

The Psalms of Ascent

12-15-19 PM

Beginning at Psalm 120 and ending at Psalm 134 are a series of Psalms that are called the Psalms of Ascent. They are thought to be the songs of the Israelites when they made pilgrimages to Jerusalem every year. They tend to be short and have various authors. The themes often are about looking towards Zion, Jerusalem or the Temple of God.

In Exodus 23:14-17 we read that God commanded the men of Israel to appear before Him three times every year. They were to come in the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), the Feast of Harvest (Pentecost), and the Feast of Ingathering (Tabernacles). In our calendar these feasts would be in April, June and October (2019).

In the 21st century it is difficult for us to envision the hardship that this might bring. Some Israelites had to walk great distances to come to Jerusalem (if they lived in Dan or Galilee, the distance was over 100 miles). If a family could walk 10 to 20 miles a day, this journey might easily take a week to make. It was not just making the journey that was hard; pilgrims had to bring enough to live on during that time. They also had to prepare their homes to be gone for several weeks (although God promised in Exodus 34:24 that no harm would come to their homes while they were on this pilgrimage). The Psalms of Ascent often point to the dangers of the journey, and the protection that God provided. Psalm 124 speaks of the dangers of men on the road and the elements themselves.

Many of the Psalms of Ascent pertain to the vision of the city itself. As it sat on a mountain (Mount Zion), they might see it from a distance, and the Psalms of Ascent (the ascent to Jerusalem) reflect the joy one might have in seeing first the mountain, then the city, then the temple. Once they did this journey, they could be refreshed in the worship of God and in seeing other people committed to this same hardship, and might be confident that they had God's blessing on them.

The New Testament speaks on many occasions of the pilgrimage of the Christian. Peter calls us pilgrims (NKJV) in 1 Peter 1:2, 2:13. Their Feast days shadowed church worship today. Jesus' church is the Spiritual Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-23) and Mount Zion (Galatians 4:24-26). Jesus church is the Israel of God; compare Galatians 6:16 with Psalm 128:6. In communion itself many elements of these feast days are revealed; In communion we declare Jesus is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7) and our Unleavened bread (1 Corinthians 11:23-24). In observing it in the first day of the week, the day of His resurrection, we declare Jesus to be the First Fruit (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). We gather together as the household of faith, the true spiritual temple and tabernacle (Hebrews 8:2). It is in this covenant that the true Atonement is found (Romans 5:11). Thus, the feast days of the Israelites foreshadowed the worship of the church.

Being pilgrims declares that this world is not our home! This assertion is cornerstone to faith in Christ (Hebrews 11:8-13). As those Israelites of old we sing on our journey of the God we serve, the true city of God, and the home we seek (Hebrews 13:12-15).