiers to be forgiven: <<***Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing***>> (Luke 23:34a). Nevertheless both contain curses on the enemies, and

both are appropriated by Christians with Psalm 69:25 and 109:8 being quoted in Acts 1:20. In both psalms the 'enemies' are influential Israelites who are unfaithful to the covenant. The same principle applies to David's authorship as with Psalm 69, namely, that this is a prayer well-suited to each of God's people in analogous situations.

This psalm is thought to be the strongest of what are known as the Imprecatory Psalms, David's songs that call down curses upon his enemies. It is important to remember that these are prayers, committing vengeance unto God. With the greater revelation of grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, Christians understand that they are to pray for the good of their enemies, and not their cursing. Yet, Christians should remind themselves that David refused to act upon these curses, instead leaving vengeance up to God. This is especially relevant regarding David, who knew what it was to take life with the sword. If David withheld vengeance, it was because he chose to, not because he lacked the opportunity, skill, or courage: <<***Afterwards David was stricken to the heart because he had cut off a corner of Saul's cloak. He said to his men, 'The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to raise my hand against him; for he is the Lord's anointed.'*** So David scolded his men severely and did not permit them to attack Saul. Then Saul got up and left the cave, and went on his way>> (1 Samuel 24:5-7).

Psalm 110 - Of David. A Psalm.

This is a royal psalm, i.e. its theme deals with the role of the house of David in the life of God's people. Like Psalms 2 and 72, this psalm goes well beyond the achievements of any merely human heir of David and thus looks forward to the Messiah; in fact, unlike those two psalms, it is almost entirely future in its orientation. When the people of God would sing this in faith, they would celebrate God's promises to David, yearn for the day in which the Gentiles receive the light, i.e. the coming accomplishment of the Messiah, and seek to be faithful to their calling until that great day.

This psalm is one of the most cited OT texts in the NT, with quotations or allusions appearing in the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline epistles, Hebrews, and the Petrine epistles; there are twenty seven in all. Christians sing this psalm to celebrate that Jesus has taken his Davidic kingship by his resurrection, and that God is busy now subduing the Gentiles into the empire of Jesus.

Psalm 111

This is a hymn of praise, celebrating the great works that the Lord has done for his people in calling them to be his, in caring for them, and in protecting them. These great works express God's unstinting goodness toward his people. The purpose of singing the psalm is to remind the people of these deeds and to encourage them to embrace the privileges that God's call has bestowed, by a heartfelt <<***fear of the***

Lord>>. Psalm 111 focuses on the deeds God has done for his people as a body. The covenant established Israel as God's people, and his works sustain and protect Israel as a whole. The redemption described here is for the sake of calling and protecting the whole people and for fostering the conditions under which true piety may thrive.

Psalms 111-112 go together. Both follow an acrostic pattern: after the initial 'Praise the Lord', the first word of each line begins with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. For both psalms, the flow of thought is governed by the acrostic structure. Verse 10 brings its praise to a close with a reference to the fear of the Lord – a wisdom idea, coupled with understanding – while Psalm 112:1 leads off its wisdom meditation with **<<Happy are those who fear the Lord>>**. This clear connection helps readers in interpretation: in Psalm 111 it is the Lord whose righteousness endures forever and who is gracious and merciful, thus echoing Exodus 34:6, while in Psalm 112 it is the godly person whose righteousness endures forever and who is gracious and merciful. The implication is that the person who fears the Lord and attends to his commandments has God's own moral traits reflected in his character. This is the goal of redemption, to renew the image of God in human beings.

Psalm 111, in stressing God's mighty deeds of redemption for his people, focuses on the big story for the whole people; Psalm 112, in stressing wisdom, encourages each member of God's people in a day-to-day walk, a little story, that contributes to the big story of the whole people. Christians sing these psalms in the same way, with the mighty deeds including Jesus' resurrection and installation as the heir of David, and God's continuing care for his people.

Psalm 112

This wisdom psalm joins Psalms 1, 37, 49, 73, 127, and 128, along with Psalm 34:11-14, in making themes from the Wisdom Literature the topic of prayer, praise, and instruction in worship. Psalm 112 is also a companion to Psalm 111, as seen in the acrostic pattern they both follow and in the links between their wording; refer also to the introduction to Psalm 111. Charles Spurgeon wrote this regarding the connection between Psalms 111 and 112: "It bears the same relation to the preceding which the moon does to the sun; for, while the first declares the glory of God, the second speaks of the reflection of the divine brightness in men born from above." This psalm focuses on the moral character of the faithful and on the benefits such people bring to themselves and to others.

Psalm 113

This short hymn of praise celebrates the way in which the great and majestic God who rules over all takes notice of the lowly. Such a God is indeed worthy to be praised by all mankind. Verses 7-8 overlap with 1 Samuel 2:8, part of Hannah's

Song. Perhaps the psalm borrowed the words, as the reference to a barren woman suggests.

