

Psalms 130 to 134

Many psalms are grouped together, either by a common style or theme, or as a series. Examples of psalms grouped by themes include: the Creation Psalms (8, 19, 104); the History Psalms (77, 114, 135); the Messianic Psalms, referred to as such in the New Testament (2, 16, 22, 45, 69, 72, 110); the Imprecatory Psalms (5, 6, 11, 12, 35, 37, 40 and others); and the Penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143). Examples of psalms grouped as a series include: the Shepherd Psalms (22 to 24); the Kingdom Psalms (45 to 50); the Royal Psalms (94 to 100); the Hallel Psalms (113 to 118); the Songs of Ascent (120 to 134); and the Hallelujah Psalms (146 to 150). A psalm has up to four levels of application: (a) *past*; (b) *present*; (c) *personal*; and (d) *prophetic*. Remember, we need to *meditate* on the psalms, focusing on *devotion*, rather than doctrine. This way each psalm becomes a gateway into the very presence of God...

Psalm 130 – “My soul waits for the Lord...”

This is a ‘penitential psalm’ (see list above) – one of the reasons the psalmist is in the ‘depths’ (v 1) is because of his ‘iniquities’ (v 3). However, there is a steady climb ‘out of the depths’ towards hope and assurance.

- In the depths of distress, where does the psalmist turn for help?
- What does this psalm tell us about the Lord (v 4, 7)?
- In what sense should the Lord be “feared” (v 4)?

The psalmist speaks of a promise to cling to (“his word”, v 5), and in describing the “watchmen” (v 6) he chooses as his word-picture a hope that will not fail – night may seem endless, but morning is certain.

Psalm 131 – “I have calmed and quieted my soul...”

There’s a sense in which this brief psalm anticipates the object lesson of Matthew 18 v 1 to 4, where Jesus called a child to him in answer to the question “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

- Do you think verse 1 gives us an excuse to avoid the challenges of life?
- Or does the psalmist’s attitude counter the sins of pride and presumption?
- What can we learn from the picture of the “weaned child” (v 2)?
- What is the ‘solid food’ that we need as we follow Jesus’ example? See John 4 v 34.

Psalm 132 – “The Lord has chosen Zion...”

When the ark covered the short distance from Kiriath-Jearim (“Ephrathah” and “the fields of Jaar”, v 6) to Jerusalem, it was the culmination of a journey of centuries, begun in far-off Sinai. In the first part of this psalm (v 1 to 5) we catch a unique glimpse of David’s true motives in bringing the ark to Jerusalem, and his sworn resolve to see the matter through. (For the full story, see 2 Samuel 6 and I Chronicles 13 to 16). The last part of the psalm (v 11 to 18) describes God’s resolve to stand by David’s dynasty, and his choosing of Zion for his “dwelling place” (v 5, 13). At the end of his prayer of dedication of the temple, Solomon quotes verses 8 to 10 of this psalm in 2 Chronicles 6 v 41 and 42.

- How does David express his zeal and devotion (v 1 to 5)?
- Verses 6 to 10 describe the procession to Zion, words sung when the ark was moved into the temple.
- “One of the sons” (v 11) may refer to Solomon, but who is David’s ‘greater son’? Luke 1 v 31 to 33.
- What other promises does God make to David and his descendants in v 11 to 18, and why?

Notice how this psalm, which began with talk of hardships and grim determination, ends with references to “horn”, “lamp” and “crown” (v 17, 18, and 2 Samuel 21 v 17 “the lamp of Israel”), suggesting strength, glory and royal dignity.

[MORE OVER...]

Psalm 133 – “When brothers dwell in unity...”

It is ironical that David, who probably wrote this psalm, eventually brought down upon his people the discord that would spill and spread from his own household to every corner of the kingdom (2 Samuel 12 v 10). But perhaps this psalm relates to an earlier time, when all Israel had rallied to David, and God had given him Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5 v 1 to 10).

- How does David describe brotherhood and unity?
- What blessings does this unity bring (v 3)?

Psalm 134 – “Come, bless the Lord...”

Can you sing this psalm? If you know the tune (or if you can make one up), why not sing this psalm, with your hands lifted up to the Lord, as an act of worship?

Learn it off by heart, and then ‘sing it in your heart’ throughout the day, when you travel to work, and as you go to sleep tonight...

And note the wonderful benediction of verse 3...

From Wikipedia: “Song of Ascents” is a title given to fifteen of the Psalms, 120–134 (119–133 in the Septuagint and the Vulgate), each starting with the superscription Shir Hama'aloth (שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת) *šîr ha-ma‘ălōt*, meaning "Song of the Ascents"), or, in the case of Psalm 121, Shir Lama'aloth (שִׁיר לַמַּעֲלוֹת) *šîr la-ma‘ălōt*, "a song regarding ascents"). They are also variously called Gradual Psalms, Songs of Degrees, Songs of Steps, songs for going up to worship or Pilgrim Songs.

Four of them (Psalms 122, 124, 131, and 133) are linked in their ascriptions to David, and one (127) to Solomon. Three of them (Psalms 131, 133, and 134) have only three verses. The longest is Psalm 132 (18 verses). Many scholars believe the title indicates that these psalms were sung by worshippers as they ascended the road to Jerusalem to attend the three pilgrim festivals (Deuteronomy 16:16). Others think they were sung by the Levite singers as they ascended the fifteen steps to minister at the Temple in Jerusalem. One view says the Levites first sang the Songs at the dedication of Solomon's temple during the night of the fifteenth of Tishri 959 BC. Another study suggests that they were composed for a celebration after Nehemiah's rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls in 445 BC. Others consider that they may originally have been individual poems which were later collected together and given the title linking them to pilgrimage after the Babylonian captivity.

They were well suited for being sung by their poetic form and the sentiments they express. "They are characterized by brevity, by a key-word, by epanaphora [i.e., repetition], and by their epigrammatic style.... More than half of them are cheerful, and all of them hopeful." As a collection, they contain a number of repeated formulaic phrases, as well as an emphasis on Zion.