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DWELLING WITH GOD: PSALMS 120-134
FOR INDONESIAN WORSHIP

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DWELLING WITH GOD: PSALMS 120-134
FOR INDONESIAN WORSHIP

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PREFACE

The Lord has blessed me with many sources of encouragement, wisdom, and insights throughout the completion of this ministry project. I am grateful to my husband, Aaron, and my children, Evangeline and Benjamin, for their patience and support in the past few years, without which I would not have been able to complete my degree program. Second, I would like to acknowledge my parents, David and Miriam Santoso, whose love for God and His Word inspire me. They have been my role models, counselors, and Bible teachers. Their prayers and belief in me helped me get through the difficult times.

Third, I thank God for the support of the board members and faculty of Southeast Asia Bible Seminary in Malang, Indonesia. It is a joy and an honor to serve in this community of Christ-centered servant leaders. I look forward to serving alongside them again to further the gospel in Indonesia. Fourth, I thank The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and its commitment to Biblical and theological training. My gratitude also goes to Dr. George Martin, my faculty supervisor, Dr. Joseph Crider, Dr. Greg Brewton, Dr. Esther Crookshank, Dr. Matthew Westerholm, and Dr. Matthew Haste. Their teaching, feedback, and guidance have been most valuable in various ways.

Lastly, I am thankful to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who redeemed me from my sins. I look forward to the time when He will return to dwell with His people in His glorious kingdom. I hope that this project will draw people closer to God and instill a love for the psalms in the Church. Soli Deo Gloria!

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December 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, psalms have been used in a variety of ways for Christian worship. The book of Psalms contains words and prayers that resonate so much with our Christian lives, yet at the same time, they can seem so distant or irrelevant with their metaphors, images, and historical contexts. How can a Christian understand the psalms in order to sing them with understanding? How can psalms be used in our worship more effectively? Psalms, as the inspired Word of God, point to the sovereign rule of God and the person and work of Jesus Christ. The meanings are not meant to be hidden behind the imageries and metaphors; they are meant to be discovered through a diligent study of God's Word with the guide of the Holy Spirit.

The Psalms of Ascents is a collection of fifteen psalms (Pss 120-134) that includes individual and corporate laments, thanksgiving songs, songs of confidence, wisdom songs, royal, and liturgical songs. A study of these fifteen psalms will give today's believers insights as to how they can be used in worship according to their appropriate contexts.

Context

Indonesia is home to the largest Muslim population in the world. Christianity in Indonesia, brought into the country largely through colonialism, has existed for several centuries. Approximately twenty-four million Christians are living among their predominantly Muslim neighbors. Although the people of these two religions have enjoyed long periods of relative harmony in the past, tensions between these two

religions have also resulted in various forms of persecution that continue to the present day.

The journey of Christianity in Indonesia has been marked by periods of intense suffering. Christianity has been mocked and ridiculed in public, and churches have been burned. Muslim converts to Christianity have been ostracized or persecuted for their faith. Many of these converts choose to be 'hidden' in society for fear of oppression from their families and friends. For many Indonesian believers, the Christian life is a journey that requires much perseverance, patience, strength, and hope.

On the other hand, the panorama of Christianity in Indonesia also includes big churches in the major cities that seat thousands of people at one time. Christianity still flourishes despite the hardships. Each Sunday, and sometimes Saturday, Christians gather freely for worship and fellowship all across the many islands of the archipelago. However, the Indonesian Church struggles with maintaining sound doctrines due to the congregations' past worldviews and traditional beliefs. Demon possessions and other demonic activities provide endless spiritual challenges to Indonesian pastors, especially among the indigenous churches. The Christian life in Indonesia needs to be grounded in the sound exposition of God's Word as the only authority of truth and the power of the Holy Spirit to break the spiritual bondage.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, the ecumenical movement in Indonesia started to weaken. Unity among Protestant churches in Indonesia was threatened, partly due to theological differences as more and more churches grew. This problem is made worse by a crisis in leadership in Indonesia's main ecumenical organization, Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia (Communion of Churches in Indonesia). The rise of the charismatic movement that spread through various denominations contributed to the schism between charismatic and traditional mainline churches. Numerous church denominations have been established for different races, tribes, and languages, for example, the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (Batak Christian

Protestant Church) for Batak-ethnic Christians. The Javanese tribe in East Java has its denomination, the Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan (Jawi Wetan Christian Church). Indonesian Chinese Christians are spread out in different denominations; two of the bigger denominations for Chinese Christians are Gereja Kristen Indonesia (Indonesian Christian Church) and Gereja Kristus Yesus (Church of Jesus Christ). Through the use of the Indonesian language in worship and active evangelism, these Chinese churches have been able to include non-ethnic Chinese in the congregations. Amidst the diverse racial backgrounds, different theological convictions, and social-economic differences, Christians in Indonesia need to understand the kind of unity that Jesus prays about in John 17:11.

The ministry context I am serving consists of people from different tribes, races, and languages. Southeast Asia Bible Seminary is located in the city of Malang, East Java. It was established in 1952 by Andrew Gih in response to the need for Indonesian pastors and evangelists in the region. By the grace and providence of God, the seminary has developed and graduated almost two thousand people to serve in various parts of Indonesia and beyond. This writing project will be applied in the future to the teaching ministry of the Southeast Asia Bible Seminary and the surrounding local churches.

Rationale

Paul called for Christians to address one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). Psalms not only have an important part in Christian worship, but they also have an important role in “teaching and admonishing” the congregation. However, many churches today are content with singing hymns and contemporary songs. Incorporating psalms in corporate worship does not come easily for many congregations, even though corporate worship is the natural habitat of the psalms. How can the psalms be appropriated in the New Testament context? How can we

understand the psalms properly to use them in the new covenant era? This ministry project seeks to answer this question through the study of the Psalms of Ascents.

In the Old Testament, God showed His presence among His people in various ways. He revealed Himself to Moses through the burning bush. The pillar of cloud and fire guided and protected the Israelites in their journey in the desert. God dwelled among His people in the Tabernacle and the Temple. The Ark of the Covenant was a symbol of God's presence among the nation of Israel. The *Shekinah* glory was a holy and majestic manifestation of His presence shown during the dedication of the First Temple. God dwelled in the person of Jesus among us. The Church is also the dwelling place of God (John 14:16-17). God dwells as the Holy Spirit upon each believer as part of the Body of Christ. The Church now awaits the new heaven and new earth where God will dwell eternally with those who are faithful.

A study of the Psalms of Ascents is significant in understanding the concept of God dwelling among His people. Although this collection of psalms had often been associated with the theme of spiritual journey or pilgrimage, a deeper theological message connects the fifteen psalms as a unity: peace, restoration, and renewal upon Israel because of the presence of God.

