



Psalms
The Book of Praises

Lesson 21

Psalms of Ascent

Psalms of Ascent

- Psalm 122
- Introduction
 - Psalms 120-134 have heading: “A Song of Ascents”
 - Various interpretations have been offered
 - The most likely – psalms for the three pilgrimages to Jerusalem
 - So these psalms may have been a small booklet of devotions useful for the journey

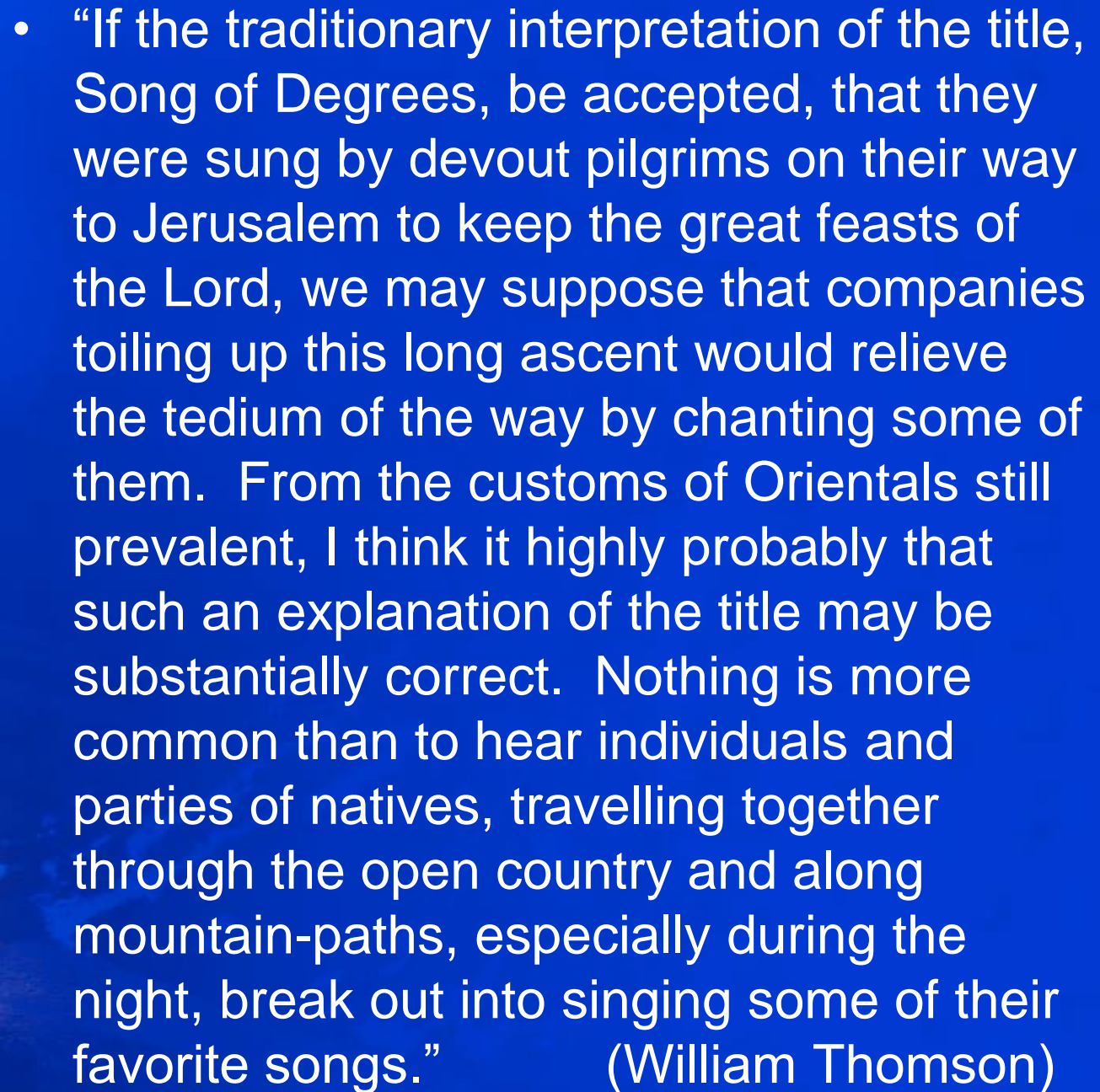
Lessons for Today

- Remember that this life is a pilgrimage; the way may be difficult, but a better life awaits.
- We can have a calm and quiet spirit because, regardless of the turmoil around us, our God is still in heaven.



