

## Psalms 128-134 – Chapter Study

### INTRO

Psalm 120-134 are called the ***Songs of Ascent***.

They were sung by the Jewish pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem for the annual feasts.

As they turned from the Jordan plain around Jericho & began the trip up to Jerusalem, they would sing these psalms to mark off the journey.

Psalm 128 - A Song of Ascents.

**1 Blessed is every one who fears the Lord, Who walks in His ways.**

**Favored with lasting success** are all those who so honor God that they obediently follow Him.

**2 When you eat the labor of your hands,**

When you partake of that which your honestly earned wages provide -

**You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.**

You'll be satisfied.

**3 Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine In the very heart of your house, Your children like olive plants All around your table.**

When someone consistently, reverently & obediently follows God, their family life will be blessed.

It's important to say this is a general principle – not a hard & fast rule that applies in every situation.

I've witnessed first-hand the truth of this in many families where the man is a faithful follower of Christ.

His family is blessed, his domestic relationships a blessing.

I've also see a few exceptions to this; where a faithful & godly man has a troubled marriage or a child is a source of grief.

There are women who are saints with husbands & kids who are a real piece of work.

But these are **exceptions** to what is otherwise a general principle; that when a man reverently obeys God over the years, his family & home are blessed & become a blessing.

**4 Behold, thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the Lord.**

'Behold' means to see with discernment.

It often introduces a truth that is meant by the Spirit to be a promise.

The idea here is that while this is a general principle – if an individual will appropriate it personally, then it becomes a promise.

So – if as we read this, the Spirit nudges you to step up & go for this blessing – what do you do?

How do you respond?

You say, "Lord, I see the promise in this principle and want to activate it personally.

I want to be that blessed person, the one favored with lasting success. So teach me to fear You, to honor & reverence You as You ought to be."

**5 The Lord bless you out of Zion, [Jerusalem] And may you see the good of Jerusalem All the days of your life.**

In other words – "May you nation & land be blessed."

**6 Yes, may you see your children's children. [grandchildren] Peace be upon Israel!**

The psalmist prayed for the peace of Israel because one of the surest ways to experience the blessing of God is to bless Israel – as God promised Abraham in Gen. 12.

Psalm 129 - A Song of Ascents.

In this psalm, there's a hymn of thanksgiving for God's preserving the nation in the face of her enemies many attempts to destroy her.

**1 "Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth," Let Israel now say—**

**2 "Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth; Yet they have not prevailed against me.**

**3 The plowers plowed on my back; They made their furrows long."**

The image here is of a scourging, where a whip cuts the flesh of the back into ribbons.

**4 The Lord is righteous; He has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked.**

God took the whip from the enemy's hand & cut off it's lashes.

**5 Let all those who hate Zion Be put to shame and turned back.**

At the end of Ps. 128 was an appeal to the promise God made to bless those who bless Israel.

Here's the other side of that promise – that God would curse those who curse Israel.

You could get a good handle on all of history by charting how various peoples, kingdoms, nations, and empires have treated Israel & the Jews.

Those nations who've favored Israel & been a safe haven for Jews have known tremendous blessing.

Those nations who've been anti-Semitic & anti-Israel have suffered.

Oh, for sure, they may prosper for a time, as Germany did in the early years of Hitler.

God gives them time to come to their senses & repent.

But if they harden themselves & persist in their hatred of & opposition to Israel & her people, judgment comes, swift & overwhelming.

So today, we see the world positioning itself in reference to Israel.

Our country, the US, has been a staunch ally & supporter of Israel since its birth in 1948.

But the current administration has taken a dramatic step away from that support and is instead making overtures to Israel's enemies.

One of the reasons why the US has been so blessed with peace & prosperity is because of its historic stand with the Jews & Israel.

God said, "I will bless those who bless you."

Now, as the leadership of our nation pulls back from that blessing of Israel, we see the departure of the blessing of God from our land.

How much longer before the blessing is replaced by "And I will CURSE those who curse you"?

Again -

**5 Let all those who hate Zion Be put to shame and turned back.**

**6 Let them be as the grass *on* the housetops, Which withers before it grows up,**

**7 With which the reaper does not fill his hand, Nor he who binds sheaves, his arms.**

[How they made roofs] – The idea was that the enemies of Israel may prosper for a time, but their time is short.

**8 Neither let those who pass by them say, "The blessing of the Lord *be* upon you; We bless you in the name of the Lord!"**

There should be no prayer for blessing on those God has already promised to curse for their hatred of Israel & His people.

All one can pray for them is to repent.

Psalm 130 - A Song of Ascents.

