

## Woe . . . for I sojourn in Meshech

*Songs for The Journey*

Psalm 120\*

We know that the atmosphere in which we live erodes faith, dissipates hope, and corrupts love, but it is hard to identify just what is wrong.<sup>1</sup>

Since we are a people submerged in a culture swarming with lies and malice we can feel as if we are drowning in a morass of impurity: we are conditioned to trust nothing we hear, depend on no one we meet. Such dissatisfaction with our world is really preparation for the journey of Christian discipleship. This dissatisfaction, fused to a longing for peace and truth, can set us on a pilgrimage to wholeness in God. Repentance is the first word in the Christian's immigration to wholeness in Christ. Are you sick at heart with your current situation?

*Dealing with Distress (1-2)*

*Denouncing the Deception (3-4)*

*Dwelling in Darkness (5-7)*

## Songs of Ascent Triads

The 'Songs of Ascents' (Pss. 120-134) fall into five groups of three.

The first four of these groups (Pss. 120–131) share the following characteristics:

- the first psalm in each group exposes a situation of distress (120, 123, 126, 130);
- the second emphasizes the Lord's power to keep/deliver/build/give hope (121, 124, 127, 130); and
- the third has the theme of security: in Zion (122, 125, 128); in the Lord (131).

This Zionward 'movement' suits and supports the 'Pilgrim Praise' idea. The whole collection keeps the traveller's eye on the goal. 132–134 are all psalms of arrival—the ark in Zion, fellowship in Zion, blessing in Zion.

The pilgrim who begins far off in a harsh world (120), indeed in this world's 'darkness' (*Kedar*, 120:5, means 'black') ends in a very different *night* (134:1), secure in the Lord's house and under his blessing.<sup>2</sup>

## Songs of Ascent — Literary Forms<sup>3</sup> (Genres)

*Genre* refers to a group of texts similar in their mood, content, structure or phraseology.<sup>4</sup>

Psalm	Theme	Genre
Psalm 120	Repentance	Lament of the Individual
Psalm 121	Providence	Confidence of the Individual
Psalm 122	Worship	Canticles of Zion
Psalm 123	Service	Lament of the Community
Psalm 124	Help	Thanksgiving of the Community
Psalm 125	Security	Confidence of the Community
Psalm 126	Joy	Lament of the Community
Psalm 127	Work	Wisdom
Psalm 128	Happiness	Wisdom
Psalm 129	Perseverance	Confidence of the Community
Psalm 130	Hope	Lament of the Individual
Psalm 131	Humility	Confidence of the Individual
Psalm 132	Obedience	Royal
Psalm 133	Community	Wisdom
Psalm 134	Blessing	Liturgy

\* These notes are prayerfully provided to aid, not replace, your personal study of God's Word.

<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, IVP

<sup>2</sup> J. A. Motyer, "The Psalms," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 572.

<sup>3</sup> Leopold Sabourin, S.J. *The Psalms, Their Origin and Meaning*.

<sup>4</sup> Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 20.