Psalms of Ascent

- “ascents” or “degrees” - ma’alah – elevation
 - The act: literally (a journey to a higher place), or figuratively (a thought arising)
 - The condition: literally (a step), or figuratively (a superiority of station)
 - A climactic progression: things that come up, (high) degree, go up, stair, step, story
- Some ideas on the meaning and why they are grouped:
 - Ark brought up to Jerusalem, Levites going up the steps of the temple, Figurative, Musical reference, Life of Hezekiah, Return to Jerusalem, Pilgrimages

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- A person wearing a red jacket is sitting on a rock in a dark, mountainous landscape at night. A lantern is lit on the ground in front of them, casting a warm glow. The background shows a range of mountains under a dark sky.
- “If the traditional interpretation of the title, Song of Degrees, be accepted, that they were sung by devout pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem to keep the great feasts of the Lord, we may suppose that companies toiling up this long ascent would relieve the tedium of the way by chanting some of them. From the customs of Orientals still prevalent, I think it highly probably that such an explanation of the title may be substantially correct. Nothing is more common than to hear individuals and parties of natives, travelling together through the open country and along mountain-paths, especially during the night, break out into singing some of their favorite songs.” (William Thomson)

Psalms of Ascent (Pilgrimage)

- Pilgrimage for three feasts: Unleavened Bread, Weeks (Harvest), Tabernacles (Ingathering)
- See Deut. 16:13-16; Ex. 23:14-17

Q1. What are some of the common elements in most of these psalms?

- Similarly subtitled – a song of ascents or song of degrees
- Addressed to others to instruct or encourage them
- All quite short
- Begin by referring to the Lord in some way
- Many refer to Jerusalem, or Zion – 122:2; 125:2; 126:1; 128:5; 129:5; 132:13; 134:3

Psalms of Ascent (Pilgrimage)

Q2. Why might they lend themselves to singing on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem?

- All quite short – easier to memorize
- Messages are appropriate to such a journey
- Mostly congregational (in the plural)

Q3. In what sense are we pilgrims or sojourners today? Give some N.T. references.

- 1 Peter 1:17; 2:11-12; Hebrews 11:13-16
- Paroikia – sojourner, pilgrim, stranger
- Our time here is brief (note 2 Cor. 5:1)
- Life is very much a journey
- All things here are temporal – should not get too invested

Psalms of Ascent (Pilgrimage)

Q4. Select at least two of the psalms and note the following: the overall theme, the mood or tone of the psalm, the main points, what you like about it, and how it applies to your own pilgrimage.



Psalm 121

- Overall theme
 - God Protects His Own
- Mood
 - Reassuring, comforting
- Main points
 - When we seek help, God is there – He condescends to our needs
 - He is constantly watchful on our behalf
 - God will protect us from any harm
 - He will keep us from evil

Psalm 121

- What you like about it
 - The comfort it provides; very reassuring
 - Vv. 1-2 – reminds me of 2 Ki. 6:14-22 (Elisha and the chariots of fire on the hillsides)





Psalm 121

- What you like about it
 - The comfort it provides; very reassuring
 - Vv. 1-2 – reminds me of 2 Ki. 6:14-22 (Elisha and the chariots of fire on the hillsides)
- Application to my own pilgrimage
 - God will protect us today
 - His providential care is at work (I may not always see it or know it)

Psalm 121

To the tune “Sun of My Soul”

The Lord will keep you on the way
And be the shade upon your right;
The sun will not oppress by day,
Nor will the moon assail by night.

The Lord will shield you from all harm;
From evil He will keep you free;
The Lord will guard your going out
And coming in eternally.

by Matt Bassford

Psalm 127

- Overall theme
 - Laboring and Prospering with the Lord
- Mood
 - An instructional psalm; subdued and matter of fact
- Main points
 - Unless the Lord is at the center of what we do, it is all vanity
 - Building a house, Guarding a city, Laboring, Raising a Family
 - The wonderful blessing of children

Psalm 127

- What you like about it
 - Sound wisdom about God and our lives
 - “Children are a heritage from the Lord.”
- Application to my own pilgrimage
 - God touches every aspect of my life and should be at the center of all
 - He provides purpose, meaning, and guidance in all aspects



Psalm 127 (questions from lesson 20)

Q7. Who wrote this psalm? Does it sound like something from any other book in the Old Testament? Which one?

- Solomon
- Ecclesiastes or Proverbs

Q8. When is hard work and being industrious vain?

- If the Lord is not kept in mind and at the center
- Success depends on more than hard work and honest endeavor
 - God must bless what man does
 - Must not fall into an attitude of self-sufficiency
- Long and hard work without a thought of the need for divine blessing is the height of futility

Psalm 127 (questions from lesson 20)

Q9. How are children to be thought of? How are they like “arrows in the hand of a warrior”?

