

## Psalm 121

1. Read **Psalm 121**
2. General observations
  - a. "A Song of Ascents"
    - i. **Psalms 120-134** (15 psalms)
      1. "A Psalter within the Psalter"
      2. Read Boice, 1067-1068, on Eugene Peterson's *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.
      3. From an Amazon review of that book:
        - a. "Peterson uses these psalms as his outline, with each of the psalms describing a characteristic of Christian discipleship: repentance, providence, worship, service, help, security, joy, work, happiness, perseverance, hope, humility, obedience, community and blessing. The psalms then become a metaphorical description of our life-long journey towards God."
    - ii. What does "A Song of Ascents" mean?
      1. We don't really know, but there are at least four possibilities
        - a. "Ascents are steps (or gradations) within the psalms."
          - i. "An idea introduced in one verse is picked up and developed in the next verse, and so on, so that there is a steplike, constantly upward moving progression of ideas."
          - ii. Problems:
            1. Noticeable in some of these psalms, but absent in others.
            2. This feature is found in other psalms that are not "songs of ascents"
        - b. "Ascents are steps leading up to the sanctuary."
          - i. Refers to the fifteen steps leading from the courtyard of the women to the courtyard of the men outside the temple in Jerusalem.
          - ii. Problem?
            1. No hard evidence for this, only a suggestion in the Talmud (a collection of Jewish rabbinic teachings)
        - c. "Ascents are the 'going up' from Babylon to Israel at the end of the exile."
          - i. See **Ezra 7:9**

- ii. Could describe a trip from the lowlands of Babylon to the highlands of Israel.
    - iii. **Psalm 126** refers to the return to Israel.
    - iv. Problem?
      - 1. The word for “ascents” is plural in each of these titles, not singular, “which seems to mean that it is referring to repeated trips to Jerusalem and not just to the return from exile.”
  - d. “Ascents are the ‘goings up’ of pilgrims at the annual feasts.”
    - i. “Songs sung by Jewish pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem for the three annual feasts - Passover, Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement...”
    - ii. “Going up” is often used for “going up to Jerusalem” - see **1 Samuel 1:3**
3. Observe, interpret, and apply (what does it say? what does it mean? so what?)
- a. Does this psalm, especially verse 7, contradict some of the other psalms we’ve studied that speak about the many afflictions of God’s people?
  - b. New Testament application
    - i. God’s providential care
      - 1. **Romans 8:35-39**
      - 2. **Hebrews 13:5-6**
      - 3. **Jude 24-25**
    - ii. What does this look like?
      - 1. **2 Corinthians 11:23-29**
      - 2. “None of these things separated [Paul] from Christ’s love, and today he is in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, and he will be forever.” Boice, 1079
4. Conclusion
- a. Read Boice, 1079-1080, “Kept from All Evil”
  - b. Read **Psalm 121** one more time

## Resources

1. *ESV Study Bible*
2. *Psalms, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Volume 5)*, Willem A. VanGemeren
3. *Psalms: An Expositional Commentary, Volume 3*, James Montgomery Boice