This is a cry for mercy from the Lord.

**1 Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord;**

**2 Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications.**

V. 8 gives us a hint at what the cause of the psalmist's distress was –

**8 And He shall redeem Israel From all his iniquities.**

It looks as though the nation was experiencing a time of divine judgment.

The psalmist is overwhelmed by both the immensity of the nation's sins & the severity of God's judgment.

He doesn't know what else to do but to cry out to God for mercy.

**3 If You, Lord, should mark [keep a record of] iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?**

No one, because their guilt & fear of just retribution would crush them to the ground.

**4 But *there is* forgiveness with You, That You may be feared.**

Though God is holy & just in all His way, the psalmist has hope in God because he knows He forgives.

He purges our record of sin when we repent & trust in His forgiveness.

But here's the deal – look at the last part of v. 4

***there is* forgiveness with You, That You may be feared.**

The more we appreciate God's forgiveness of our sin, the more we will honor & reverence Him.

As our awareness of God's holiness grows, there's a corresponding recognition of our distance from that holiness, and just how much we need forgiveness.

Forgiveness becomes a more valuable thing & we realize just how costly it is to God.

So our honor & reverence for Him grows.

Some years ago, a skeptic was mocking the shallow Christianity of his day & said, “I love to sin. God loves to forgive. It’s a match made in heaven.”

If we are maturing spiritually, our fear of God will grow, in large part because we will become even MORE aware of our need of His mercy & forgiveness.

If your idea of spiritual maturity is that you come to the place where you *rarely need* to ask for forgiveness, think again.

The holiest saints are those most keenly aware of their own brokenness but God’s amazing sufficiency.

**5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope.**

And there it is – the psalmist is looking to God for help.

**6 My soul *waits* for the Lord More than those who watch for the morning— *Yes, more than those who watch for the morning.***

Some English versions refer to the watchmen who manned the city walls at night – waiting for the dawn to come so they can go home when the shift changes.

The word ‘watchers’ here could refer to watchmen, but this is more a picture of utmost anxiety.

Those who look for the morning are those who are so distressed they can’t sleep. So they sit around waiting for the daylight so they can get out & do something.

The psalmist is putting all his trust in God – no one else can bring the help that’s needed.

**7 O Israel, hope in the Lord; For with the Lord *there is* mercy, And with Him *is* abundant redemption.**

**8 And He shall redeem Israel From all his iniquities.**

Because God is merciful, if His people will just turn to Him, He will *redeem* them.

That is, He will ransom them.

They idea of redemption is that of removing someone from a place of danger & distress to a safe place of peace.

When we’re in sin, we’re out of fellowship with God.

We’re in a dangerous spiritual place where sorrow, pain, & death are sure to come.

The wages of sin are death.

The HS comes to us in that place of sinfulness & tells us we’re not where we ought to be.

That’s called conviction.

If we resist the Spirit’s urging, we stay in that dangerous place & payday gets closer.

If we yield to conviction & turn to God for forgiveness, He reaches in & pulls us out of that place and restores us to fellowship with Himself.

But here’s the deal – just as a ransom has to be paid to rescue a hostage, a ransom has to be paid to redeem us.

Sin incurs a spiritual debt justice requires must be paid.

The cost for our forgiveness was the Cross of Christ.

In the OT, all those animals that were sacrificed at the temple in Jerusalem pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice Jesus paid as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Psalm 131 - A Song of Ascents. Of David.

David only wrote a few of the 15 Songs of Ascent.

In this one he reaffirms his desire to walk in humility before the Lord & others.

This seems a rather odd message for the pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. = In reality it’s *perfect*.

Jerusalem was both the political & religious center of Israel.

It was a place of scholarship & political intrigue.

It would be easy for pilgrims whose homes were far away to get worked up about being in Jerusalem & deciding they were going to insert themselves into circles & issues that were none of their business or concern.

If they did, they would miss the much greater blessing of just hanging out with the other pilgrims, enjoying the time of renewing their fellowship with God.

So, as a king, as someone who lived at the center of both political & religious power, David shared his heart.

He wised he could lay it all aside just to walk in humility before the Lord.

Since the annual feasts were a time to afford him the opportunity to do that, he would. Affairs of state took a backseat to worship during Passover & Pentecost.

**1 Lord, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me.**

**2 Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, Like a weaned child with his mother; Like a weaned child *is* my soul within me.**

The weaned child no longer look to its mother for milk.

In the same way, David is no longer ambitious for the things he thought were indispensable.

He's content to quietly trust in the Lord.

