

The LORD, Your Keeper

Psalms 121*

Psalm 120 sets the stage for the Israelites' journey to the Holy City; this poem is a song "for the road." It depicts a condition of distress, despair, and difficulty. Psalm 120 reveals to us that the beginning point of the Christian's journey with God begins with repentance. The 121st Psalm emphasizes God's power to deliver, keep, and give hope to the Christian traveler.

The theme of the 121st Psalm is *providence* which is defined by J.I. Packer as; "The *unceasing activity* of the Creator whereby, in overflowing bounty and goodwill, He upholds His creatures in ordered existence, guides and governs *all events*, circumstances, and free acts of angels and men, and *directs everything* to its appointed goal, for His own glory." When you are in trouble, where do you fix your gaze?

Creator before me (1-2)

Sustainer around me (3-4)

Defender beside me (5-6)

Protector forever (7-8)

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.⁴

Songs of Ascent — Literary Forms⁵ (Genres)

Genre refers to a group of texts similar in their mood, content, structure or phraseology.⁶

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

"God's providence is His *constant* care for and His *absolute* rule over *all* His creation for His own glory and the good of His people."— Jerry Bridges

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

⁴ 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.

⁵ Leopold Sabourin, S.J. *The Psalms, Their Origin and Meaning*.

⁶ Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 20.