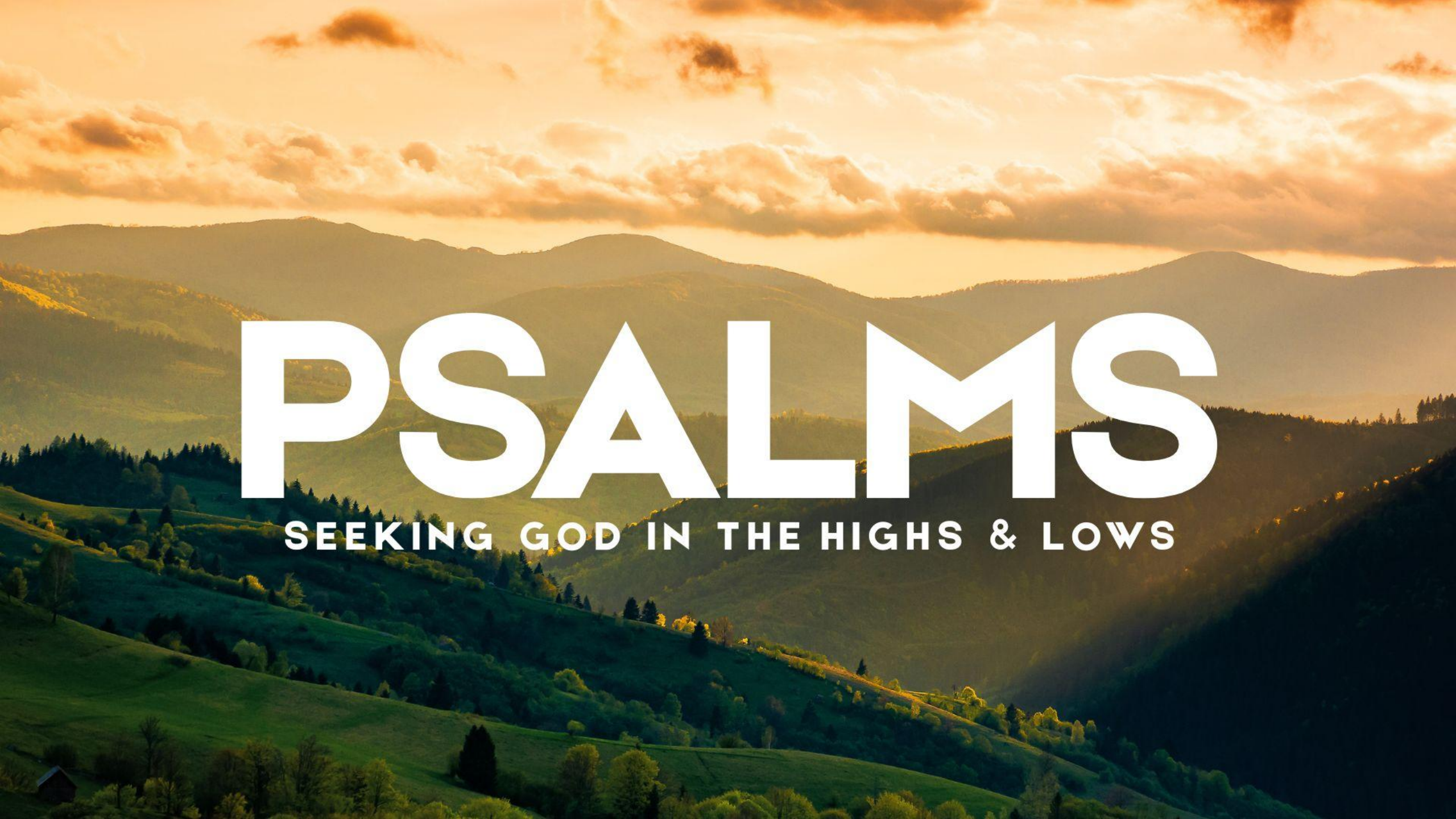




PSALMS

SEEKING GOD IN THE HIGHS & LOWS

Psalms

Seeking God in the Highs and Lows

Week	Psalm	Teacher
September 27	Psalms of Ascent (120-134)	Ron Grebe
October 4	Psalm 122	Grant Phipps
October 11	Psalm 91	Stew Bruner
October 18	Psalm 22	Mike Gann
October 25	Selected Psalms	George Peavy
November 1	Selected Psalms	Greg Moore
November 8	???	Stew Bruner
November 15	Psalm 139	Grant Phipps
November 22	Psalm 103	Mike Gann



Psalms 120-134

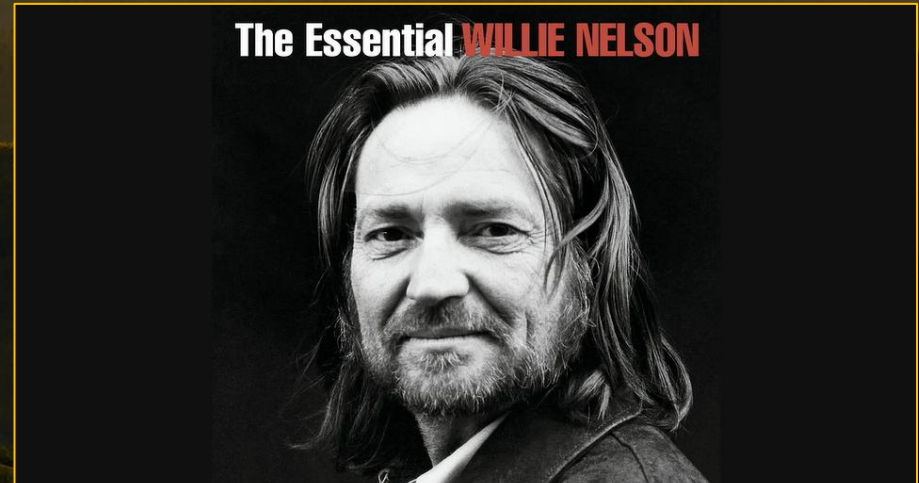
The Psalms of Ascent

Any favorites among these psalms?

If you were going on a road trip, what songs would you put on your playlist?



"Take it Easy" by Eagles



"On the Road Again" by Willie Nelson

Big Idea for Today

Psalms of Ascent



Need



Help



Trust



Wait



Praise

God's Playlist: How to Walk with Him

Psalms of Ascent

- You know a lot more from these Psalms than you might realize:

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! – Ps 122:6
May they be secure who love you!

Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain. – Ps 127:1

I lift up my eyes to the hills. – Ps 121:1-2
From where does my help come?
My help comes from the LORD.

Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep. – Ps 121:4

If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, – Ps 130:3
O Lord, who could stand?

Cleanliness is next to godliness. – John Wesley
in 1791

The LORD has done great things for us; – Ps 126:3
we are glad.