**3 O Israel, hope in the Lord From this time forth and forever.**

Psalm 132 - A Song of Ascents.

As the pilgrims made their way toward Jerusalem the focus of their journey was the temple.

It was built on land bought by David, according to plans designed by him.

In fact, it was originally David's desire to build the temple but God forbade him, saying his son would instead.

Still, God was blessed by David's heart & desire so God made him a promise, that his royal line would last forever & produce the long awaited Messiah.

So as the pilgrims made their way to see & worship in the temple, they lifted this song to the Lord, asking Him to remember his promises to David.

**1 Lord, remember David *And* all his afflictions; [trials]**

**2 How he swore to the Lord, *And* vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob:**

**3 "Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, Or go up to the comfort of my bed;**

**4 I will not give sleep to my eyes *Or* slumber to my eyelids,**

**5 Until I find a place for the Lord, A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."**

Years before planning the temple, David wanted to bring the ark of the covenant out of its humble surroundings in the little village of Kirjath-Jearim to the capital of Jerusalem.

He was consumed with concern that the ark, the object God used to place His glorious presence over, wasn't being honored in a manner worthy of it.

**6 Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; We found it in the fields of the woods.**

This is the area of Kirjath-Jearim where the ark had sat for 20 years before David took it to Jerusalem.

**7 Let us go into His tabernacle; Let us worship at His footstool.**

**8 Arise, O Lord, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength.**

**9 Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness, And let Your saints shout for joy.**

**10 For Your servant David's sake, Do not turn away the face of Your Anointed.**

**11 The Lord has sworn *in* truth to David; He will not turn from it: "I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body.**

**12 If your sons will keep My covenant And My testimony which I shall teach them, Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore."**

God promised David if his descendants obediently followed the Lord, the throne would never pass from them. And indeed, his descendants did retain the throne for the next nearly 500 years.

But the last few kings were so corrupt & rebellious the kingdom was destroyed by the Babylonians.

Despite this, God promised the Messiah would come from His descendants & in the end times restore David's throne at Jerusalem.

**13 For the Lord has chosen Zion [Jerusalem]; He has desired *it* for His dwelling place:**

**14 "This *is* My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.**

In the Millennium, when the curse is reversed & paradise is restored, Jesus as Messiah will reign from Jerusalem over all the world.

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

**16 I will also clothe her priests with salvation, And her saints shall shout aloud for joy.**

**17 There I will make the horn [royal strength] of David grow; I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.**

**18 His enemies I will clothe with shame, But upon Himself His crown shall flourish.”**

Psalm 133 - A Song of Ascents. Of David.

This song by David celebrates unity.

The best way to read it is to do so as you picture a large group of pilgrims as they are nearing the end of their journey to the holy City.

They're about to crest the Mt. of Olives & catch their first view of the city & temple.

**1 Behold,**

Observe with understanding -

**How good and how pleasant *it is* For brethren to dwell together in unity!**

If you were to sit down and think back over your life to mark down those times that stand out as the most fun, the most rewarding, the most satisfying & fulfilling –

You'd find that many of them, probably most, were when you were with good friends.

You were sharing some activity, or just hanging out, talking.

The laughter was plenty.

The sense of belonging was rich.

There was a deep contentment just being there, knowing you were with people who genuinely cared for you & you sincerely cared for.

You see – we were created FOR relationship, for intimate fellowship.

We are social beings who need one another.

Sin has tweaked that need & turned it into all kinds of hideous perversions.

Yet we still find the echo of our divine purpose whenever we enjoy true unity.

This is one of the reasons we urge people to plug in to a small group.

**2 *It is* like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments.**

[explain – Exodus 30]

**3 *It is* like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the Lord commanded the blessing— Life forevermore.**

[explain]

Psalm 134 - A Song of Ascents.

This last of the Ascent Songs is directed to the priests.

It's a fitting conclusion to the psalms sung by the pilgrims because it spoken to those priests serving in the temple.

**1 Behold, bless the Lord, All *you* servants of the Lord, Who by night stand in the house of the Lord!**

These are the priests officiating at the evening sacrifice.

As the sacrifice came to an end, they would stand, lift up their hands, offering up prayer & worship to the Lord.

So -

**2 Lift up your hands *in* the sanctuary, And bless the Lord.**

Then, the priests turned, and with hands still raised, would pronounce the blessing God told Aaron & his sons in Numbers 6 they were to announce over the people –

“The Lord bless you & keep you.

The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.

So they shall put My Name on the children of Israel, & I will bless them.”

**3 The Lord who made heaven and earth Bless you from Zion!**