Psalms 113-118 have been called the Egyptian Hallel, where Hebrew *hallel* means praise; and Egyptian because of the later connection with Passover, Psalms 113-114 sung before the meal and 115-118 after it. They became to be a regular part of the great festivals of the liturgical year including Hanukkah, the Dedication, once it was instituted in the intertestamental period: <<**At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter**>> (John 10:22). These psalms likely provided the hymn that Jesus and his disciples sang after their Passover meal: <<**When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives**>> (Matthew 26:30). Adam Clarke commented, “To these reference is made by the evangelists, Matthew 26:30, and Mark 14:26, there called the hymn which Jesus and his disciples sang at the Passover, for the whole of the Psalms were considered as one grand hymn or thanksgiving.”

Psalm 114

This hymn of praise celebrates the special status of God’s people in his plan: the Lord is the one whom all nature obeys, and even trembles before, and yet he has chosen little Israel to be his own, and he exerts his power on their behalf.

The psalm mentions the exodus from Egypt, the covenant at Sinai that made Israel to be God’s dominion, the crossing of the Jordan River under Joshua’s leadership, and God’s provision for his people as they travelled through the wilderness. When the believing congregation sings this, they are better able to accept their current circumstances as under God’s governance as well. The psalm uses exuberant personification, describing the Red Sea and Jordan River as if they fled from God, the mountains as skipping like lambs, and the earth as trembling at God’s presence. The imagery conveys how powerful the Lord is: even the strongest natural forces would not dream of resisting him. However, the events of the psalm are not simply displays of raw power: God used his power for the sake of his people, Israel.

Charles Spurgeon had high praise for Psalm 114, the second in the series of Psalms sung as the Egyptian Hallel as part of Israel’s Passover ceremony: “This sublime song of the Exodus is one and indivisible. True poetry has here reached its climax: no human mind has ever been able to equal, much less to excel, the grandeur of this Psalm.”

Psalm 115

This is a hymn urging God’s people to trust and worship the Lord alone, by reminding them that he alone is worthy of their deepest loyalty. In the background lurks the temptation to turn to the gods worshipped in other nations, and the congregation must grasp how hopeless it is to serve such deities. Some scholars

suppose that the Gentiles' taunt: <<**Where is their God?**>>, and the description of useless idols is evidence that the psalm arose after the exile, when Israel had close exposure to such taunts and temptations. And some have taken the expression, <<**you who fear the Lord**>> to address Gentiles who worship the Lord like the Roman Centurion Cornelius: <<**He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God**>> (Acts 10:2), and the people in Pisidian Antioch: <<**So Paul stood up and with a gesture began to speak: 'You Israelites, and others who fear God, listen**>> (Acts 13:16), which began to be a notable feature of Jewish life in the Greek period, i.e. after 330 BC. None of these arguments is decisive, however: as the comments show, the taunts and temptations existed at all periods, and the expression 'fearing the Lord' readily applies to any of the faithful in Israel at any time. Nevertheless, if the psalm originated before the exile, it certainly took on a renewed relevance in the postexilic period; and the Gentiles attending the synagogue might see themselves included among those who fear the Lord, the true God. Indeed, Christians can sing this psalm for the same purpose of fortifying their loyalty to, and confidence in, the true God.

Psalm 116

This is a hymn of personal thanksgiving for God's care. The specific circumstance is a deliverance from impending death; the words of the psalm may be generalised to other kinds of dramatic answers to prayer in a time of dire need. The psalm is notable for its assumption that one's thanks for this very personal deliverance are properly consummated in public worship. These words are an excellent form for God's people to use in giving public thanks after their own emergencies, e.g. some churches use the psalm in a service of thanksgiving after a woman has given birth.

Psalm 117

This short hymn invites all nations to praise the Lord. The Lord's steadfast love and faithfulness is pledged to Israel but is intended for the entire world; hence the Gentiles addressed are included in the word 'us'. The calling of Israel was for the sake of the whole world, and the OT constantly nurtures the hope that a day will come when the Gentiles will gladly join in worshipping the one true God.

When Israel sang this in faith, they would recall both their privileged position and their reason for existence. Paul quotes v.1 in Romans 15:11 as part of his argument for Jewish and Gentile Christians welcoming one another and worshipping together: the long-awaited time has arrived.

Psalm 118

This joyful song of thanksgiving closes the Egyptian Hallel. The psalm calls on all of God's people to praise the Lord for his steadfast love, and then moves to what

seems to be a personal testimony of God's rescue from distress, and then to a liturgical occasion at the Lord's house, which involves the whole people again.

The psalm describes a festive procession into Jerusalem after some great deliverance. The original occasion is hard to identify. It could be the rebuilding of the temple or the walls of Jerusalem. In later times it was sung at the Festival of Tabernacles as well as Passover. It was evidently recited by the crowds when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; refer to Matthew 21:9, Mark 11:9, and Luke 19:38. And Jesus may imply that it will be sung again at his Second Coming; refer to Matthew 23:39. It was the last psalm Jesus sang at the Last Supper with his disciples before they left for Gethsemane (Matthew 26:30), and vv.25-26 of Psalm 118 are often still recalled in prayers at the Lord's Supper.