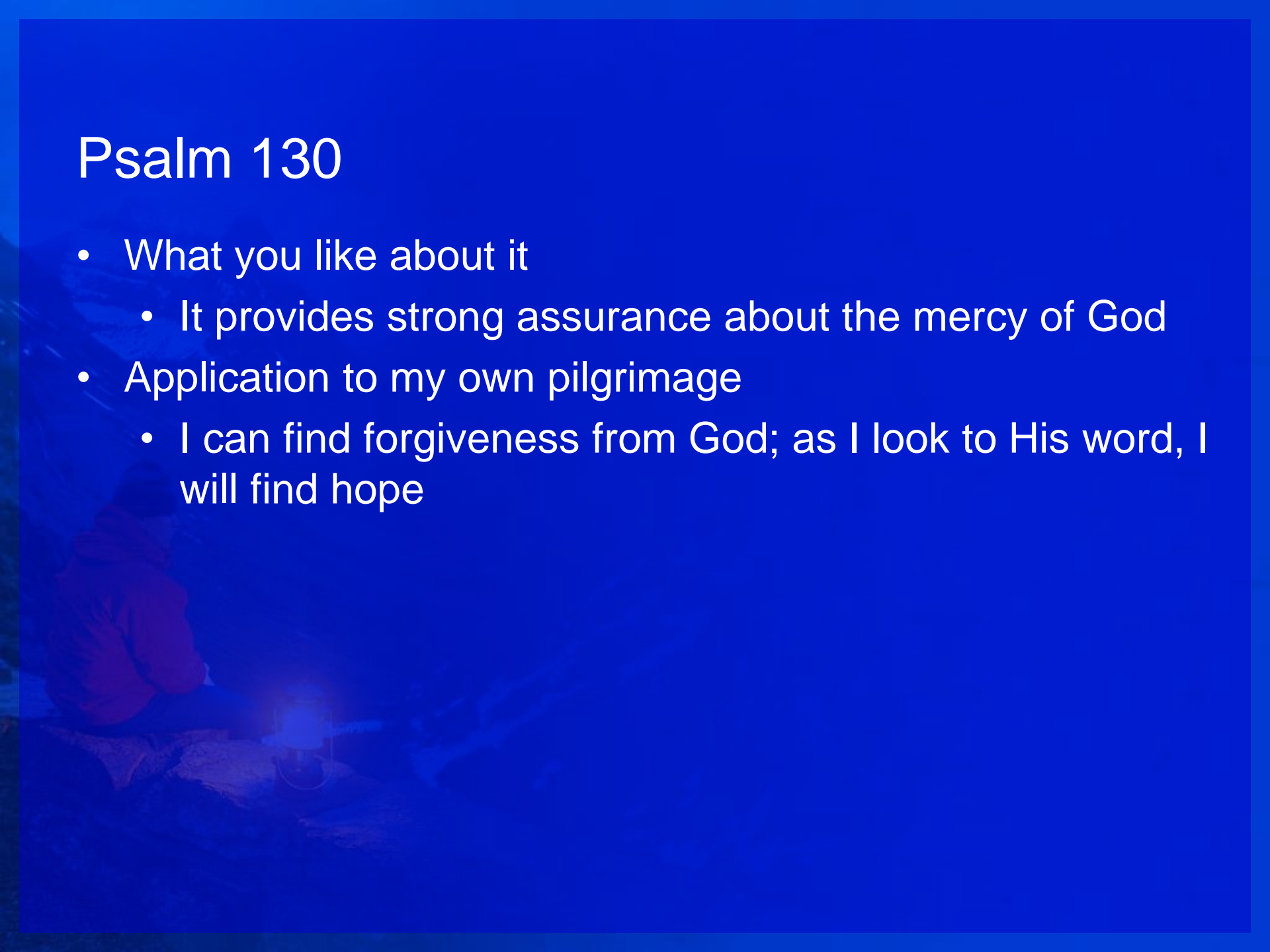
- A free gift of God; a token of His grace
- A reward to the righteous; an inheritance
- In those days, what was a warrior without weapons?
 - Can be very useful to a father
 - Truly a blessing and should be viewed as such
- Truly, happy is the man so blessed

Psalm 130

- Overall theme
 - Hope for mercy and redemption of the Lord
- Mood
 - Uplifting
- Main points
 - The Lord hears our cry, our prayer
 - God will forgive and not keep record of iniquities
 - In the word, we find hope
 - There is mercy and abundant redemption with the Lord

Psalm 130

- What you like about it
 - It provides strong assurance about the mercy of God
- Application to my own pilgrimage
 - I can find forgiveness from God; as I look to His word, I will find hope



Psalms of Ascent

120 – A Prayer for help against slander

121 – The Lord, the Guardian

122 – Jerusalem – the great capital city

123 – Looking to the Lord

124 – Thanksgiving for national deliverance

125 – The Lord is the Protector of His people

126 – A prayer for full restoration

127 – Man's need of the blessing of the almighty

128 – Domestic bliss an outgrowth of the fear of the Lord

129 – “They have not prevailed against me”

130 – Hope for redemption and mercy

131 – A psalm of trust and humility

132 – Prayer for the Lord's blessing upon the sanctuary

133 – In praise of brotherly unity

134 – An exhortation to praise the Lord

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