

The Songs of Ascents

There have been many attempts to interpret the phrase “A Song of Ascents” found in the headings of Psalm 120 - Psalm 134. A majority, however, believe that this phrase points out that these psalms were sung by Jewish pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem for the three annual feasts or festivals of Judaism: **the feast of Pentecost** in the summer; **the feast of the Tabernacles** in the fall; and **the feast of Passover** in the spring. Three times a year, all observant Jews would leave their homes, their farms and their villages to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. As they journeyed, they were “ascending” because Jerusalem was the highest point in the land of Palestine—they were literally traveling upwards. Not only were they ascending *physically*, they were also ascending *spiritually*, because as they traveled together in families and groups of families they sang these songs and prepared their hearts to worship the Lord.

These psalms chart for us the spiritual pilgrimage of God's people from the depths of difficulty in this world into the very presence of the living God in eternity. And as Christians (even though we don't go on physical pilgrimages anymore), it's important for us see their songs of pilgrimage so that we might be reminded that our identity here on earth is that of being spiritual **pilgrims** (Hebrews 11:13-16). We are to make our way through this world *as pilgrims*, journeying to another land, to our heavenly home—the New Jerusalem. Studying these psalms can give us the wisdom and encouragement that we so desperately need as we travel through this wearisome and trying world to our true eternal homeland.

Further, it is vital for us to know that the entire Christian life is to be one of *ascending*—rising higher spiritually. For, we are drawing nearer towards the New Jerusalem as time passes and as the Spirit leads us in being more and more conformed to the image of Christ. Our lives are to be displays of growth (Phil 3:12-21). Thus, these psalms remind us and encourage us as we walk out our heavenward journey of pilgrimage (Prov 4:18 ; Psa 84:5-7; 2 Cor 3:18; 1 Pet 2:11).