The liturgical section inclines most scholars to think that the psalm was originally composed for some special ceremony, such as laying the foundation of the new temple: **<<and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever towards Israel.' And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid>>** (Ezra 3:11), in which the song is similar to v.1; or it may relate to the dedication of the new temple; refer to Ezra 6:16-22. In any case, that connection would make the 'I' giving the personal testimony of each member of the congregation, identifying himself with the trials of the whole people. God's many acts of deliverance show that his steadfast love endures forever and is not limited to one generation.

Psalm 119

This long Psalm deserves a long introduction. The author is unnamed; older commentators almost universally say it is a Psalm of David, composed throughout his entire life. More modern commentators often say that it is post-exilic, coming from the days of Nehemiah or Ezra. Today's commentators lean towards agreement with the older commentators, but do not insist upon it; if it were important, God would have preserved the name of David to this psalm. No matter who wrote it, it was most likely written over some period of time and later compiled, because there is not a definite flow of thought from the beginning of the psalm to the end. The sections and verses are not like a chain, where one link is connected to the other, but like a string of pearls where each pearl has equal, but of independent value.

This psalm celebrates the gift of God's Torah, or covenant instruction, as the perfect guide for life. It thus belongs conceptually with Psalm 19 and overlaps with such wisdom psalms as Psalms 1 and 112. It is far more extensive, and far more elaborate, than they are; it is the longest psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible, longer than many of the books, and the most carefully structured. By singing and praying its contents, one expresses heartfelt admiration to God, who has so

lovingly bestowed this great gift upon his people, and fervent yearning for one's personal life to reflect the loveliness and goodness of the Torah.

The psalm's structure observes a strict acrostic pattern: there are 22 stanzas of eight verses each, following the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in sequence. Within a stanza, the first word of each verse begins with the same letter, the letter to which the entire stanza corresponds. This pattern severely limits the author's liberty in sustaining his flow of thought, but this does not hinder the psalm from accomplishing its goal, which is to enable God's people to admire his Word so strongly that they will work and pray hard to have it shape their character and conduct. The cumulative impact of the psalm is huge.

The psalm uses a number of terms for God's covenantal revelation:

- Law is the Hebrew word *torah*, i.e. instruction.
- Decrees or testimonies is the Hebrew word *'edot*, i.e. what God solemnly testifies to be his will.
- Precepts is the Hebrew word *piqqudim*, i.e. what God has appointed to be done.
- Statutes uses the Hebrew words *khuqqim* and *khuqqot*, i.e. what the divine lawgiver has laid down.
- Commandments is the Hebrew word *mitswot*, i.e. what God has commanded.
- Ordinances or rules is the Hebrew word *mishpatim*, i.e. what the divine judge has ruled to be right.
- Word is the Hebrew *'imrah* and *dabar*, i.e. what God has spoken.

Except for precepts, which appears only in the psalms, all of these words can be found in Deuteronomy, e.g. 4:8, 4:44-45, 6:1 and 33:9, and denote God's word, focusing on its role in moral instruction for his people. The person who will keep God's instructions, Hebrew *shamar* and *natsar*, i.e. attend to them carefully, watch over them, and treasure them, will find that his way, Hebrew *derek* and *'orakh*, i.e. the moral quality and orientation of his life, will more and more reflect God's own character; refer also to Psalms 18:30 and 145:17.

Only a few verses in this psalm lack an explicit mention of God's word. The psalm calls these instructions righteous, true and enduring, and worthy of trust, hope, and faith. All of these are attributes of God himself and it is no surprise that God's words would partake of his character. Indeed, the law expresses God's own steadfast love and faithfulness.

This psalm reflects the view that the Lord, who abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness and who therefore freely and fully forgives his people when they confess their sins, loves his people without limit, and therefore also guides the faithful in the way of life that is genuinely good and beautiful. The psalm speaks the language of one ravished with moral beauty, to which there is only one fitting

response – to try to reproduce this beauty, as much as possible, in one’s daily life. There is no pretence of perfection here, only yearning, and trust, and dependence on God. To say that these commands are true is to confess that, with all their elements geared to a particular culture and phase of redemptive history, the principles that underlie them are founded on the very nature of things, and of God. This is why Christians can sing these words with the same yearning, trust, and dependence.

The psalm does not tell who its author was, nor when it was written. Many scholars think it comes from after the Babylonian exile, but this cannot be proven. The psalmist identifies with the faithful among God’s people, when they face trials, and when they suffer contempt and ill treatment for their faithfulness, even from members of God’s people who reject his grace. Even when many of God’s own people forsake him, there will be those who want to pursue faithfulness. This fits the time before Ezra and Nehemiah carried out their reforms, but it fits many other times as well. The words of this psalm can enable Christians to embrace its aspiration, both when they sing it and when they use those words as prayers for illumination as they attend to God’s word in public and in private.

The theme of the glory of Scripture is diligently explored in this psalm, but always in connection with God himself. Derek Kidner well remarks: “This untiring emphasis has led some to accuse the psalmist of worshipping the word rather than the Lord; but it has been well remarked that every reference here to Scripture, without exception, relates it explicitly to its author; indeed, every verse from v.4 to the end is a prayer for affirmation addressed to God. This is true piety: a love of God not desiccated by study but refreshed, informed and nourished by it.”