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope. – Ps 130:5

God helps those
who help themselves. – Poor Richard's
Almanac in 1698

Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity! – Ps 133:1

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb a reward. – Ps 127:3

In my distress I called to the LORD,
and he answered me. – Ps 120:1

Psalms of Ascent

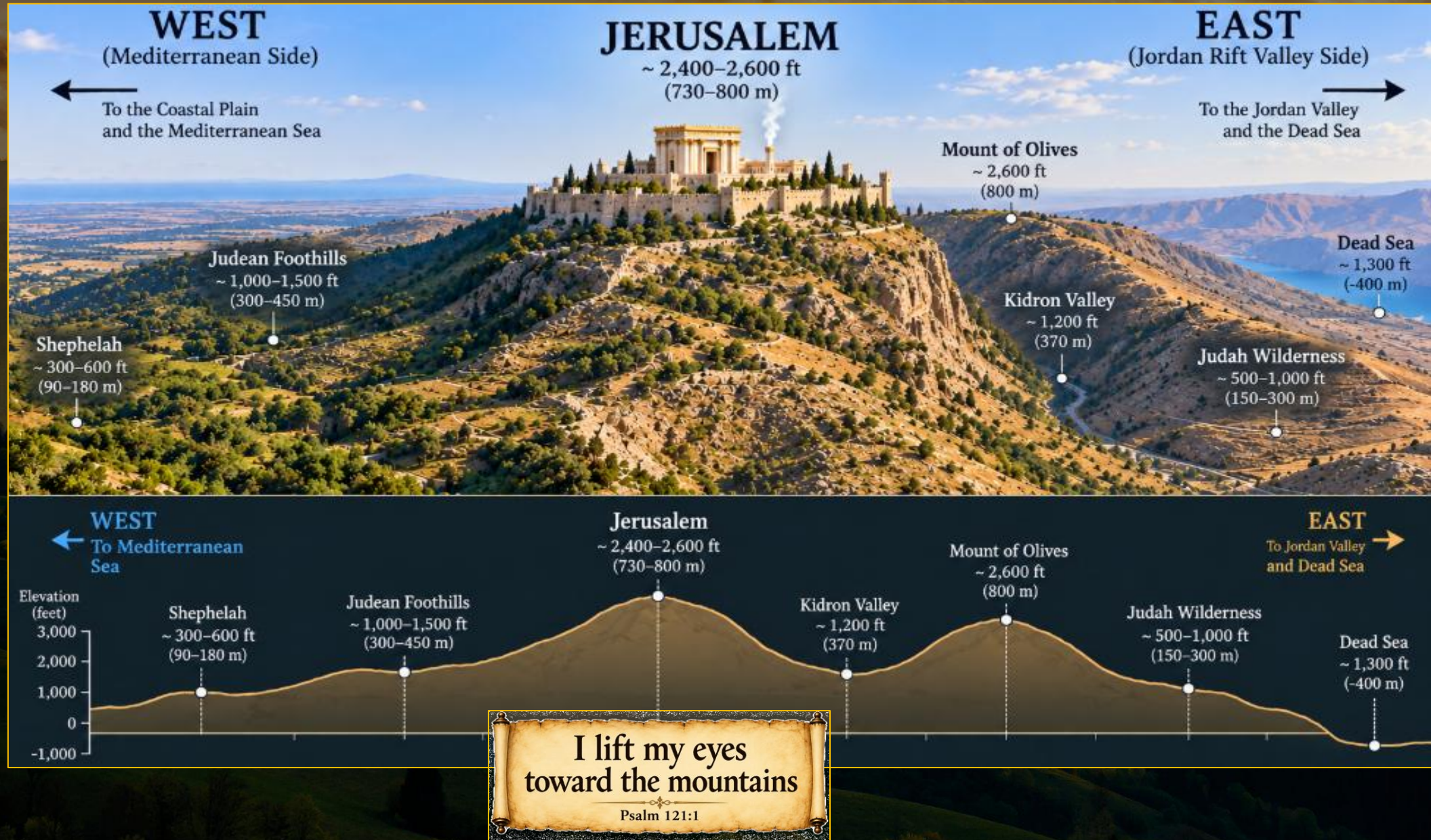
- Why are they called “Psalms of **Ascent**”?
- Psalms that were **sung** by pilgrims traveling to the holy city of Jerusalem:
 - People always “go up” to Jerusalem (Mt. Moriah) for both **physical** and **spiritual** reasons.
 - Jerusalem sits high in the Judean mountains at roughly 2,600 feet above sea level.
 - No matter which direction travelers came from (like the coast or the Jordan Valley), they literally had to climb **uphill** in elevation to reach the city.

The Hebrew term is ma'ālâ which means “going up” or “step/stair”

Also called Pilgrim Psalms, Song of Degrees, or the Gradual Psalms



“Up” to Jerusalem



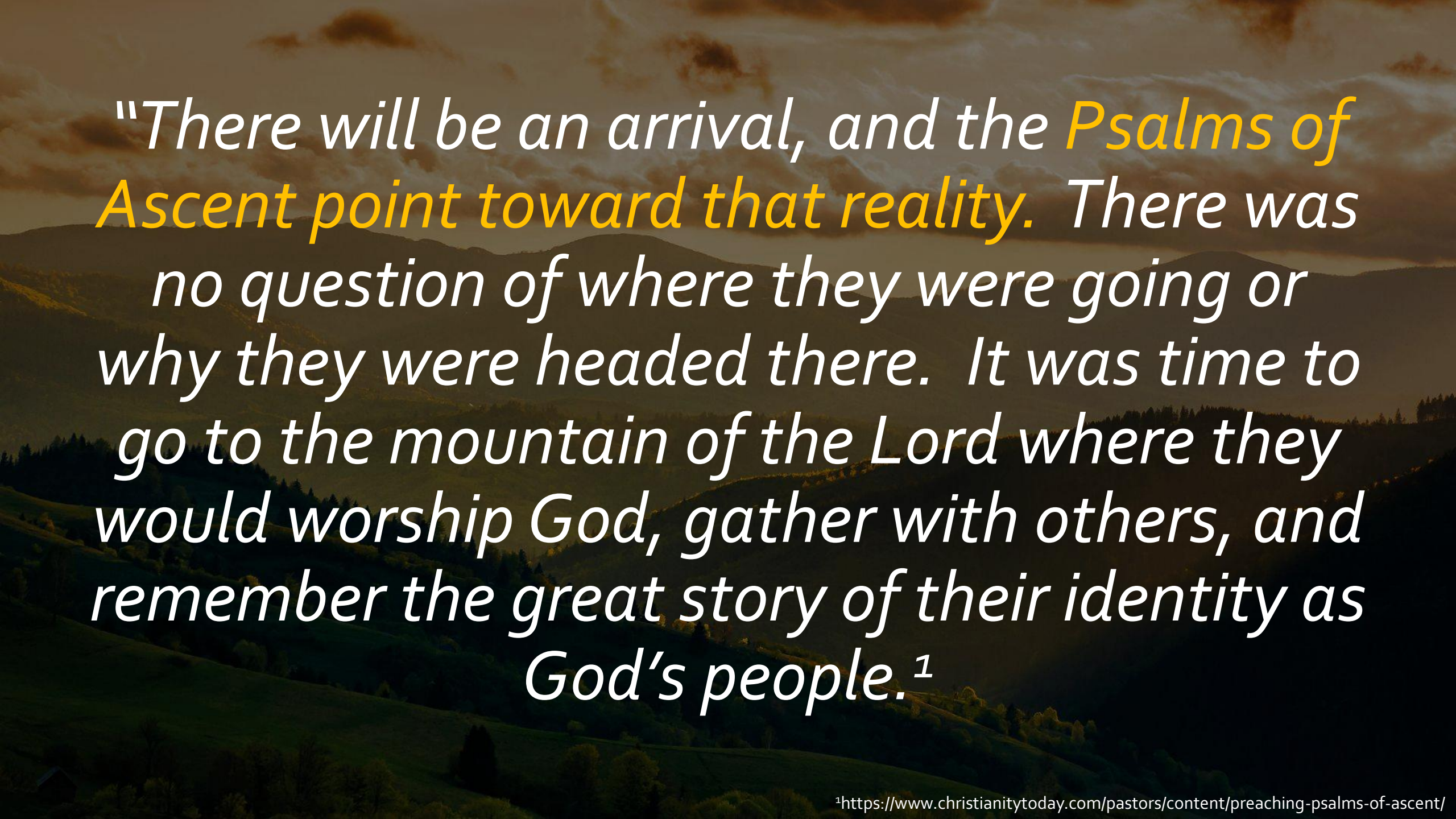
Psalms of Ascent

- Why are they going to **Jerusalem**?
 - Every Israelite **male** was commanded to travel to Jerusalem **three times a year** as part of their spiritual and religious duty:

- Crucifixion → • **Feast of Passover** in the Spring (Unleavened Bread)
- Acts 2 → • **Pentecost** in the Summer (Weeks)
- **Feast of Tabernacles** in the Fall (Booths)

*¹⁶Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God **at the place that he will choose**: at the Feast of **Unleavened Bread**, at the **Feast of Weeks**, and at the **Feast of Booths**. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. ¹⁷Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you. – Deut 16:16-17 (and Ex 23:14-17)*

- Jerusalem was the location of the **holy Temple of God**. Going to the Temple meant drawing close to God's physical presence.
- Upward Focus of Psalms of Ascent:
 - They represent an intentional move away from **worldly cares** toward ultimate trust, joy, and unity with God.



*"There will be an arrival, and the **Psalms of Ascent point toward that reality.** There was no question of where they were going or why they were headed there. It was time to go to the mountain of the Lord where they would worship God, gather with others, and remember the great story of their identity as God's people.¹*

¹<https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/content/preaching-psalms-of-ascent/>

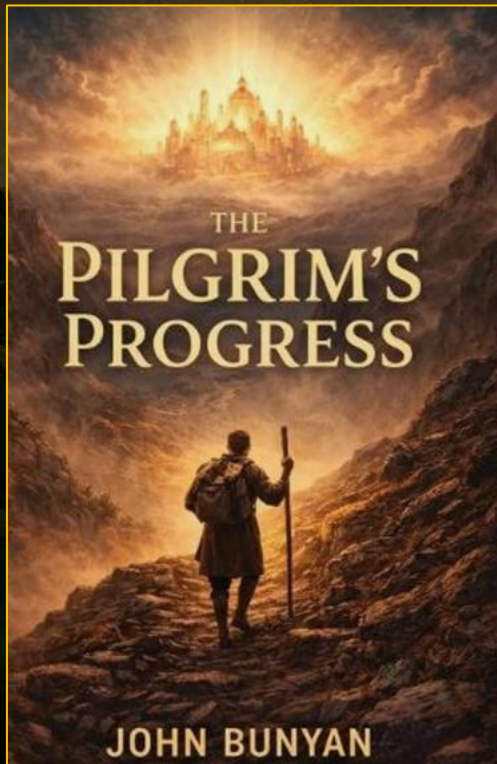
Psalms of Ascent

- Traveling to Jerusalem in OT times was **physically demanding** and took several days on foot.
- Depending on your location – the trip could be a day to as long as a week:
 - Far northern area of Dan to Jerusalem was **150 miles**
 - Far southern edge of Beersheba to Jerusalem was **120 miles**
- A trip from towns like Nazareth or Capernaum to Jerusalem covered roughly **75** to **125** miles.



Significance of Psalms of Ascent

- The Psalms of Ascent remind us that **life is a journey**:¹
 - It is a journey **with God**.
 - But also a journey **with his people** on the way to God's eternal kingdom.
- Scripture describes us as sojourners:



²⁰**But our citizenship is in heaven**, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

– Philippians 3:20-21

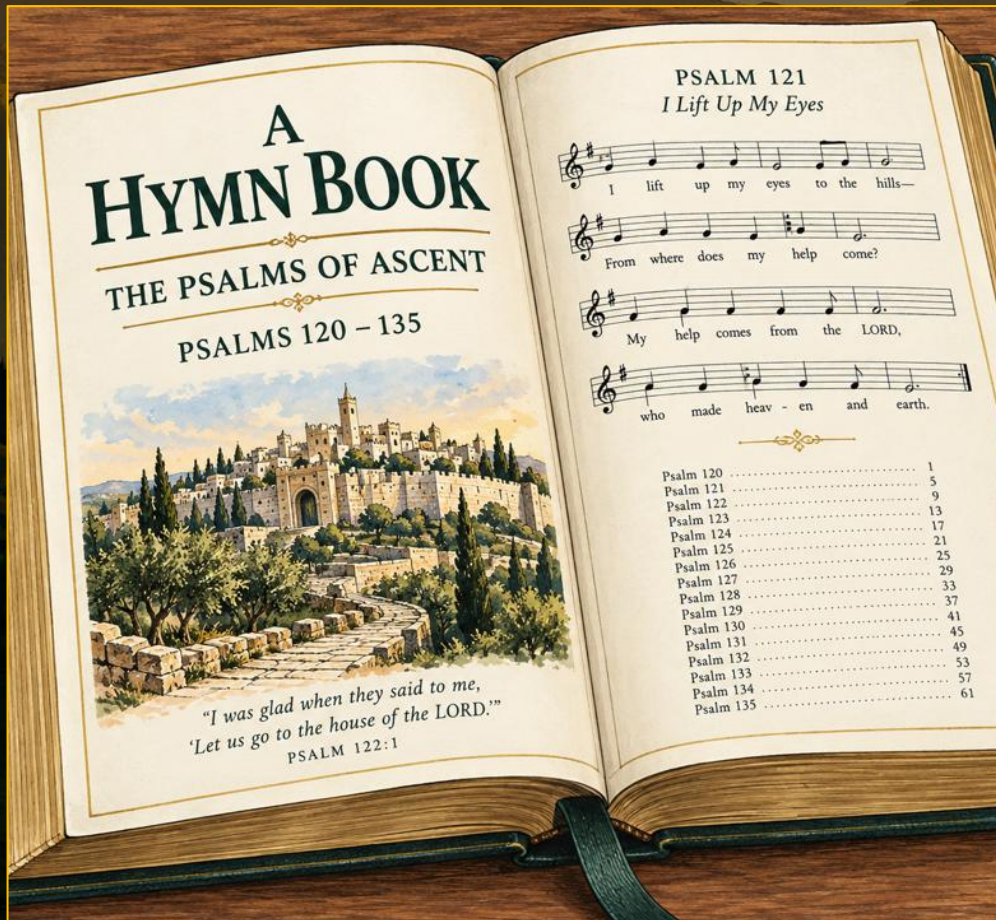
¹³**These all died in faith**, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that **they were strangers and exiles on the earth**. ¹⁴For people who speak thus make it clear that **they are seeking a homeland**. – Hebrews 11:13-14

¹¹Beloved, I urge you as **sojourners** and **exiles** to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. – 1 Peter 2:11

¹<https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/content/preaching-psalms-of-ascent/>

