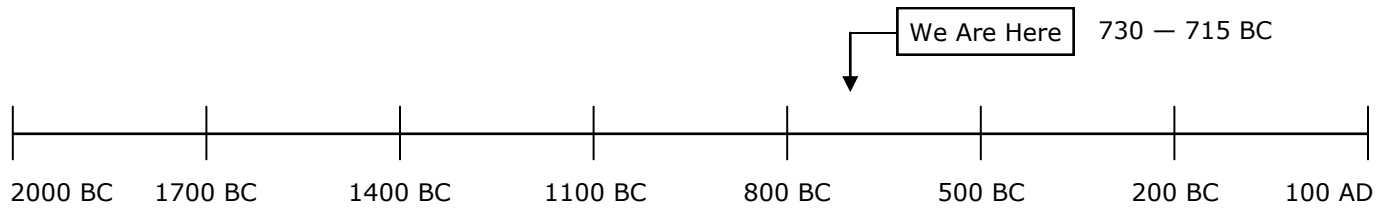


The Pilgrim Psalms

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Week 28: July 9-15 — *Various Psalms*

53.4% Complete — 169 Days to Go



Helpful Resource

Overview of Bible History (p.37)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

Once again we found ourselves reading through a selection of psalms, and once again the challenge was to find a common thread by which to weave them all together. This week, most of our reading fell in *Book V* of the *Psalms* (107-150), and while there are some outstanding individual psalms (i.e. 119), a great many of them had a tie that binds. What was it? It was the title ascribed to them, "A Song for the Ascent to Jerusalem."

The fifteen psalms (or songs), numbered from 120-134, have had various titles over the ages, such as the "Songs of Degree" and "Songs of Step." The Vulgate, which was Jerome's Latin translation (405 AD), used the term "canticum graduum" or "the gradual song." The probable origin of these names was no doubt the fact that these psalms were sung by God's people as they traveled to Jerusalem each year for the three festivals (*Deut. 16:16*) — the Feast of Unleavened Bread (or Passover), the Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost), and the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles or Tents). Jerusalem was set in the hills, and travelers on this pilgrimage ascended to the city; thus, sometimes these songs were referred to as the "Pilgrim Psalms." They were short songs, usually characterized by a key word or phrase. More than half of them were cheerful and all of them were hopeful. These joyful songs made the long trip bearable; oftentimes, large caravans of people joined together for the journey. The songs enabled these pilgrims to look forward to arriving in the holy city; they also reminded them of the greatness of God. The people anticipated worshipping the Lord in the Temple and receiving His blessings.

Note: Four of the "Pilgrim Psalms" were written by David (122, 124, 131, and 133), and one was written by Solomon (127); the authors of the rest are unknown.

- Personal Application

So, what do the "Songs of Ascent" or "Pilgrim Psalms" have to do with us today? What's the connection? It becomes very clear when we consider what Jerusalem and the Temple meant to the people of Israel. Jerusalem was the holy city, the place where God chose to dwell, and in that city resided the sacred sanctuary itself, the Temple, where the people would worship Him. In that light, then, Jerusalem is a picture of our church (and some even say it's a picture of the Church or of Heaven), and the Temple is our sanctuary, the place where we gather corporately to worship the Lord.

When we consider this picture of Jerusalem as our church and the Temple as our sanctuary, several aspects of the "Pilgrim Psalms" come into focus:

1. **The people went to church:** While it's not recommended that we attend church three times a year, like the Israelites, it is recommended that we attend regularly. Fortunately for us, we don't have to leave our homes and our jobs for days to attend church, but there are those who do not leave the home or job at all to worship. We must be faithful to assemble together (*Heb. 10:24, 25*); we need the Church and the Church needs us.
 2. **The people went to church despite obstacles:** "The Songs of Ascent" were sung while the people climbed the hills to Jerusalem. It was not an easy trek to the holy city; they traveled in caravans, uphill most of the way, amidst the rocky terrain. But it didn't matter; nothing could keep them from worshiping the Lord in the sacred Temple. Today, church attendance suffers with the slightest of obstacles; it's all a matter of convenience. Our commitment to worship should be stronger than any of the enemy's obstacles.
 3. **The people went to church to be near to God:** A bit of symbolism resides in the fact that the people ascended to the Temple. They left behind their problems, the routine of work and rose above it all to worship the Lord. One reason we need to attend church and worship the Lord is to withdraw from the rat race in which we live and allow His presence to lift our heads and encourage our hearts. The nearness of God is our good.
 4. **The people went to church expectantly:** What's obvious in the "Songs of Ascent" is that they express the excitement of the people as they get closer to the Temple. They were imagining being in God's presence, and they were purifying their hearts and clearing their minds, making ready their moment at the altar. So much of our worship experience at church is not what happens, what is sung, but rather our worship is oftentimes dependent upon what we bring into the sanctuary, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, or what we leave outside the doors. We need to be expectant when we worship the Lord.
 5. **The people went to church prepared:** Not only were the people expectant to meet with God but they were traveling with animals to sacrifice at the altar, to give an offering to the Lord. It's not that we should still be bringing animals to our sanctuary but we should be offering our lives, our desires, our passions, our occupations and free time, our money, our time, our gifts and abilities, everything we have to sacrifice. That in itself is worship. Many times we attend a church service and get nothing out of it, when the purpose for our attendance is to bless the Lord, not just to receive a blessing.
- Picture of Jesus
Cornerstone (*118:22*): Peter identified Jesus as the cornerstone (*Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7*).

The Bottom Line

We must be *intentional* to *prepare* our hearts for corporate *worship*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why should attending church be so important to a believer? Why is it important to you?
2. How expectant are you to meet with the Lord in worship? What do you need to change?
3. What obstacles has the enemy used to discourage you from attending church faithfully?
4. *Psalm 119*, about the Word, is right before the "Songs of Ascent." Is there a connection?