Charles Spurgeon commented, “This wonderful psalm, from its great length, helps us to wonder at the immensity of Scripture. From its keeping to one subject it helps us to adore the unity of Scripture; for it is but one. Yet, from the many turns it gives to the same thought, it helps you to see the variety of Scripture. Some have said that in it there is an absence of variety, but that is merely the observation of those who have not studied it. I have weighed each word, and looked at each syllable with lengthened meditation; and I bear witness that this sacred song has no tautology in it, but is charmingly varied from beginning to end. Its variety is that of a kaleidoscope: from a few objects a boundless variation is produced. In the kaleidoscope you look once, and there is a strangely beautiful form. You shift the glass a very little, and another shape, equally delicate and beautiful, is before your eyes. So it is here.”

Psalm 120 - A Song of Ascents.

Psalm 120 is the first of the fifteen ‘Songs of Ascents’ (Psalms 120-134). This diverse group includes individual and corporate laments, songs of confidence, thanksgiving hymns, a song celebrating Zion, wisdom psalms, a royal psalm, and a psalm for a liturgical occasion. Some traditional Jewish interpreters have

suggested that these were songs sung on the steps as the same word can mean this, for example: **<<You shall not go up by steps to my altar, so that your nakedness may not be exposed on it>>** (Exodus 20:26). This would either be in parts of the temple or up from a spring in Jerusalem. Others have taken them as geared toward returning to Jerusalem from exile: **<<Any of those among you who are of his people – may their God be with them! – are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel – he is the God who is in Jerusalem>>** (Ezra 1:3). Many favour these as songs for the people of God as they made the pilgrim journey to Jerusalem and the temple at the three appointed feasts (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles). Since Jerusalem was on a higher elevation than the surrounding landscape a person always goes up to the city or, indeed, up to the temple once in the city.

First Chronicles 13:6 uses this phrase to describe the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem: to bring up from there the ark of God the Lord. According to Spurgeon (and many others), the word translated as ascents shares the same root with ‘to bring up’ in 1 Chronicles 13:6. The same root word is used in the same context in 1 Chronicles 15:15.

None of these makes good sense of David’s authorship of Psalms 122, 124, 131, and 134. In fact Adam Clarke wrote, “The author of these fifteen Psalms is not known; and most probably they were not the work of one person. They have been attributed to David, to Solomon, to Ezra, to Haggai, to Zechariah, and to Malachi, without any positive evidence. They are, however, excellent in their kind, and written with much elegance; containing strong and nervous sentiments of the most exalted piety, expressed with great felicity of language in a few words.” It is probably enough to take them simply as suited to the ‘ascent’ to Jerusalem for worship: **<<So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. He said to the people, ‘You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt’>>** (1 Kings 12:28), **<<To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord>>** (Psalm 122:4), and: **<<Then all who survive of the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year by year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the festival of booths>>** (Zechariah 14:16), even if they were not originally composed for that purpose.

Psalm 120 is an individual lament, sung by someone living away from Israel; his distress concerns the way that deceitful people are stirring up war, while the psalmist prefers peace. It is possible that the psalm originated during the exile, when God told his dispersed people to seek the welfare or peace, Hebrew shalom, of the city to which they were sent: **<<But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare>>** (Jeremiah 29:7). Because the Gentile lands of Meshech and Kedar are so far apart, some have suggested that ‘I’ in this psalm is the Jewish people personified, but this is unnecessary. Worship in Jerusalem, both

for the singer and for the Gentiles, is the remedy for this violence: <<**Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'** For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more>> (Isaiah 2:3-4).

Psalm 121 - A Song of Ascents.

This psalm is the second in the series and seems to be intended to instil confidence in those making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship. The successful journey becomes a parable for the whole of one's life, in which the faithful can be confident of God's tireless care. Refer also to the introduction to Psalm 120 for the Songs of Ascents.

Psalm 122 - A Song of Ascents. Of David.

This psalm, the third with the title 'Song of the Ascents,' celebrates Zion as God's chosen city, and specifically the privilege of going there on a pilgrimage. Not only is the house of the Lord there, but so are <<**the thrones of the house of David**>>. Christians who sing this recognise that in their gathered worship they are carrying out the task of the temple, and their Davidic king, Jesus, is present with them: <<**So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God**>> (Ephesians 2:19-22), and: <<**Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ**>> (1 Peter 2:4-5).

It is one of the four Songs of Ascents that is specifically attributed to King David. He wrote it both for what Jerusalem was in his day, and for what it would become under his son and their successors. David perhaps never made pilgrimage from a great distance to one of the major festivals, but he wrote Psalm 122 in the voice of one who did, and who has arrived at the Holy City. Charles Spurgeon commented, "David wrote it for the people to sing at the time of their goings up to the holy feasts at Jerusalem. It comes third in the series, and appears to be suitable to be sung when the people had entered the gates, and their feet stood within the city."