This project seeks to highlight the importance of understanding the Psalms of Ascents and how they can apply to the Indonesian worship context. By understanding the significance of these psalms and their relevance to the Church, Christians in Indonesia can discover how to use them in their public worship and personal devotion as they go through the challenges of living out their faith in a Muslim-dominated country. Through the studies of these psalms, Indonesian Christians may develop a sense of hope and unity as they realize that, despite their ethnic and cultural differences, they can stand united as a community of the new covenant. Moreover, these psalms will be an important source of encouragement, comfort, strength, and hope to the Indonesian Church with its unique social, cultural, and religious context.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to discover the biblical and theological significance of the Psalms of Ascents and to provide suggestions for their use in worship for the Indonesian Church.

Goals

Three goals needed to be achieved for the completion of this project. These goals were progressively arranged to provide a solid foundation for the application of the Psalms of Ascents. The goals were as follows:

1. The first goal was to assess how psalm texts are used in the worship contexts of select Indonesian churches to identify areas for improvement.
2. The second goal was to write a Bible study curriculum for the exposition of the Psalms of Ascents to be taught to the students/congregation.
3. The third goal was to give recommendations for how the Psalms of Ascents may be used in worship based on the result of the survey.

These goals will hopefully encourage the continued use of the Book of Psalms in corporate worship among Indonesian churches. The application of the Psalms of Ascents in worship have demonstrated the relevance as well as the significance of the Book of Psalms to the worship and spiritual life of the Church. This project required a specific research methodology, which will be discussed further in the next section.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess the use of psalms in the worship contexts of select Indonesian churches. This assessment was done through an online survey to discover whether psalms are used regularly in worship and how they are used in the worship contexts of different denominations. The survey was administered to the pastors, church leaders, worship leaders, and members of different denominations on Java. This survey provided information on how different churches in Indonesia use the psalms in their worship services and provided insights as to how the Psalms of Ascents can be applied in

the worship contexts. This goal was considered reached when at least thirty responses from the online survey were received and evaluated.

The second goal of this project was to develop teaching content that provides an exposition and theological interpretation of each of the Psalms of Ascents (Pss 120-134). The accuracy, clarity, and relevance of the teaching content were measured through an evaluation rubric by a panel of experts consisting of a pastor, a lecturer, and a theologian. This goal was considered reached when the panel of experts was able to clearly understand the exposition of the psalms and their relevance. A minimum of eighty percent of the rubric evaluation indicators met the sufficiency level.

The third goal was to give recommendations on how to incorporate these psalms into the Indonesian worship service that enhances communal and personal learning and reflection. Songs were chosen both from Western and Indonesian origins to reflect the cultural identity of the Indonesian Church, which is still influenced, to a certain extent, by Western hymnody. A worship evaluation rubric was used to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the material. This goal was considered reached when the minimum of eighty percent of the rubric evaluation indicators met the sufficiency level.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

Spiritual pilgrimage. Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo, gave a broader interpretation to the concept of a pilgrimage than his contemporaries. *Peregrinatio* and *peregrinus* – two terms that can be translated as “pilgrimage” and “pilgrim” – can be found in many of Augustine’s treatises. However, his use of these terms has no connection to geographical sites. In the framework of Augustine’s perception of Christianity, a Christian is like a foreigner, far away from his homeland, who is yearning

for the heavenly city and is on a journey to go back. This definition can also be found in Greek philosophy and in the writings of Philo of Alexandria.¹

Hermeneutic of alignment. This is a method of hermeneutic or interpretation utilized by St Augustine to align or establish continuity between the song of the Psalmist, the Psalmist, and the lives of his readers within an overarching common framework.²

Patristic exegesis. This refers to the Church Fathers' way of interpreting a biblical text. The common hermeneutical assumptions are that Scripture is revelatory, authoritative, unified, containing both multiple meanings and an overall aim, and is to be interpreted within the "rule of faith" of the Church.³ John O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, in their explanation of patristic exegesis, stated that it is best understood as a continuous effort to understand how faith in Jesus Christ brings order and coherence to the disparate data of Scripture.⁴

Two limitations were applied to this project. First, the implementation part of this project will be done in the future after I complete all the requirements for this degree and return to Indonesia. Therefore, this project only provided the evaluation of the teaching content and the worship recommendations as a potential curriculum to be applied in the seminary and church setting in my future ministry. Second, this project did not address the history and uniqueness of every congregation or believer as a context for contextualizing the psalms, although the communal and personal journey of faith remains an important aspect of reading the psalms.

¹ Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 111-13.

² Gerard McLarney, *St. Augustine's Interpretation of the Psalms of Ascent* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 7.

³ McLarney, *Augustine's Interpretation of the Psalms of Ascent*, 26.

⁴ John O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 22.

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project gathered data of worship practices in select Indonesian churches, covering some of the main denominational churches as well as the independent churches. The rationale for the choice of churches for this study was to survey the churches that would represent the main denominations in Java, where the seminary is located. The teaching content of this study will be carried out in the seminary's context in the future. Second, this survey focused only on the use of psalm texts in the Sunday worship service.

Conclusion

The study of the Psalms of Ascents revealed significant insights into issues that are relevant for the spiritual life and worship of the Church. Believers need to understand that the voice of the psalmists is also the voice of the Church. The Indonesian Church, with its unique journey as the people of God, can be guided by these psalms to the perspective of hope and trust that is centered on God.

CHAPTER 2
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE PSALMS OF ASCENTS

Interpretations of the Heading *Shir Ha-ma'lot*

Psalms 120-134 is a collection of psalms within the book of Psalms. The heading *shir ha-ma'lot*, which is attached to each of the psalms, suggests that they are regarded in some sense as a group. The psalms also have some common linguistic and stylistic devices that suggest a common source such as, step parallelism and verbatim repetition.¹ The Septuagint translates them as *ode ton anabathmon*, and in the Vulgate, is written as *canticum graduum*, both meaning “Songs of Degrees.” The word *shir* originally meant “lyric poem for singing, especially at the joyous occasion.” Eventually, the word was applied to “songs sung by the Levitical choir.”

This heading has been explained in various ways. The Mishnaic tradition relates the fifteen songs to the fifteen steps of the temple leading up to the Court of Israel from the Court of Women.² This explanation connects the number of psalms with the number of steps. The Levites used to sing psalms while standing on the steps at the Feast of Tabernacles during the ceremony of the Water-libation.³ The Greek translators (*Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachos*) later changed the translation of “Songs of Degrees” to *asma ton anabaseon* (Songs of Ascents) along with the explanation that the psalms were sung by the people from the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 7:9) going up to

¹ David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 108.

² *m. Sukkah* 5:4D, E.

³ Alfred Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1969), 99.