Significance of Psalms of Ascent

- These ancient **prayer-songs** accompanied the pilgrimage to Jerusalem in times of celebration.¹

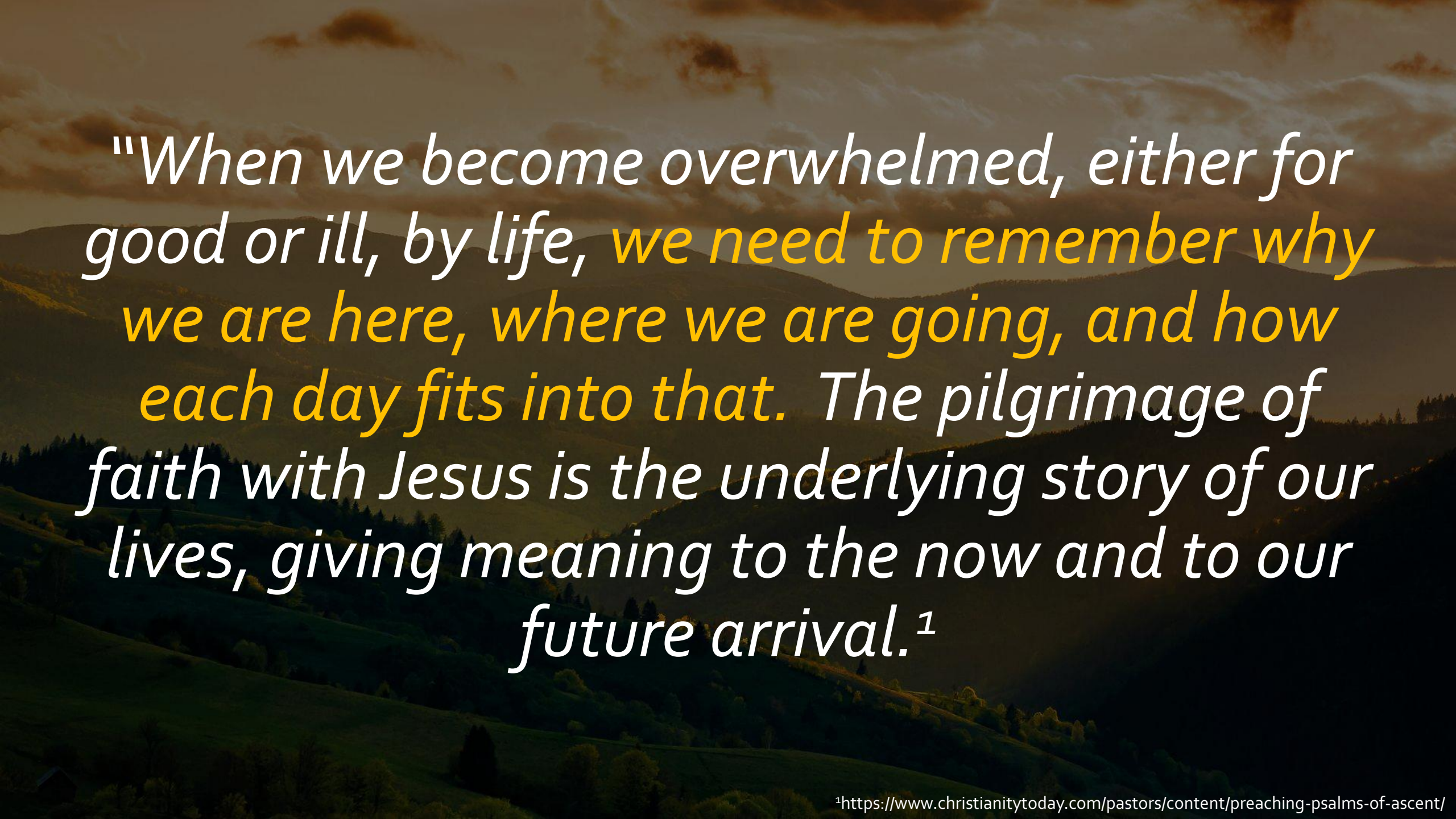


- These are not **15 unrelated songs**:
 - Read together, they offer a rich picture of the pilgrim's life: distress, trust, worship, family, repentance, community, and hope in the Lord.¹
- The overarching theme is the very **presence of God**:²
 - By singing these songs on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, God's people were reminded that **His presence was what they needed most**.
 - Now, when we read the Songs of Ascents we're reminded to **turn our eyes to the heavens** as we await Christ's return.

¹<https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/content/preaching-psalms-of-ascent/>

²https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/how-to-read-the-psalms-of-ascents?utm_source=chatgpt.com

³<https://thedailygraceco.com/blogs/the-daily-grace-blog/what-are-the-songs-of-ascents-and-why-do-they-matter-to-us-today?>



*"When we become overwhelmed, either for good or ill, by life, **we need to remember why we are here, where we are going, and how each day fits into that.** The pilgrimage of faith with Jesus is the underlying story of our lives, giving meaning to the now and to our future arrival.¹*

¹<https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/content/preaching-psalms-of-ascent/>

Highs and Lows

- Life is full of **highs** and **lows**, seasons of joy and seasons of difficulty.

² *Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."*

³ *The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad. – Ps 126:2-3*

¹ *Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!*

² *O Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!*

– Ps 130:1-2

³ *Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us,
for we have had more than enough of contempt.*

⁴ *Our soul has had more than enough
of the scorn of those who are at ease,
of the contempt of the proud. – Ps 123:3-4*

- What matters most is not the **circumstances** we face, but how we respond to them – with faith, humility, and trust in God.

Practical Also

- When the Israelites traveled to Jerusalem for the feasts, they went in **groups**. Imagine walking as a group (family or towns) to Jerusalem:

¹ *Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!*

² *It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!*

³ *It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore. – Psalm 133*

Unity among God's people
creates a fragrant, pleasant
atmosphere.¹

Dew in the morning was very
important to agricultural
communities.

Describing a miracle by God.

Last night in
Flagstaff



- Reminds us of the importance of **fellowship** with our brothers and sisters in Christ – life is not a pilgrimage to take alone.¹