Psalm 123 - A Song of Ascents.

This is a community lament, as the references to ‘we,’ ‘our’ and “us” show. As the fourth psalm titled ‘A Song of Ascents’, it envisions a situation in which the faithful pilgrims feel themselves to be the objects of scorn and contempt – whether from the unfaithful in Israel or from unbelieving Gentiles among whom they must pass, the psalm does not say, but the words are general enough to include both. The psalm goes beyond simply asking for a safe journey; it seeks relief from the scorn, a visible sign of God’s mercy, which might even benefit those showing scorn. Christians should have no difficulty in praying the same way.

It is another in the series of psalms sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem at the time of an annual festival. These songs give us a pattern of preparation to meet with God and his people. For more on the Song of Ascents psalms, refer to the introduction to Psalm 120.

Psalm 124 - A Song of Ascents. Of David.

This is a thanksgiving hymn for the community, particularly for an occasion in which God’s people have been under threat but have been delivered. It is conceivable that David wrote this psalm in response to some deliverance such as those in 2 Samuel 5:17-25, but the words are quite general, applicable in a wide variety of settings; God’s people have known many occasions on which this psalm provides just the right hymn.

The implication of the psalm being now a Song of Ascents, the fifth in the series, seems to be that the faithful would sing it in connection with their pilgrimage to Jerusalem; the deliverance of the whole people allows them to continue journeying there. For more on the Song of Ascents psalms, refer to the introduction to Psalm 120.

Psalm 125 - A Song of Ascents.

This psalm instils confidence in the Lord’s people, that remaining loyal to him really is worth it. The leading image is of Zion as a city surrounded by sheltering mountains. It is possible that some of Zion’s citizens might go over to evil, but the Lord will see to it that he publicly vindicates his faithful ones. This is like Psalm 122, in that it stresses the ideal of what the city should be and the faithful will do their part to make it live up to the ideal.

Like the others in the series of 15 Songs of Ascent, it was especially appropriate for those pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for one of the three annual major feasts of Israel. Charles Spurgeon observed, “We can imagine the pilgrims chanting this song when perambulating the city walls.”

Psalm 126 - A Song of Ascents.

This is a community lament that recalls a previous time of God's mercy on his people and asks for a fresh show of that mercy. The psalm does not specify which particular mercy or crisis is in view, and it is well-suited to a wide variety of comparable situations. In such crises, God's people may take encouragement from past events of mercy and pray for more of it. Repeated words that tie together the two halves of the psalm are: <<***the Lord restore the fortunes***>>, and: <<***shouts of joy***>>. The psalm also reminds God's people that their well-being impacts the nations around them.

It is the seventh in the series of 15 songs for pilgrims coming to Jerusalem. This song likely was composed after the exile, in wondrous gratitude for God's restoration and praying for a furtherance of that work. Refer also to the comment made on Psalm 120.

Psalm 127 - A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.

The basic theme of this wisdom psalm is that without the Lord's blessing, all human toil is worthless. This is explicit in vv.1-2, and implicit in vv.3-5, where the pious are to see their children as the Lord's gift. Psalms 127-128 are wisdom poems in the Songs of Ascents. Wisdom themes are suited to worshipful pilgrims, because in the OT, faithfulness in everyday life (the emphasis of wisdom) and vitality in worship go together. Christians need the same reminders. This psalm, along with Psalm 72, is attributed to Solomon. God gave Solomon great wisdom as confirmed in 1 Kings 4:29-34, although Solomon himself did not always abide by it; refer to 1 Kings 11:1-8. Of those who connect Psalm 127 to Solomon, most believe him to be the author. Yet it is possible that the sense may be that the psalm was composed by David for Solomon.

Psalm 128 - A Song of Ascents.

This wisdom psalm expands some of the topics in Psalm 127. Psalm 127 ended with the blessed or happy man and Psalm 128 gives a further description of this man's blessedness: in the context of ancient Israel, it consisted of a productive farm, and a faithful wife and children around the table together. The ending of the psalm shows that neither wisdom nor blessedness are individualistic; both relate to the larger reality of the wellbeing of God's people. It is another of the 15 songs sung by travellers on their way to Jerusalem, usually for one of the three yearly festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

Psalm 129 - A Song of Ascents.

It is reasonable to call this song a psalm of confidence for the community, as it reflects on what God's people have endured and how God has sustained them. It could also be called a community thanksgiving, which celebrates God's sustaining presence, or a community lament, asking that God continue to sustain his people

against those who would harm them. As a Song of Ascents, it is well-suited to remind the pilgrims never to take their privileges for granted. As the pilgrims came to Jerusalem to remember God's many past deliverances, such as in the festivals of Passover or Tabernacles, they prayed confident prayer in God's continued protection and the defeat of their many enemies. Derek Kidner commented, "Whereas most nations tend to look back on what they have achieved, Israel reflects here on what they have survived. It could be a disheartening exercise, for Zion still has its ill-wishers. But the singers take courage from the past, facing God with gratitude and their enemies with defiance."

Psalm 130 - A Song of Ascents.