Jerusalem.⁴ Although Psalm 126 supports this argument, the contents of the other Psalms do not support this explanation, and Psalms 122 and 134 suggest the existence of a temple. Another interpretation of the title of these fifteen psalms is to see these psalms as a series of songs or prayers that accompany the Jewish pilgrims in their journey to the temple in Jerusalem.⁵ The heading may explain a movement of ascent towards the presence of God. Geographically, Jerusalem is located on an elevated ground. Exodus 34:24 recorded the three annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem that were prescribed by the Law in relation to the agricultural festivals. This interpretation is adopted by many scholars even though the pilgrimage theme alone is not sufficient to explain the entire collection of psalms. Although the journey theme is present in Psalm 121, there is nothing that points to the idea of a spiritual pilgrimage. The Greek versions of the Old Testament by *Aquila*, *Theodotion*, and *Symmachos* were used by Origen in his *Hexapla*. Origen was known to be influenced by Greek philosophers, especially Plato, in his reading of Scripture. One of Origen's main ideas is the concept of journey in which our souls ascend once again to God.⁶

A less popular interpretation of these psalms is based on Isaiah 38:20, where the songs are viewed as commemorative of the events during King Hezekiah's reign. Martin Luther, as cited by Rubin and Baron, translated the phrase as *ein Lied im höhern Chor* (a song in the upper choir), which assumes the placement of the Levitical choir on the steps of the Temple.⁷ In the early nineteenth century, another interpretation emerged with the idea that the fifteen songs derive their headings from the step-like progressive rhythm of thought. "Songs of Degrees," then, refers to the characteristic of their poetic

⁴ Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel*, 99.

⁵ Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel*, 100.

⁶ Iain Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 180.

⁷ Emanuel Rubin and John H. Baron, *Music in Jewish History and Culture* (Sterling Heights, MI: Harmonic Park Press, 2006), 32.

structure.⁸ The problem with this interpretation is that the step parallelism device is not found in every psalm of the collection.

Sigmund Mowinckel points out the strong connection between Psalms 120-134 and the Feast of Tabernacles. He further points out that these psalms allude to the complex ideas characteristic of the feast and suggests that the collection has been arranged with a view to this festival.⁹

Unity in the Psalms of Ascents

Most psalm scholars view these fifteen psalms as an independent collection, although some evidence suggests that the Psalms of Ascents were linked with Psalms 135 and 136.¹⁰ The features that characterized their unity are:

1. There is a clear longing for Zion (Pss 120, 121, 122, 125, 132, 133, 134)
2. The use of step parallelism (Pss 121, 127, 129, 131)
3. The frequent use of *similes* (Pss 123, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 133)
4. Focus on Jerusalem (Pss 122, 125, 130, 132, 133, 134)
5. Longing for peace (Pss 120, 122, 125, 128, 133)
6. The use of temple imageries (Pss 122, 123, 132, 134)
7. Repeated phrases: “the LORD who made heaven and earth” (Pss 121, 124, 134); “Peace be upon Israel” (Pss 125, 128); “O Israel, hope in the LORD” (Pss 130,131); “Let Israel now say” (Pss 124, 129); “the LORD bless you from Zion” (Pss 128, 133, 134)

Psalms of Ascents and the Feast of Tabernacles

The description in Psalm 122 suggests a possible connection with three appointed feasts celebrated in Jerusalem (Exod 23: 14-17): Feast of Unleavened

⁸ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 755.

⁹ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 195.

¹⁰ Thijs Booij, “Psalms 120-136: Songs for a Great Festival,” *Biblica* 91, no. 2 (2010): 241-55.

Bread/Passover (*Pesach*), Feast of Weeks/Harvest (*Shavuot*), and Feast of Booths/Tabernacles (*Sukkot*). David C. Mitchell argues that the Psalms of Ascents are associated with the Feast of *Sukkot* in particular.¹¹ Several points support this explanation:

1. The ark and references to its dedication are mentioned in Psalm 132. 2 Chronicles 5 describes the ark's entry to Solomon's Temple, which occurred at a feast that is in the seventh month. Feast of *Sukkot*, also known as Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths, takes place on the seventh month (*Tishri* 15). This festival is one of three annual festivals held in Jerusalem.
2. The imagery of harvest in the Psalms of Ascents (Pss 126, 128, 129, 132, 133) corresponds to the harvest and agriculture nature of the Feast of Sukkoth. This feast is the final harvest of the year and is celebrated for seven days, followed by the eighth day, which is the great day of the feast (Num 29:12-35).
3. Zechariah 14: 16-19 connects the repetitive use of the word 'go up' (ascend) to the Feast of Booths.
4. Psalm 134 may refer to a night service and the only night service referred to in the rabbinic *Mishnah* literature occurred during the Feast of *Sukkot*.¹² Isaiah 30:29 describes joyful processions to the Temple at night during a festival accompanied by singing.
5. The references to 'building a house,' 'work,' and 'sleep' in Psalm 127, as the eighth psalm in the collection, may correspond to the first or eighth day of the Feast of *Sukkot* when all the Israelites return from living in the temporary booths back to their homes. They are instructed not to do any work on that day and observe a day of rest. (Lev 23:36. 42-43).
6. Leviticus 23:42-43 reveals the connection between the Feast of Booths and Israel's exodus from Egypt. The name *Sukkot* came from one of the first places that the Israelites camped in after they left Egypt (Num 33:5). The theme of YHWH's deliverance is present in Psalm 124: "If the Lord had not been on our side — let Israel say — If the Lord had not been on our side when men attacked us, then they would have swallowed us alive in their burning anger against us. Then the waters would have engulfed us; the torrent would have swept over us; the raging waters would have swept over us." (Ps 124:1-5). The protection of Israel from the wilderness is also the message of Psalm 121.

¹¹ David C. Mitchell, *The Songs of Ascents: Psalms 120-134 in the Worship of Jerusalem's Temples* (Newton Mearns, Scotland: Campbell, 2015), 113.

¹² Mitchell, *The Songs of Ascents*, 31.