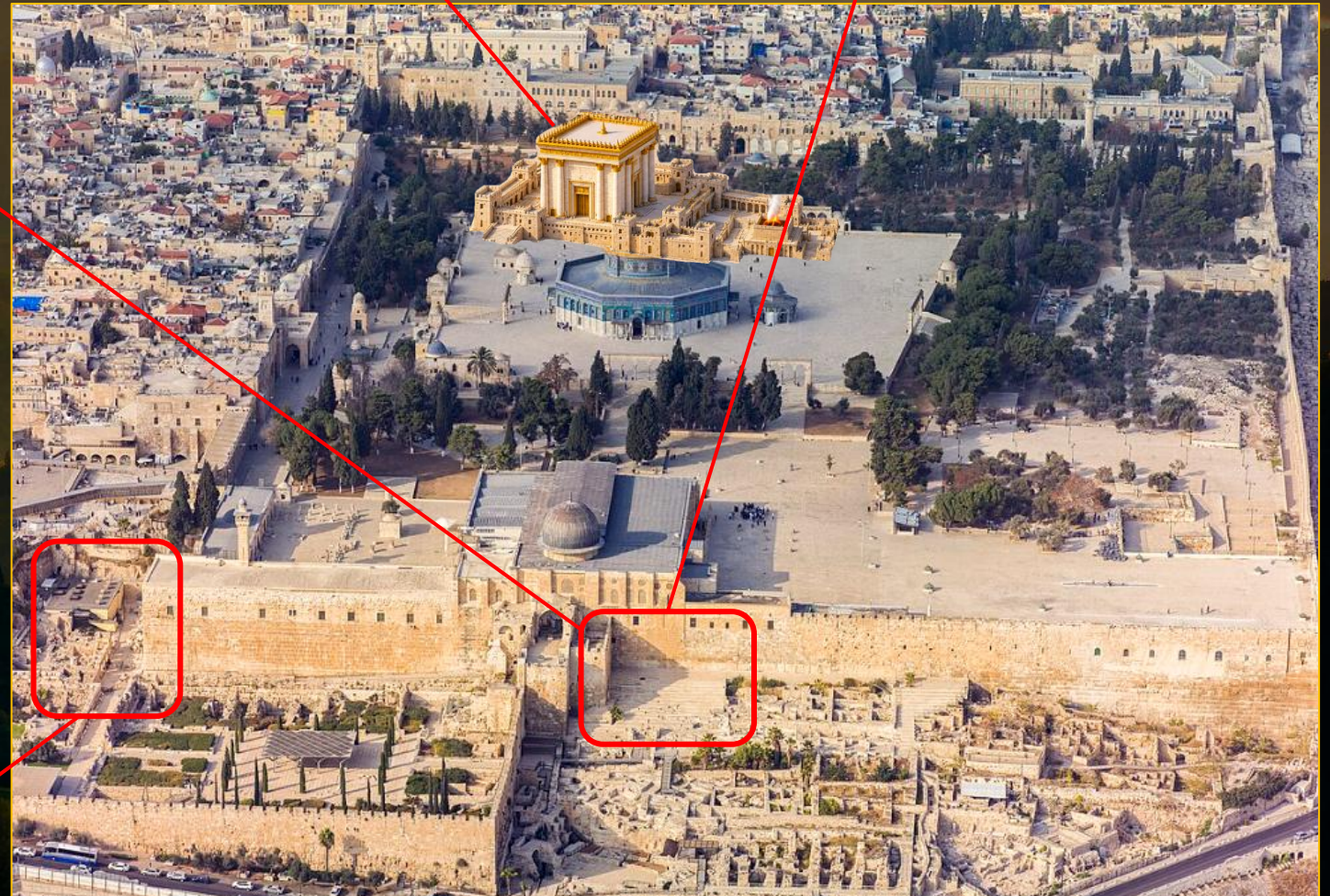
¹<https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/how-to-read-the-psalms-of-ascents>

Southern Steps of Temple Mount

- At the southern edge of Jerusalem's Temple Mount, a 200-foot wide flight of stairs represents both **original** and restored steps from the Second Temple period:

- Visiting the southern steps – you can walk where Jesus walked.
- Historical Jewish tradition and rabbinic literature indicate the **15 songs** correspond to the **15 physical steps** the Levite priests climbed to enter the inner temple courts.

2nd Temple location



Western wailing
wall area

Southern Steps of Temple Mount

Groups reading the Psalms of Ascent on each step



Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

– Luke 2:41

Israel trip in 2005



- Scripture records Jesus visiting Jerusalem at least **5 times** during his ministry:

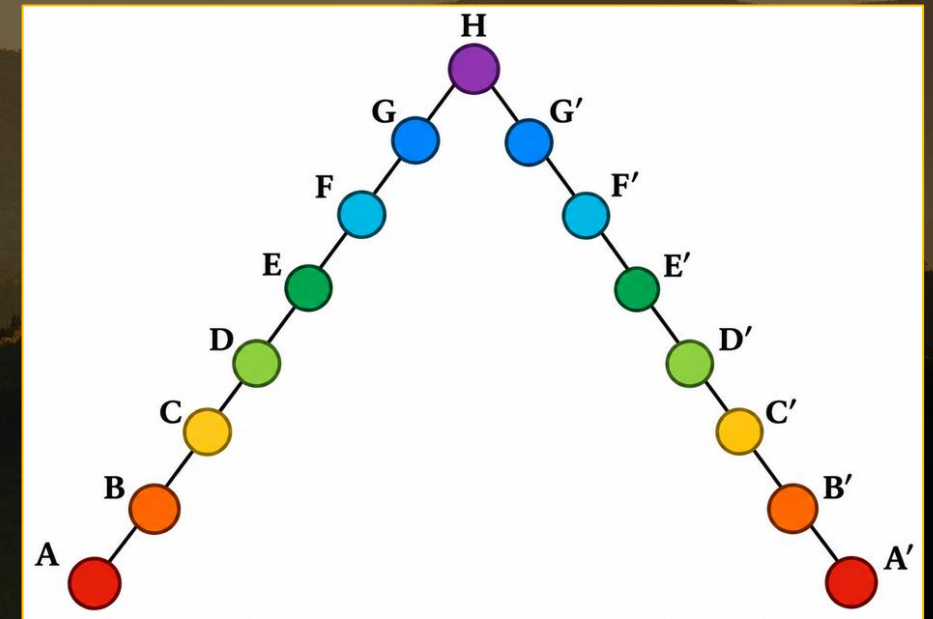
- Passover – John 2:13
- Unnamed festival – John 5:1
- Feast of Tabernacles – John 7:2-10
- Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) – John 10:22
- **Final Passover – John 12:12**



How would Jesus have felt singing the Psalms of Ascent just before the Crucifixion?

Chiasm in Psalms of Ascent?

- Many biblical scholars and commentators propose that the fifteen Psalms are arranged in an **inverted chiastic** structure:¹
 - **The Center (Peak)**: Psalm 127 ("Unless the Lord builds the house...") sits at the turning point, focusing on the foundation of the house, family, and God's sovereign provision.
 - The Sides (**Preceding and Succeeded**): Flanking the center are two matching groups of seven psalms:
 - **First 7 Psalms (120–126)**: Moving upward in themes of distress, petition, and returning joy.
 - **Last 7 Psalms (128–134)**: Mirroring the first half with themes of blessing, security, and communal worship in Zion.
- The **7-1-7** (or **2-5-1-5-2**) symmetry provides a theological map for pilgrims moving physically and spiritually toward the temple in Jerusalem.