Psalm 130 begins with a personal testimony of God's rescue from the depths of guilt and awareness of sin, and ascends step by step up to giving confidence to others in their trust in God. This is an individual lament, expressing penitence and trust in God's mercy. Because Psalm 130 is marked by an awareness of sin and a powerful assurance of forgiveness, tradition numbers it among the seven penitential psalms. Other psalms with prominent penitential themes are Psalms 6, 25, 32, 38, 51, and 143. The penitential element is geared toward helping worshippers to see themselves as forgiven people, whose only right to enter God's presence lies in his mercy.

Psalm 131 - A Song of Ascents. Of David.

This psalm of confidence in the Lord models the ideal frame of soul before God, a calmed and quieted soul. Commentators suggest two possible occasions for its composition. The first may be when Saul hunted David, and David was often accused of ambition for the throne of Israel. The second may be David in response to his wife Michal when she accused him of being vulgar and undignified when he danced in the procession of bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. Whatever the occasion was, this short psalm is a beautiful denial of pride, arrogance, and selfish ambition. Charles Spurgeon observed, "It is one of the shortest Psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn. It speaks of a young child, but it contains the experience of a man in Christ."

Psalm 132 - A Song of Ascents.

The theme of this royal psalm is God's covenant with the house of David to establish the dynasty for the good of the people and, eventually, of the world. Most of the psalm expresses confidence in these promises; the requests are for God to carry out his purpose. As a Song of Ascents, this psalm recalls how the dynasty of David is to ensure the stability of the realm, especially of Jerusalem. In the era in which the Psalter was edited, the inclusion of this psalm in the collection shows the editors' faith that in due course God will renew the Davidic line.

Psalm 133 - A Song of Ascents.

This wisdom psalm celebrates the beauty of brothers in Israel dwelling together with two colourful similes that describe the blessedness of Israel being true to its calling: <<*when kindred live together in unity*>>.

Of the fifteen psalms in the series, Psalm 133 is one of the four attributed to King David, and so has the title 'A Song of Ascents. Of David' in many translations, although not in the NRSVA. It is not known exactly when David composed this song, but one likely occasion was when David was finally received as king over all the tribes of Israel, ending a terrible season of national division and discord.

Psalm 134 - A Song of Ascents.

This final Song of Ascents is geared toward a liturgical occasion, perhaps the opening or closing of a festival, depending on the identity of the <<*servants of the Lord*>>. By the reading argued for here, this would suit well the close of a worship service. It is also a call to the priests and Levites of the temple to continue their service of praise, with the answer of a blessing from those servants to the people.

Charles Spurgeon suggested that the scene was of pilgrims departing Jerusalem in the darkness of early morning, calling out to the priests and Levites who stood watch at the temple. The pilgrims then receive the blessing spoken to them by those same servants.

Psalm 135

This hymn calls God's people to praise him for his majestic power that he has displayed in his deeds on behalf of Israel. Each generation that sings this would strengthen their faith in and loyalty to the Lord, and deepen their gratitude toward him for their privileges. A side effect should also be an increasing compassion for the Gentiles, who suffer from worshipping lifeless idols. Many phrases in this psalm closely resemble phrases found elsewhere in the OT; there are reference to four different psalms, two passages from Deuteronomy, two from Jeremiah, and two from Exodus. Derek Kidner wrote of Psalm 135, "Every verse of this psalm either echoes, quotes or is quoted by some other part of Scripture." This could mean that the author of the psalm used those other texts as his sources; it could also mean that this psalm and some of those other texts used phrases and ideas from a common stock. The psalm names no author, nor does it state whether <<*the house of the Lord*>> is the first or second temple. The psalm serves the needs of God's people at all times, in order to renew their faith and gratitude.

Psalm 136

This hymn calls on the worshipping congregation to give thanks to the Lord, who has shown his steadfast love throughout the history of God's people: from creating

the world, to bringing Israel out of Egypt and leading them through the wilderness, to giving them victory over those who opposed them as they took the Promised Land. The psalm includes more recent acts of God's deliverance and care, interpreting them as the continuation of God's enduring commitment to his people. Each verse in this psalm has the same refrain: **<<for his steadfast love endures for ever>>**; one cannot miss the theme. Perhaps the psalm was to be sung responsively, with a priest leading with the first line of each verse, and a Levitical choir or the whole congregation replying with the refrain.

Psalm 137

This community lament remembers the Babylonian captivity, and provides words by which the returned exiles can express their loyalty to Jerusalem and pray that God would pay out his just punishment on those who gloat over its destruction.

This psalm is notable for the ferocity of its final wish. This is a vivid application of the principle of *talion*, the principle that punishment should match the crime: **<<Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind>>** (Genesis 9:6), and: **<<If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot>>** (Exodus 21:23-24). It is a prayer that the Babylonians, who had smashed Israelite infants, should be punished appropriately.