7. References to the temple and the temple worship in Psalms 122, 132, and 134 fit the occasion of a great festival celebrated in Jerusalem's temple. The cultic atmosphere from phrases such as "Peace be upon Israel" (Pss 125, 128) support the temple ritual setting for the psalms. The symbolism of the tabernacle serves as a reminder of God's covenantal relationship with His people and His promise of salvation.
8. The concept of the 'dwelling' of Israel and the dwelling place of God is mentioned in Psalms 120, 132, and 133. Imageries from daily living in Psalms 127 and 128 suit the atmosphere of the Feast of Tabernacles.
9. The message of freedom and redemption from tyranny in Psalms 124, 126, and 129 resonates with the content of the documents found in the study of the Feast of Tabernacles around New Testament times.¹³
10. While the Feast of Booths points to the traditions of God's protection of Israel in the wilderness, it also points forward to the expectation of a reward for the righteous in the future.¹⁴ Psalm 125 contains the message of this expectation.
11. There seems to be a progression from 'dwelling' outside of Jerusalem (Psalm 120) to the arrival in Jerusalem (Psalm 122) and ultimately to the house of the LORD (P 134).
12. Processions to the sanctuary are known to be accompanied by music and singing (2 Sam 6:1-5; Neh 12:31-43; 1 Chr 13:5-8; Ps 68)¹⁵

These are the connections between the Psalms of Ascents with the celebration and rituals of the Feast of Tabernacles. The Mishnah explicitly linked the Psalms of Ascents and the Feast of Sukkot.¹⁶ It tells how at the feast,

Countless Levites [played] on harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets, and musical instruments on the fifteen steps which descend from the Court of Israel to the Court of Women, and which correspond to the fifteen Songs of Ascents in the Psalms. On these steps the Levites stood with musical instruments and played melodies. (*m. Suk. 5.4C, D, E, F*)

The Mishnah specifically mentions that the festivities took place at the close of the first day of the festival.¹⁷ This account reveals that the psalms were more likely to be sung in the temple in the city during the festival than on the road to Jerusalem. The

¹³ Håkan Ulfsgard, *Feast and Future: Revelation 7:9-17 and the Feast of Tabernacles* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1989), 146.

¹⁴ Ulfsgard, *Feast and Future*, 146.

¹⁵ Booij, "Psalms 120-136," 246.

¹⁶ *m. Sukkah 5:4.*

¹⁷ *m. Sukkah 5:2.*

rabbinic description includes the lighting of large oil lamps set on tall golden stands, the cultic dance performed by men as they sang, and the Levites who played instruments and sang. The reference to the Songs of Ascents came right before the description of the Levites singing their song. It is most likely that the songs sung by the Levites were the Songs of Ascents. The content of the fifteen psalms shows a stronger connection with the meaning and significance of the feast itself rather than with the ‘pilgrimage’ to the Temple. Furthermore, there is no source that provides evidence of the psalms being sung in other contexts. God dwelling with His people and the restoration, peace, and blessings resulting from that is a major theme that brings unity to the psalms.

Feast of Tabernacles in Zechariah 14

Zechariah makes the connection between the Feast of Tabernacles and the coming Day of the Lord. Rabbi David Kimhi, a medieval Jewish philosopher and grammarian, stated that the title of the psalms might refer to the ingathering of the exiles in the time to come.¹⁸

Zechariah 14:16-19 states: “Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. And if the family of Egypt does not go up and present themselves, then on them there shall be no rain; there shall be the plague with which the LORD afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths. This shall be the punishment to Egypt and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths.” Seen in the text of Zachariah is a prophetic element to the Feast of Tabernacles, in which a great “ingathering” of people will come to the Holy City in the future to celebrate Tabernacles.

¹⁸ Joshua Baker and Ernest W. Nicholson, eds. and trans., *The Commentary of Rabbi David Kimhi on Psalms CXX-CL*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 22 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 3.

According to Jewish tradition, the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night had first appeared to Israel on the 15th of Tishri, the first day of the feast. It was said that on that day, Moses also came down from the Mount and announced to the people that the Tabernacle of God was to be reared among them.¹⁹ If indeed the Psalms of Ascents are sung in the context of the Feast of *Sukkot*, then the narrative sequence of the fifteen psalms may be interpreted for today's Christians as a period of waiting and anticipating the eschatological Feast of *Sukkot*. Mitchell further pointed out that because several psalms in the collection celebrate the deliverance from foreign enemy attacks, it is also possible to read the Psalms of Ascents as representing Israel gathering for a festive thanksgiving at the Feast of Sukkoth after being delivered from its enemies.²⁰

Numbers 29:12-40 describe the elaborate sacrificial rituals for each day of the festival. Large numbers of bulls, rams, male lambs, male goats, and other offerings were presented. The elaborate rituals of sacrifice suggest the importance and the greatness of the Feast of *Sukkot*. The Feast followed five days after the Day of Atonement, in which the sin of Israel had been removed, and there is a restoration of the covenantal relationship between Israel and YHWH.

The festival is also known as the Feast of Booths due to the practice of building and living in little 'booths' to remember the temporary dwellings of Israel's ancestors in the wilderness. After living in the booths for seven days, the people leave their booths on the eighth day and return to their homes while remembering how the promises to their ancestors were fulfilled.²¹

¹⁹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ* (London: James Clarke, 1959), 286.

²⁰ Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter*, 166.

²¹ Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 237.

The harvest activities surrounding the Feast of Tabernacles remind us of the harvest motifs used to mark the end of the ages. The fulfillment of the promises would also bring justice to the world. As a church, we too anticipate the fulfillment of the promises of God in the second coming of Christ. It is therefore appropriate for the church to look forward to the fulfillment of the promise pictured in the Feast of Tabernacles.

Psalms of Ascents and the First Temple

For what circumstance were the Psalms of Ascents composed? It is difficult to provide a certain explanation of how these psalms were first used by the Israelites. However, some points may suggest a connection between Psalms of Ascents and Solomon's Temple. According to the account in 1 Kings 8:1-2, the dedication of Solomon's Temple occurred in the seventh month of 959 BCE, the month of *Ethanim*. The feast of *Sukkot* occurred during the seventh month. This is also recorded in 2 Chronicles 5:3. The name of the month is later known as *Tishri* in the Babylonian system.²² Here are the points that support this explanation:

1. 1 Kings 8:65-66 records that the festival was observed for seven days and another seven days. On the fifteenth day, Solomon sent the people away. 2 Chronicles 7: 9 also indicated that the dedication of the temple and the festival were celebrated each for seven days.
2. Psalm 132:8-10 records a section of Solomon's prayer for the temple in 2 Chronicles 6:41-42 "Arise, O LORD, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your saints shout for joy. For the sake of your servant David, do not turn away the face of your anointed one."
3. Psalms 120, 122, 125, 128, and 133 contain the theme of peace in Israel. During the reign of King Solomon, Israel experienced peace throughout. All the twelve tribes of Israel were united. "Behold, a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of rest. I will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies. For his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever." (1 Chr 22:9-10). Even Solomon's name means 'peace.' After the death of Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms and was never again reunited.

²² Håkan Ulfgard, *The Story of Sukkot: The Setting, Shaping, and Sequel of the Biblical Feast of Tabernacles* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 99.