¹<https://www.chiasmusxchange.com/2026/04/22/psalms-120-134/>

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain

Theme

*The harvest
of joy*

*Security of
those who trust*

*Divine rescue
from enemies*

*Looking up
for mercy*

*Joy of entering
Jerusalem*

*The Lord as
Guardian*

*Distress in a
hostile world*

Theme

*The harvest of
domestic blessing*

*Survival through
affliction*

*Divine redemption
from sin*

*Quiet trust
and humility*

*The establishing
of Jerusalem*

*The community as
Guarded*

*Praise in the
sacred space*

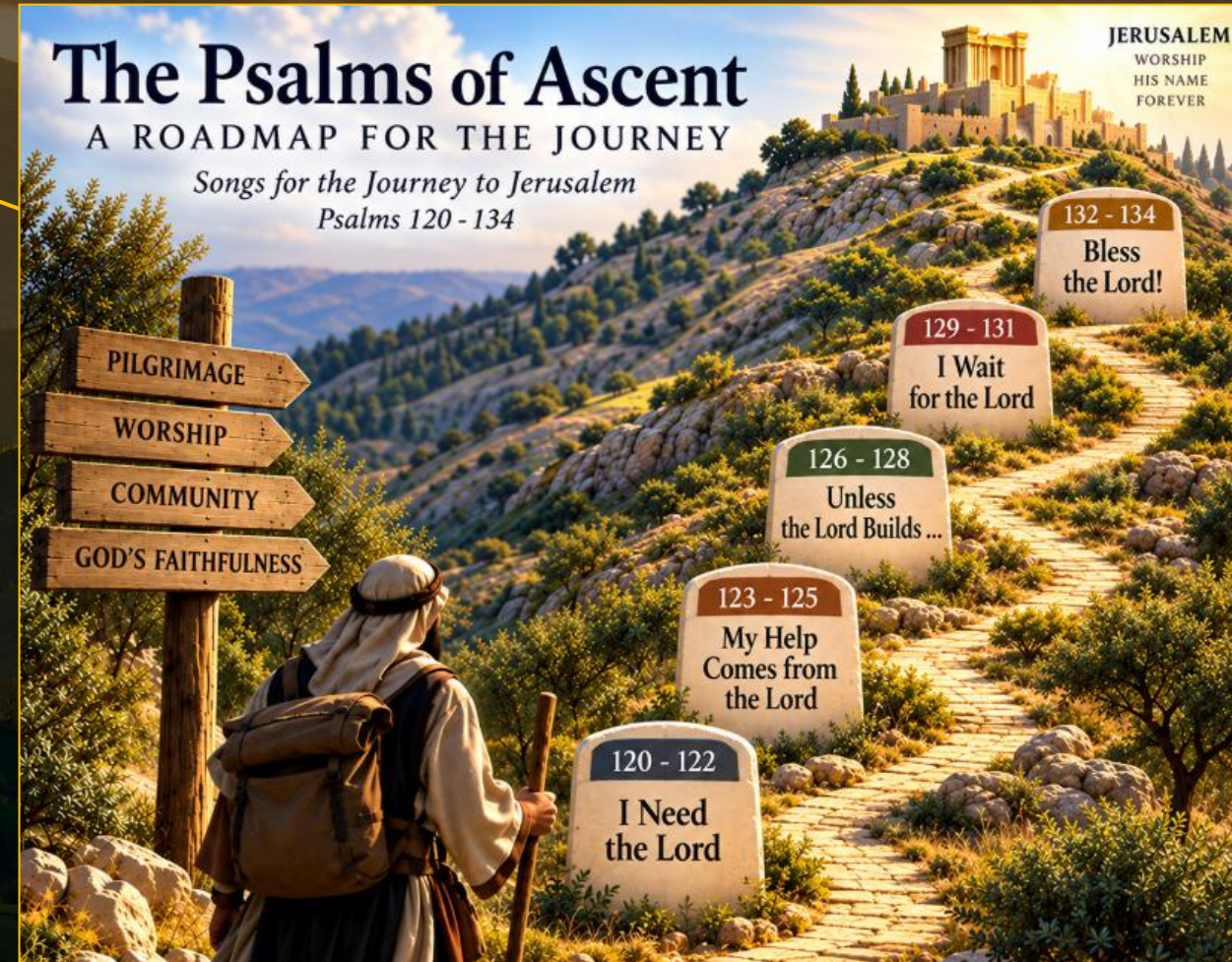


Psalms of Ascent¹

- The Psalms of Ascent can also be grouped as a **roadmap** that describes our pilgrimage of faith and helps us stay focused on the ultimate end:

- Roadmaps help us stay on track to our destination.
- For the Hebrew pilgrims **Jerusalem was the end**.
- For Christian pilgrims, the ultimate end is both becoming like Christ in our lives but also the **new heaven** and the **new earth** of God's kingdom.

¹Then I saw a **new heaven** and a **new earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more ... ⁵**"Behold, I am making all things new."** – Rev 21:1, 5



Grouping in Psalms of Ascent

Main Theme

I Need the Lord



Psalm 120
Deliver Me, O Lord

* Psalm 121
*My Help Comes from
the Lord*

+ Psalm 122
*Let Us Go to the House
of the Lord*

My help comes
from the Lord

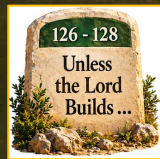


Psalm 123
*Our Eyes Look to the Lord
Our God*

Psalm 124
*Our Help Is in the Name
of the Lord*

Psalm 125
*The Lord Surrounds His
People*

Unless the Lord
builds ...



* Psalm 126
*Restore Our Fortunes,
O Lord*

Psalm 127
*Unless the Lord Builds
the House*

Psalm 128
*Blessed Is Everyone Who
Fears the Lord*

I wait for the
Lord



Psalm 129
*They Have Afflicted Me
from My Youth*

* Psalm 130
*My Soul Waits for the
Lord*

Psalm 131
*I Have Calmed and
Quieted My Soul*

Bless the Lord!



Psalm 132
*The Lord Has Chosen
Zion*

Psalm 133
*When Brothers Dwell
in Unity*

* Psalm 134
Come, Bless the Lord

* Will be reviewed today

+ To be reviewed in detail next week by Grant

Psalm 121

My Help Comes from the Lord





Psalm 121 – *My Help Comes from the Lord*

¹ *I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?*

² *My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.*

³ *He will not let your foot be moved;
he who **keeps** you will not slumber.*

⁴ *Behold, he who **keeps** Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

⁵ *The LORD is your **keeper**;
the LORD is your **shade** on your right hand.*

⁶ *The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.*

⁷ *The LORD will **keep** you from all evil;
he will **keep** your life.*

⁸ *The LORD will **keep**
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.*

- The journey maybe **dangerous** but our safety depends on Him and not on us.

- The Lord is identified as our keeper **6 times** in this psalm:

- The Lord is watching over them/us on the journey.

- He is a **watchman** who doesn't sleep or slumber.

- He doesn't keep us from going through difficult times but – He promises us that He will not give us more than we can handle (**1 Cor 10:13**)

- We shouldn't describe our Christian walk by all the **trials we face**, but by describing **the God that keeps us in the midst of them**.¹

- Very practical – God is our **shade** as we walk in this blazing sun up this mountain.

Psalm 126

Restore Our Fortunes, O Lord





Psalm 126 – *Restore Our Fortunes, O Lord*

¹ *When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.*

² *Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."*

³ *The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.*

⁴ *Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb!*

⁵ *Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!*

⁶ *He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.*

For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations – Mal 1:11

- Likely written after the **70-year Babylonian captivity** between 538 BC and 516 BC:

- Possibly written by **Ezra** along with Psalm 137.
- Might have been written after the laying of the foundation of the **second Temple** (Ez 3:8-10) or after reinstating the **Feast of Tabernacles** (Neh 8:13-14).¹

- The opening verses reflect the **overwhelming joy** of the Israelites returning home which felt like an unbelievable dream:²

- No longer in exile – they were delirious with joy.

- Said among the Nations – major focus of Scripture:

- God works for his glory.
- Similar to Psalm 23:4 *"He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake"*

¹Steven Simon, The Songs of Ascent: A Journey Through Psalms 120 – 134.

²Holman Old Testament Commentary, Psalms 1-75, p. 126



Psalm 126 – *Restore Our Fortunes, O Lord*

¹ When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with **shouts of joy**;
then they said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."