Three additional comments may be made. First, even though Babylon was the Lord's tool for disciplining his people, they apparently went about their work with cruel glee: **<<I was angry with my people, I profaned my heritage; I gave them into your hand, you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy>>** (Isaiah 47:6). Second, the vile practice of destroying the infants of a conquered people is well-attested in the ancient world, e.g. 2 Kings 8:12, Hosea 10:14 and 13:16, Nahum 3:10, and Homer's Iliad 22.63, and was therefore foretold of the fall of Babylon: **<<Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered, and their wives ravished>>** (Isaiah 13:16). Further, the Babylonians had apparently done this to the Judæans as the connection with v.8 suggests, and the prophets led the people to await God's justice; refer to Isaiah 47:1-9 and Jeremiah 51:24. In this light, the psalm is not endorsing the action in itself but is instead seeing the conquerors of Babylon as carrying out God's just sentence, even if they did so unwittingly.

Neither Israelites nor Christians are permitted to indulge personal hatred and vengeance: **<<You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord>>** (Leviticus 19:17-18), **<<But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous>>**

(Matthew 5:44-45); generally speaking, the repentance of those who hate God's people is preferred, and yet, failing that, any prayer for God's justice and for Christ's return will involve punishment for those who have oppressed his people: <<*When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; they cried out with a loud voice, 'Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?'*>> (Revelation 6:9-10).

Psalm 138 - Of David

This psalm provides a way of offering thanks to God for signs of his constant care. The mention of the holy temple has led some to connect the psalm specifically to a thank-offering, which is reasonable: <<*the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank-offerings to the house of the Lord: 'Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever!' For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the Lord*>> (Jeremiah 33:11). Psalms 138-145 are the final collection of psalms attributed to David.

Several commentators mention that it was fittingly placed next to Psalm 137, which described the inability of the psalmist to sing before the heathen. Psalm 138 is a declaration that even the kings of the nations will praise Yahweh.

Psalm 139 - To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

In this hymn the closing request <<*Search me, O God, and know my heart*>> echoes the opening statement <<*O Lord, you have searched me and known me*>>. The key word of the psalm is 'know': God knows, and the faithful soul knows. These features highlight the Psalm's theme: God's intimate knowledge of his people, a theme that vv.1-6 begins. Then vv.7-12 declare that there is no place one can go to get away from that knowledge, and vv.13-16 illustrate the point by describing life in a very dark place, i.e. the mother's womb. Verses 17-18 exclaim how delightful this knowledge of God's knowledge is; vv.19-22 affirm the singer's loyalty to the Lord; and vv.23-24 invite God to continue examining the singer's inner life, in order to purge it from all that hinders him from walking in the way everlasting.

Psalm 140 - To the leader. A Psalm of David.

This individual lament serves the needs of people under threat from ungodly people who intend serious harm. The psalm does not clarify whether these ungodly people are Israelites, but this is the most likely identification in a psalm of David. This psalm, in praying for protection and expressing trust, also prays for the defeat of these enemies and looks forward to God's display of his justice.

The psalm has a familiar theme to many of David's other Psalms, where he cried out to God in a time of trouble. This trouble seems to be slander against him, perhaps when he was a fugitive escaping from Saul's court.

Psalm 141 - A Psalm of David.

This is an individual lament, geared to a situation much like that of Psalm 140. The particular contribution of this psalm is its earnest prayer for God to protect the faithful person against all insincerity and compromise amid such dangers. It shows David as a man of tender conscience who asked God to deal with his own sin and weakness before addressing the wicked men who fought against him. It shows that David was even more concerned about evil inside him than he was about evil from others.

Psalm 142 - A Maskil of David. When he was in the cave. A Prayer.

This individual lament, with its title that refers to David being in the cave, is a companion to Psalm 57. It is also similar to Psalms 140-141, the faithful person praying for protection from persecutors. Unlike the previous two psalms, this one has no prayers for the enemies' downfall and thus is like Psalm 143.

The cave was probably Adullam cave, mentioned in 1 Samuel 22:1, although the caves of En Gedi in 1 Samuel 24:1 are also a possibility. Adullam seems to be the best fit; therefore it can be said that Psalms 34 and 57 are also associated with this period of David's life.

Psalm 143 - A Psalm of David.

This individual lament is suited to a situation in which the person's troubles make him aware of his own sins. It is another cry to God from a time of crisis and affliction because of David's many enemies. It is numbered among the seven Penitential Psalms - songs of confession and humility before God. It was a custom in the early church to sing these psalms on Ash Wednesday, the Wednesday before Easter. Psalm 143 does not seem to belong to this group as much as the others do (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, and 130 are the others), but v.2 is a strong and clear statement about the unrighteousness of mankind. Psalms 6 and 38 are probably the closest to what David has penned here.

Psalm 144 - Of David.

This royal psalm asks for God to give victory to the reigning heir of David, which will lead to a condition of blessing for his people. It was written from the time when David came to be recognised as the king over all the tribes of Israel, and expresses his heart for the nation in both war and peace.