4. Psalm 132 describes how the ark was found and brought to its resting place. “Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength.” (Ps 132: 8). The ark of the covenant played an important role in the time of the Psalms of Ascents. During the dedication of Solomon’s temple, the ark was brought into the most holy place of the temple (1 Kgs 8:3-6). Psalm 132:14 declared, “This is my resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.” This dwelling place could not have been the tent that the ark was kept in before the building of the temple because that was temporary. The permanent dwelling place for the ark was the temple. The dedication of the temple was the only important public event
5. Psalm 128:5 and Psalm 134:3 echo the Aaronic blessing: “The LORD bless you and keep you, The LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance on you, and give you peace.” (Num 6:24-26). Aaron is also mentioned in Psalm 133:2. Only the sons of Aaron are allowed to give the Aaronic blessing, and during the reign of Solomon, the sons of Aaron are charged with the service of the house of the LORD (1 Chr 23:28).
6. Psalm 120 expresses the cry of the people of God in faraway lands suffering under oppression from other peoples. Solomon expressed the same petition in his prayer during the temple dedication (1 Kgs 8: 46-53, 2 Chr 36-39).
7. 2 Chronicles 6:6 records Solomon’s speech during the dedication in which he said that YHWH has chosen Jerusalem. In 2 Chronicles 6:16, it says that David shall not lack a man to sit in the throne of Israel if only his sons walked in His ways. These words are echoed in Psalm 132:11-13.

Psalms of Ascents and the Second Temple

After the Jews returned from exile, they anticipated a glorious new beginning. Psalm 126 have been interpreted as referring to the return and restoration from exile but it could also refer to a more general type of restoration. Even though the Israelites were back in their land to rebuild the Temple and restore the old temple worship, it is clear that they could not go back and recapture the glory. In the Second Temple built by Herod, the ark of the covenant no longer existed. The Holy of Holies was empty. The ark of the covenant, with the cherubim, the tables of the law, the book of the covenant, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the pot of manna, were no longer in the sanctuary. The heavenly fire that had descended from heaven upon the altar was extinct. God moved out of the holy of holies at the start of the Babylonian exile (Ezek 10:18; 11:22–23). Scripture did not

record God returning to dwell in the second temple that was rebuilt after the Israelites' return from Babylon.²³

The way for the Israelites had to be forward. God was preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah when the new covenant will replace the old one. The new covenant will bring restoration and establish the reign of Messiah in the Kingdom. Matthew 1:23 proclaims: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us)." The presence of God returned with the coming of Christ, not to dwell in a handmade temple but in one made not by hands. God's presence in the heavenly temple extended to earth, no longer into the old holy of holies but in Christ (John 1:51).²⁴

Jesus Tabernacled among Us

In the Gospels, John 1:14 connects the Temple with Jesus: "And the Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus spoke in John 2:19-22: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Jesus could be speaking about his own body being resurrected from the dead here, but he could also be referring to a new cosmic reality of the eschatological temple. Here, not only does Jesus begin to take over the role of the Jerusalem Temple, but he also predicted its imminent destruction: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands'" (Mark 14:58).

Jesus' presence brought the presence of God to earth and ushered in the New Covenant. The special revelatory presence of God, formerly contained in the holy of holies of the tabernacle and temple, has now burst forth into the world in the form of the

²³ Ezek 43:1-5 describes the return of God's glory in Ezekiel's vision of the rebuilt temple, which points to future realities of restoration and renewal.

²⁴ G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 388.

incarnate God, Jesus Christ.²⁵ Luke 23:45 records: “And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.” John 1:9 proclaims: “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” Jesus affirmed his connection to the temple as the source of living water, especially during the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:37-38). The water libation ceremony is a prominent ritual of the festival.

Temple Themes in the Sermon on the Mount

Reading the Sermon on the Mount as a text that was significantly linked to the temple vocabulary, authority, and ritual reveals many things about the unity and meaning of this text.²⁶ The words of Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 5-7, would have been heard by people living at a time when the Temple served as the main Jewish religious institution. The idea of the Temple has dominated the religious landscape of the Jews for centuries.

Because the Temple was the most powerful, authoritative religious institution in Judaism at the time of Jesus, it is incumbent on modern readers to consider the possibility that the Sermon on the Mount struck its original listeners and readers as authoritative precisely because it drew heavily on words, phrases, quotations, imagery, and rituals related to the Temple.²⁷

The arrival of Jesus ushers in a new temple system through a new covenant: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Heb 8:10). The establishment of the new covenant has made the first covenant obsolete (Heb 8:13). In the new covenant, God is spiritually transforming the hearts of His people. This covenantal transformation of the heart is what the Sermon on the Mount strives to achieve.

²⁵ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 195.

²⁶ John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 209.

²⁷ Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 42.

In John Welch's study of the temple related language throughout the Sermon on the Mount, the connection between this text and Psalm texts can be observed:

In addition, a significant number of phrases in the Sermon on the Mount quote from or allude to passages in the Old Testament, and many of them, especially those that come from the Psalms, evoke strong memories of the Temple in Jerusalem. Undoubtedly, Jesus' listeners would have recognized the Old Testament sources behind these words and phrases much more readily than modern readers do. In response to hearing these temple-related words and phrases, listeners would easily have thought to themselves, "I am listening to a holy man of God. He is speaking about holy things. He is drawing heavily on temple imagery. He is making the Temple come to life in an invigorating new way"²⁸

Several phrases in the Sermon on the Mount echo phrases from the Psalms pertaining to the Temple. Psalms were composed in the Temple and became an important part of the cultic life of the Temple.²⁹

In conclusion, the light of the Temple opens new perspectives on the Sermon on the Mount, its vocabulary, unity, potency, functionality, morality, and spirituality. An awareness of its mountain setting, its extensive use of the Psalms, and its embodiment of numerous temple themes provides leverage in appreciating the Sermon on the Mount's foundational voice.³⁰

Benedict H. Green supported the strong connection between Psalms and the Sermon on the Mount, specifically the Beatitudes: "The distribution of the Old Testament parallels is interesting, and probably significant. Twice as many of them come from the prophets, as from the Pentateuch, and twice as many again from the Psalter."³¹

In Matthew 7:28, Jesus asserts Himself as the authority of the teachings. He also calls for the people to hear and obey his words (Matt 7:24-27). He is preparing them to be a people of the new covenant.

²⁸ Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 43.

²⁹ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 1:2.

³⁰ Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 221.

³¹ Benedict H. Green, *Matthew, Poet of the Beatitudes* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 264.

The Theme of the Kingdom of Heaven in Psalms of Ascents and the Sermon on the Mount

The theme of the kingdom of heaven arises several times in the Sermon on the Mount. The righteousness of the kingdom is different than those of the scribes and Pharisees. The righteousness comes from the heart as God will write the law on their hearts (Jer 31: 33). In Matthew 5: 3, 10, Jesus mentions that the kingdom of heaven is to be given to those who are poor in spirit and have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Matthew 5:19 states that those who annuls even the least of the commandments and teach other people to do the same will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever keeps and teaches the commandments will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom is again mentioned in the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:10). The theme of the kingdom is reinforced with the admonition to seek first the kingdom of God (Matt 6:33). At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, those who do the will of the Father are told that they will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 7:21). In Psalm 122, the city of Jerusalem represented the dwelling place of YHWH and His authority over the tribes of Israel as a united, theocratic nation. YHWH is also recognized as a judge of the nation. In the Old Testament, Jerusalem takes the role of the 'city of God' where YHWH dwells, rules, and executes justice.