**rinnâ - a creaking
(or shrill sound)**

great things for us;

shouts of joy, O LORD,
like streams in the Negeb!

⁵ Those who sow in tears
shall reap with **shouts of joy!**

⁶ He who goes out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with **shouts of joy**,
bringing his sheaves with him.

Paul & Silas
Acts 16

• Shouts of joy – other versions say "singing":¹

- **Deepens truth**: Singing embeds Scripture into the memory and heart, acting as "take-home theology" that helps believers internalize biblical truths.
- **Unites**: Corporate singing allows believers to teach, admonish, and build up one another in faith and unity.
- **Engages the whole person**: Unlike simple speech, singing combines melody, breath, and poetry, uniting the intellect and emotions to focus completely on God.
- **Strengthens us in trials**: Biblical examples show that singing can be an act of spiritual warfare and a source of perseverance during deep suffering.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. – Colossians 3:16



Psalm 126 – *Restore Our Fortunes, O Lord*

- Four reasons to sing a little louder in church:¹

1. **Your singing delights the Lord**

God makes himself at home in our praise.



2. **Worshiping through song is the unique experience of redeemed people**

Singing is the natural response to the experience of transformation from lost to found, enslaved to free, dead to alive, hell-bound to heaven-destined. Christians are the only creatures in the universe with that experience; not even the angels can relate. ← 1 Peter 1:12 things into which angels long to look.

3. **Your singing encourages your brothers and sisters in Christ**

Our faith is bolstered when the people around us are singing the same truths, each of us coming together with our various burdens and rejoicing in Christ despite them.

4. **God commands us to sing**

Scripture contains more than 400 references to singing, including 50 direct commands, and Israel's songbook, the Psalms, is the largest and most-quoted book in the New Testament.

¹<https://www.biblicaleldership.com/2023/03/29/four-reasons-to-sing-a-little-louder-in-church>

Psalm 130

My Soul Waits for the Lord





Psalm 130 – *My Soul Waits for the Lord*

¹ Out of the depths **I cry to you, O LORD!**

² O Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.

⁵ I **wait** for the LORD, my soul **waits**,
and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul **waits** for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.

⁸ And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.



- This is what we should do when we find ourselves in a crisis – **cry out to the Lord**.
 - Might have been what Jonah felt like.¹
- One of the **seven** penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, and 143).
 - The penitent sinners hope is in God's mercy only.²
- The waiting was not **passive** or **inactive**:³
 - The psalmist used the time to actively set his **hope** upon God's promises, revealed in His **word**.
 - The watchman doesn't doubt that morning **will come**, but only wonders **when**, and watches for it diligently. So it was for the singer who watched for God and the help God promised to bring.

³https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/psalm/psalm-130.cfm?a=608001

²Robert Jamieson. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, Logos, p. 386

¹Steven Simon, *The Songs of Ascent: A Journey Through Psalms 120 – 134*.



Psalm 130 – *My Soul Waits for the Lord*

¹ *Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!*

² *O Lord, hear my voice!*

*Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!*

³ *If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?*

⁴ *But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.*

⁵ *I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;*

⁶ *my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.*

⁷ *O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.*

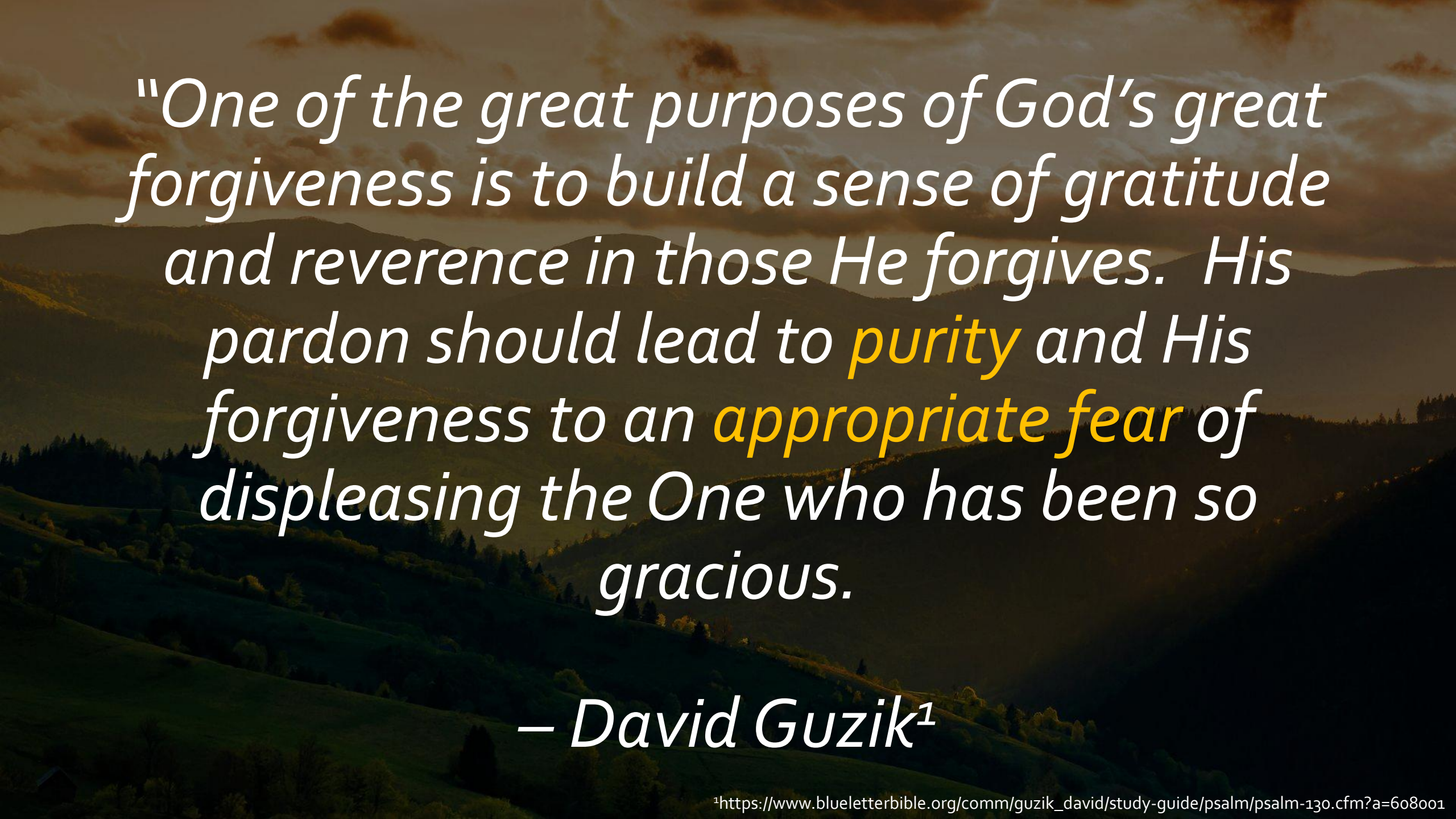
⁸ *And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.*

• Charles Spurgeon:¹

*"Cease looking for the water, and look for the well. You will more readily see the Savior than see salvation, for he is lifted up, even he who is God, and beside him there is none else. You will more easily fix your eye on Jesus than upon justification, sanctification, or any other separate blessing."*¹

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, *let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²*looking to Jesus*, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
– Hebrews 12:1-2

¹Charles H. Spurgeon, Sermon entitled "Israel's Hope", preached April 19, 1891.