The 'I' in vv.1-11 is the Davidic king, and 'our' in vv.12-14 is the whole people. God's promise to the house of David recorded in 2 Samuel 7:4-17 has tied the well-

being of the whole people to the faithfulness of the reigning heir of David. When God's faithful people sing this, they are praying for the success of this arrangement, so that the people might flourish under God's blessing. Christians, who recognise Jesus as the final heir of David, pray that God will protect his people from persecutors, will further the expansion of the people, and will prosper the faithful in their daily lives.

Psalm 145 - Praise. Of David.

This is the last of the psalms of David, and it introduces the hymns of praise that finish the Psalms. This hymn or song of praise specifically praises the Lord for his goodness and generosity toward his creatures, especially to his people, both corporate and individual.

One remarkable feature of this psalm is the way it uses so many different words for praising: extol, bless: to speak well of God for his generosity, praise: to glorify God for his magnificent qualities, laud: to speak highly of God, meditate, proclaim, celebrate, sing aloud and give thanks. The author has exploited all the vocabulary he can muster to describe this great activity, praising God for his greatness and goodness. Further, there are repeated terms for the enduring nature of this praise: for ever and ever, the generations, and everlasting.

This psalm follows an acrostic pattern. Like the other acrostics from David, this one, at least in most Hebrew manuscripts, is imperfect, in this case lacking the *n*-verse between vv.13-14. Verse 13b is included but is supplied from Q, Masoretic, Greek and Syriac texts. The Septuagint and Dead Sea Scroll evidence may witness to an earlier text, but they may just as easily witness to an early editor helpfully adding what he thought was a missing verse; the evidence is finely balanced. The sentiment of v.13b, of course, is fully in line with the psalm and with the Bible as a whole.

Although Psalm 86 was called A Prayer of David, this is the only one titled 'Praise. Of David', and it is a summit peak of praise. James Montgomery Boice commented, "Psalm 145 is indeed a monumental praise psalm, a fit summary of all David had learned about God during a long lifetime of following hard after the Almighty."

Psalm 146

The first and last phrase of this psalm and Psalms 147-150 <<***Praise the Lord***>>, Hebrew *hallelujah*, makes it plain that this hymn calls God's people to praise him. The theme is that the Lord's reign makes him a sure hope for God's suffering people. This final series of five psalms are generally known as 'the Hallelujah Psalms.' James Montgomery Boice commented, "In the earlier psalms, we have studied the writers' griefs, shames, sins, doubts, and fears. We have witnessed the people of God in their defeats and victories, their ups and downs in life. We have

encountered rebellious words and struggling faith. All this is behind us now. In these final psalms every word is praise.”

Psalm 147

Like Psalm 146, this hymn of praise begins and ends with <<**Praise the Lord!**>> Here the praise is focused on gratitude for some great work of building up Jerusalem, or perhaps rebuilding it after the exile, and for the creator who sustains his creation, especially his chosen people as they depend on him. The psalm alternates between universality, i.e. God rules over and cares for everything and everyone, and particularity, for he has set his own people apart and cares for them especially. Each new section begins with an imperative: ‘praise’ (v.1), ‘sing’ (v.7), and ‘praise’ (v.12).

Psalm 148

This hymn of praise calls on all of God’s creatures to join in praising him: from the heavenly hosts, to the heavenly bodies, to the inhabitants of sea and land, to all mankind. The concluding note, regarding God’s special people Israel, may refer to some particular event such as the return from exile, or it may be a more general reference to the protection God has given his people; in either case, God’s favour for Israel is put into the larger context of his plan to bring light to all mankind through Israel.

Psalm 149

This hymn of praise calls on God’s people to praise the Lord for their special privileges. In particular, if Psalm 148 recalls the benefits that the whole world will one day receive through God’s work on behalf of the faithful in Israel, Psalm 149 ends by calling to mind the expectation that the faithful will one day be God’s agents of judgement through the world: <<**Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels – to say nothing of ordinary matters?**>> (1 Corinthians 6:2-3), <<**It was also about these that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘See, the Lord is coming with tens of thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgement on all, and to convict everyone of all the deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him’**>> (Jude 14-15), <<**And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses**>> (Revelation 19:14).

Psalm 150

This hymn closes the Psalter with its call for ‘everything that breathes’ to praise the Lord with every kind of jubilant accompaniment. This psalm may have been intended for some particular liturgical use, for example, the opening of a joyful

service of celebration, but it now also serves as the final doxology of the whole book. The list of musical instruments in vv.3-5, with its mixture of wind, strings, percussion, and rhythmic dance, gives the impression of loud song and ceaseless motion – the worshipper’s whole body offering praise to God.

Each of the five books of the Psalms closes with a doxology (Psalm 41:13, 72:18-19, 89:52, and 106:48). This entire Psalm can be seen as a doxology that not only closes the fifth and final volume of the collected psalms, but also closes the entire Book of Psalms.

Psalm 150 contains no argument, no real teaching, no real explanation. It is an eloquent, passionate cry to all creation to give Yahweh the praise due to him. Alexander Maclaren commented, “The psalm is more than an artistic close of the Psalter: it is a prophecy of the last result of the devout life, and, in its unclouded sunniness, as well as in its universality, it proclaims the certain end of the weary years for the individual and for the world.”