Matthew 7:24-27 tells of the parable of the two foundations, ending the Sermon on the Mount. The man who hears and does what Jesus has taught is compared to one who has built his house upon the rock which the floods cannot sweep away. While this can be understood in the context of warning against false prophets, the image of the "rock" may refer to God or the temple.³² To build one's house upon the rock would mean to base it on the LORD and His temple (Ps 28:1, Isa 30:29). The Rock that followed the Israelites throughout their wanderings is identified by Paul as Christ (Exod 17:1-7, Num 20:2-13, 1 Cor 10:1-4).

³² Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 180.

As Psalm 132 celebrates God's chosen dwelling place in Zion, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount talks about building a house on the rock through hearing and doing His words. This parallels the oath that the LORD made to David in Psalm 132:12, where He promised to preserve the throne of David if his sons keep His covenant and His decrees. Jesus now becomes the new foundation upon which the New Covenant and the new kingdom are established.

More Thematic Parallels in Psalms of Ascents and the Beatitudes

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 5:3). The poverty of spirit has two meanings: the humility that identifies with the sinner and a rejection of wealth and the security that goes with it.³³ Green analyzed the root meaning of ‘poor in spirit’ and ‘meek’ in verse 5 and argued the phrase means to be ‘humble.’ He identified verses 3 and 5 as a pair. Humility towards people can be seen as gentle, non-assertive, and non-violent. Humility before God means recognizing one’s empty and fallen state. Both ‘poor in spirit’ and ‘meek’ require an awareness of the need for forgiveness and a readiness to seek it. This humility can be found in Psalm 131:1: “O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me”. In Hellenistic Jewish thought, “meekness” takes the meaning of being a servant and being in a position of waiting patiently.³⁴ This attitude of waiting patiently like a servant is found in Psalm 123:2: “Behold, as the eyes of servants, look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he has mercy upon us.” Similarly, the attitude of waiting is in Psalm 130:5-6: “I wait

³³ Green, *Matthew, Poet of the Beatitudes*, 290.

³⁴ Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 52.

for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His Word, I hope; my soul waits for the LORD more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.”

In Matthew 5:4, Jesus taught, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” The context for this mourning is likely connected to the concept of repentance of sins.³⁵ Temple rituals that emphasized mourning and confession are observed on the Day of Atonement. There is a promise of comfort for those who mourn. The rituals of mourning for sinners also brought the joy of being forgiven. “Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.” (Ps 126:5-6) Mourners are those who humble themselves and express their penitence: “If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared” (Ps 130:3–4) and “O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption.” (Ps 130:7).

In Matthew 5:6 Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Satisfying the hunger for righteousness is pronounced in Psalm 132:15-16: “I will abundantly bless her provisions; I will satisfy her poor with bread. Her priests I will clothe with salvation, and her saints will shout for joy.”

Matthew 5:7: “Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.” The Temple is a place where people come to seek and receive mercy. Mercy is what the psalmist asks for in Psalm 123:3: “Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt.” To be merciful, one must first be dependent on God’s mercy. It is those who continue to see themselves as sinners who do not judge others. Those who seek forgiveness of sins will not withhold it from others.

³⁵ Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 51.

Matthew 5:9 calls for peacemakers: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.” To bring peace is to bring reconciliation. Jesus came to bring reconciliation and peace between God and man. He has become the peacemaker through His sacrifice on the cross, and His disciples are called to share the message of peace to the rest of the world. To be a peacemaker means to imitate Christ. The biblical concept of peace or *shalom* contains a deep and broad range of meanings. There is a strong connection between the biblical *shalom* and the Temple. It was built during a time in Israelite history where YHWH had given peace to their enemies. It was built by a king whose name in Hebrew means ‘peace.’ There is a desire for peace in Psalm 120 and prayer for peace in Psalms 122, 125, and 128.

Matthew 5:8 states, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The connection between this verse and the Temple is unmistakable. Psalm 24:3-4 sets the requirement for entering the Temple to be clean hands and a pure heart. “To you, I lift up my eyes, O You who are enthroned in the heavens!” (Ps 123:1). The psalmist also compares his soul to a weaned child in Psalm 131. The blessing that is quoted in Psalm 134:3 from Numbers 6:24-26 is connected to beholding God: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.”

In Matthew 5:10-12, Jesus says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” In Psalm 120, the people of God suffer from deceitful people, while Psalm 125 calls for God’s people to be righteous. Psalm 129 talks about how God’s people have endured suffering, and the righteous God cuts the cords of the wicked. The psalm gives assurance of the sustaining presence of God upon His people.

Covenant Theme

The temple in Jerusalem, as the home of the ark of the covenant, was the place where the covenant between YHWH and His people was renewed and perpetuated. The establishment of this covenantal relationship began first in Mount Sinai, then to the tabernacle, and finally to the Temple. Psalm 132:12 reminds God's people of the foundations and promise of the covenant: 'If your sons will keep My covenant and My testimony which I will teach them, their sons also shall sit upon your throne forever.' Jesus' teachings and commandments in the Sermon on the Mount formed the basis of the new covenant. A new relationship between YHWH and His people is re-created by Jesus' set of new commandments.³⁶ In the Old Testament, Moses and the priests served as mediators between YHWH and Israel. In the New Testament, Jesus becomes our mediator to YHWH. From Mount Sinai to Mount Zion, and finally, to the mount where Jesus taught his sermon, the covenant is established, renewed, and recreated.

Blessings Theme

Psalms 127, 128, 129, 132, 133, and 134 contain the theme of blessings. These blessings are given from Zion to those who trust and fear YHWH. The blessing in Psalm 134 also connects to the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:26. Temple liturgy during the reign of King Solomon would likely have included this priestly blessing. Blessings in the Psalms of Ascents fall in the areas of family, children, fertility, the fruit of labor, prosperity, long life, and general blessings. In the Sermon on the Mount, a series of blessings were also promised, especially in the Beatitudes. Jesus began the Sermon with these blessings in Matthew 5:3-11. The blessing in Matthew 5:3,10 is the kingdom of heaven; in verse 4 is comfort; in verse 5 is to inherit the earth; in verse 6 is the blessing of being satisfied with righteousness; in verse 7 is mercy; in verse 8 is to see God; in verse 9 is to be called sons of God; in verse 11 is the reward in heaven for enduring persecution.