*"One of the great purposes of God's great forgiveness is to build a sense of gratitude and reverence in those He forgives. His pardon should lead to **purity** and His forgiveness to an **appropriate fear** of displeasing the One who has been so gracious.*

– David Guzik¹

Psalm 134

Come, Bless the Lord





Psalm 134 – *Come, Bless the Lord*

¹ *Come, **bless the LORD**, all you servants of the LORD,
who stand by night in the house of the LORD!*

² *Lift up your hands to the holy place
and **bless the LORD**!*

³ *May the LORD bless you from Zion,
he who made heaven and earth!*

- A fitting end – pilgrims have finally reached **Mt. Zion**.
- Sums up the journey in three simple verses and the entire life of **faith** in a beautiful interchange of blessing:¹
 - Service (v1a)
 - Worship (v1b)
 - Divine Care (v3)

- Ideal end to the journey – **praising Him** for safe travel and His provision.¹

- Great summary of the Psalms of Ascent.

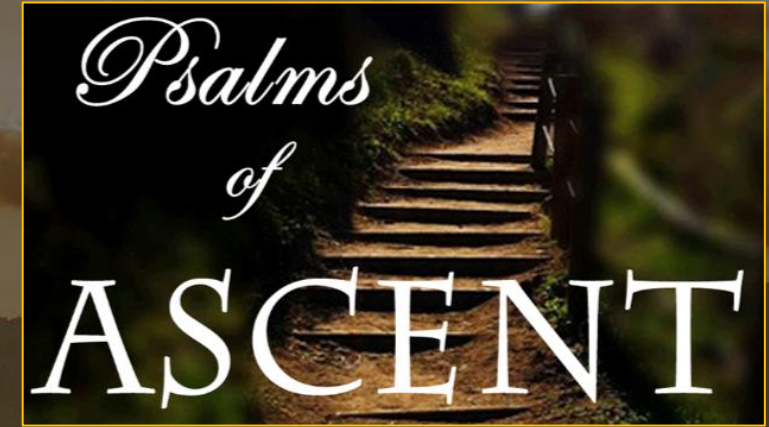
Bless the Lord By Matt Redman



¹Steven Simon, The Songs of Ascent: A Journey Through Psalms 120 – 134.

Psalms of Ascent Summary

Psalms 120 – 134

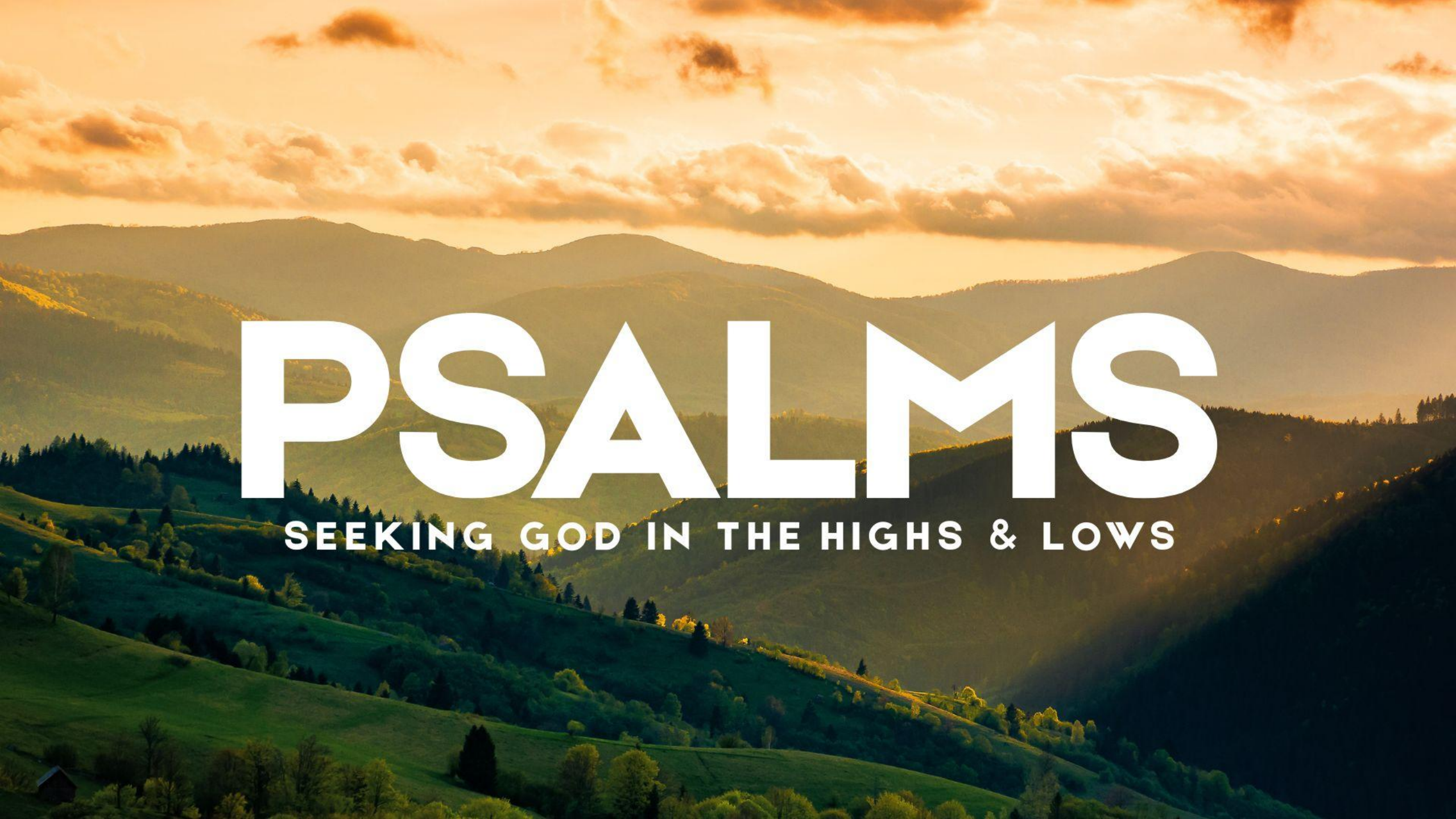


- The Christian life is not a straight, upward climb. The question is not whether we will face difficulty – but how we will **respond**.
- The Psalms of Ascent teach us how to walk with God through every season of the journey:
 - when we **NEED** Him
 - when we need **HELP**
 - when we must **TRUST** Him
 - when we must **WAIT** for Him
 - and when we finally **PRAISE** Him.
- The journey has highs. The journey has lows. **But the Lord is with us on the way.**

Psalms

Seeking God in the Highs and Lows

Week	Psalm	Teacher
October 4	Psalm 122	Grant Phipps
October 11	Psalm 91	Stew Bruner
October 18	Psalm 22	Mike Gann
October 25	Selected Psalms	George Peavy
November 1	Selected Psalms	Greg Moore
November 8	???	Stew Bruner
November 15	Psalm 139	Grant Phipps
November 22	Psalm 103	Mike Gann



PSALMS

SEEKING GOD IN THE HIGHS & LOWS