³⁶ Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 67.

The blessings in the Sermon on the Mount are understood and heard in the Jewish temple context due to the many references to temple language, imageries, and rituals.³⁷

Peace Theme

The peace language found in Psalms of Ascents (Pss 120, 122, 125, 128) expresses the longing, desire, and vision of peace/ shalom for the kingdom of God. The Sermon on the Mount expounded this concept and emphasized the paradoxical understanding to show us that shalom or human flourishing can be experienced even amid the sin and brokenness of the world.

Jonathan Pennington makes the connection between Sermon on the Mount and shalom:

I have argued that the combined themes of *Makarios*-ness, *teleios*-ity, wholeness, singularity, righteousness, and others together create a vision for a way of being in the world that promises true human flourishing, now partially and eschatologically fully, through believing in and aligning oneself with Jesus Christ, God's authoritative Son. Jesus is the embodiment—even incarnation—of the ideal Philosopher-King, inviting people into flourishing in God's coming kingdom.³⁸

Although the ultimate fulfillment of human flourishing is eschatological, the only way that human flourishing can be experienced in this present world is in a paradoxical way, combining longing, suffering, and persecution with joy, happiness, and peace.³⁹

The Church as the Temple

As a result of Christ's resurrection, the end-time temple is being built first through Christ, then the Church, thus extending the temple into the new creation in the new age. This building process will culminate in the new heavens and new earth as a

³⁷ Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 64.

³⁸ Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 234.

³⁹ Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 238.

paradisaal city temple.⁴⁰ Jesus' earthly ministry replaces the role of the temple, and after his resurrection and ascension, God's presence descended in the form of the Holy Spirit, making everyone who believes in Christ to be God's dwelling place (1 Cor 3:16-17). God still has not dwelled with the Church in the same way as described in the book of Revelation. God the Father and the Son still dwell in heaven. The Church is the 'already but not yet' establishment towards the future new heaven and earth in Revelation. Each believer is part of the Church as the dwelling place of God. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount expounds on the 'ideal' life of the New Testament Church as people of the new covenant and, most importantly, as a place where God the Holy Spirit dwells.

The Church is a community of the New Covenant that worships Him in the Spirit and truth. John 4:21-24 described the transition from temple worship:

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

True worship no longer is required to at the Jerusalem temple or any other geographical place. The Church has become the temple of God. The mission of the Church now is to extend the boundaries of the new garden temple until Christ returns, when, finally, they will be expanded worldwide.⁴¹

The Future Feast of the Tabernacles

"And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zech 14:16). In the fourteenth chapter of

⁴⁰ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 393.

⁴¹ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 395.

Zechariah, there is a recognition of YHWH's rule over the nations and universal worship of God among the nations.

Sukkot was always known as the holy day that commemorates God dwelling with his people, how fitting for the Kingdom of God, when it fully comes to the redeemed earth, to be considered the ultimate fulfillment of this holy day.⁴² The term tabernacles (Hebrew, *sukkot*) involves God's promise to return to Earth and "tabernacle," or dwell, with His people in a way never experienced in history (Ezek 37:26-27; Isa 24:23). "Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain" (Zech 8:3); "...and I will bring them to dwell amid Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and righteousness" (Zec 8:8).

"And it shall be inhabited, for there shall never again be a decree of utter destruction. Jerusalem shall dwell in security" (Zech 14:11). Many other Old Testament passages describe a future time when God will dwell with His people, and they will finally enjoy safe territorial boundaries and will be a blessing and witness to the Gentile nations (Gen 12:2-3; 15:18; Isa 2:2-4; 60:3; Jer 32:37-41; 33:16; Ezek 37:25-28).

"At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart" (Jer 3:17). This future 'kingdom' of God is described similarly in Revelation 21:1-8. God will sit on his throne and dwell amid His people forever.

"For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come" (Heb 13:14). "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the LORD God the Almighty

⁴² Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Times: A Practical Guide for Understanding and Celebrating the Biblical Holidays*, 2nd ed. (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish, 2007), 100.

and the Lamb” (Rev 21:22). The presence of God and the Lamb is the future temple. The river of the water of life will flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev 22:1).

Expositions of the Psalms of Ascents

Psalm 120

1. In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me.
2. Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue
3. What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue?
4. A warrior’s sharp arrows, with glowing coals of the broom tree!
5. Woe to me, that I have sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!
6. Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace.
7. I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war! (ESV)

The psalmist begins with a lament. He called out to YHWH in his distress, and YHWH answered him. The first verse of this psalm tells the readers multiple things: the psalmist’s helplessness, his realization of his need for help, his relationship with the Lord, his hope in the Lord to come to his aid, his trust in the wisdom and power of the Lord, and his experience of receiving the Lord’s answer. He finds confidence in his answered prayer.

Verses two and three describe the distressing situation the psalmist is in. He is a victim of lies or slander. He is suffering because of the falsehood made against him. In verse three, the psalmist assures the source of the deceitful tongue of divine retribution. God will repay those with deceitful tongues with the punishment that he deserves. Verse four gives the answer to the question in verse three. The sharp arrows and the glowing coals of broom figuratively express divine punishments.⁴³ The broom is a type of plant

⁴³ Cuthbert C. Keet, *A Study of the Psalms of Ascents: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary upon Psalms CXX to CXXXIV* (London: Mitre Press, 1969), 21.

whose bitter root gives a charcoal that glow and retains heat for a long period of time.⁴⁴ The sharpness of the warrior's arrow and the lasting heat of the broom tree reflect the severity of the divine punishment and retribution. In Revelation 20:10, God will cast punishment to the devil for deceiving the nations by throwing him into the lake of burning sulfur.

Meshech and *Kedar* are geographically distant from each other. The word *Meshech* is used to denote the people who are living between the Black and the Caspian seas.⁴⁵ There is another Semitic tribe called *Meshekh*, who are Arameans who live on the border of both Israel and *Kedar*.⁴⁶ The latter may be the one being referred to. *Kedar* is a word used to denote a nomadic Arab tribe who was known for living in tents.⁴⁷ They live in the northwest Arabian desert and are known to be archers (Isa 21:17). The Israelites lived among people of other nations who do not worship YHWH and may be hostile towards them.

In verse six, there is a tension of the psalmist living too long among those who hate peace. This tension arises from dwelling in a place where there is no peace, and there is no presence of God. The psalmist is reminded of this tension with the world around him and anticipates the peace that can only be found in YHWH. This reality stands in contrast with the ritual of 'dwelling in booths' in the Feast of Tabernacles, where the Jewish community remembers YHWH's presence, faithfulness, and provision.

Verse seven expresses the dilemma that often describes man's struggle with sin. Even when the psalmist desires peace, his spoken words do not reflect peace. The words 'that are for war' probably be filled with anger, self-defense, desire for revenge,

⁴⁴ Keet, *Psalms of Ascents*, 22.

⁴⁵ Keet, *Psalms of Ascents*, 23.

⁴⁶ Mitchell, *The Songs of Ascents*, 162.

⁴⁷ Keet, *Psalms of Ascents*, 23.

accusations, and perhaps even cursing. The psalmist cries out to YHWH for justice in his anger. He does not seek revenge or retribution with his own hands.

Psalm 120 portrays the hostility of the psalmist's world. This hostility is very much a part of the believer's world today. This is a psalm that believers in any century can identify with. The longing for peace echoes throughout every generation. The peace that the psalmist is longing for is not just to be free from conflict but a holistic concept of *shalom* that only YHWH can give. The Biblical concept of peace or *shalom* contains a deep and broad range of meanings, including health, wholeness, and completeness.

Jesus came to bring reconciliation and peace between God and man. He has become the peacemaker through His sacrifice on the cross, and His disciples are called to share the message of peace to the rest of the world. Matthew 5:9 calls for us to be peacemakers: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God." To be a peacemaker means to imitate Christ. To be a peacemaker means bringing reconciliation even when faced with persecution. Matthew 5:11-12 says, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Jesus goes on in Matthew 5:44-45, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven..." Like the psalmist, we may see no lasting resolution to terror and conflict in this world, but we know that when Christ comes, He will be the source of peace.

Psalm 121

1. I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?
2. My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.
3. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
4. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

5. The LORD is your keeper, the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
6. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
7. The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
8. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore. (ESV)

For the Israelites, traveling by foot or on the back of an animal is anything but easy. On the journey to Jerusalem, the Israelites go through uneven terrain, sweltering deserts, and mountains. There is danger from the Middle East climate with soaring high temperatures during the day and low temperatures at night. There is danger from robbers who might hide in the hills and attack unsuspecting travelers. There might even be danger from wild animals. Psalm 121 moves the feeling of distress in Psalm 120 to the feeling of confidence and optimism. This confidence and optimism come from faith and trust in YHWH, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Did the psalmist look up to the mountains in fear or in hope? Mountains were believed to be dwelling places for the gods, so the psalmist could be looking toward the mountains in the hope of YHWH. The mountains may also hide dangers or present difficult obstacles for the psalmist. Travelers need divine protection, and just as modern travelers pray for safety and buy travel insurance before starting on a journey, the ancient travelers seek their protection from the keeper of Israel. He who watches over Israel is always vigilant. When the people rest at night, He keeps watching over them as the LORD is not like other pagan gods who need to eat and rest. He protects His people every step of the way.

Verse six can seem a little odd for modern readers. The possibility of sunstroke is a real threat to ancient travelers walking during the heat of the day. The Israelites also have a belief that the moon can have a harmful effect on their physical and even mental health. YHWH's protection continues from day to night. A shade is very necessary and comforting for a traveler. The comparison of divine protection with 'shade' reminds the

people of Israel of how they were led by the pillar of cloud, which provided shade when the LORD brought them out of Egypt (Exod 13:17-22). He also commanded them to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles/ Feast of Booths/ *Sukkot* by living in temporary booths for seven days (Lev 23:42-43). The booths were called *sukka*, from which the feast got its Hebrew name. The word *sukka* is derived from the same root that means ‘to weave together,’ ‘to cover with branches,’ or ‘to form shade.’⁴⁸

Succoth is the name of a place where the Israelites camped in after they left Egypt (Exod 13:20). The ‘booth’ is a significant symbol. As they celebrate this festival, the people also remember that YHWH dwells with his people. Revelation 7:14-16 reminds us that those who have come out of the great tribulation will stand before the throne of God, and He will spread his tent over them; the sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.

Verse eight reminds us that He will watch your coming and going both now and forevermore. This psalm celebrates YHWH, the Almighty Creator, to be the alert and faithful protector of His people. The Israelites remember how YHWH led and protected them in the wilderness after escaping from Egypt. Now believers can look to the future manifestation of His promises. YHWH dwelled among His people through the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit. Not only that, but He will also make His dwelling throughout His heavenly kingdom on earth in the future.

This psalm celebrates YHWH, the Almighty Creator, to be the sovereign and faithful protector of His people. The Israelites remember how YHWH led and protected them in the wilderness after escaping from Egypt. Psalm 121 beautifully portrays the transcendence and the immanence of YHWH: The Maker of heaven and earth who will keep the psalmist’s foot from slipping. As the Israelites make their journey through the desert, they may remember this psalm for assurance of the constant presence and

⁴⁸ Jeffrey L. Rubinstein, “The Symbolism of the Sukka,” *Judaism* 45, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 393.

protection of YHWH. Those who trust the LORD for protection find assurance that He will protect them from danger.

Psalm 122

1. I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD!”
2. Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!
3. Jerusalem — built as a city that is bound firmly together,
4. To which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord.
5. There, thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David.
6. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! “May they be secure who love you!
7. Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!”
8. For my brothers and companions’ sake, I will say, “Peace be within you!”
9. For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good. (ESV)

The pilgrim has arrived in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the city that unites the Israelites as a nation. Jerusalem was the center of their worship and festivals. Being in Jerusalem, the city of God, reinforces and celebrates the Israelites’ identity as the people of God. The fifteen songs of the Psalms of Ascents suggest a time when the twelve tribes of Israel were united. Although the tribes of Israel were divided for most of their history, they were united under the rule of Saul, David, and Solomon. After the death of Solomon, Israel was again divided into rival kingdoms. The reign of Saul to Solomon is the only period in Israel’s history when the twelve tribes live in the Holy Land as a peaceful and united monarchy with common access to Jerusalem.⁴⁹

As the psalmist arrives, he admires the structure of Jerusalem, which is built with solid gates and fortresses. To the tribes of Israel, Jerusalem represented the authority of YHWH over them as a theocratic nation and a place to offer worship and thanks.

⁴⁹ Mitchell, *The Songs of Ascents*, 38.

YHWH is also recognized as a judge of the nation. In the Old Testament, Jerusalem takes the role of the 'city of God' where YHWH dwells, rules, and executes justice.

The prayers for *shalom* in verses six to nine are appropriate because of the meaning of Jerusalem. This is the first psalm in the collection that was written by David. David, who did not live to see the completion of the temple, may have written this psalm in anticipation of this great moment. The desire for peace mentioned in Psalm 120 is found in Jerusalem, where Israel unites as a covenant community in the presence and rule of YHWH.

One of the significant elements of the Feast of the Tabernacles is the joyful gathering of His people. There is joy in the psalmist's heart as he comes to Jerusalem. Revelation 19:7 declares, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready." In the eschatological messianic age, the great multitude shouted before God in worship and celebration of the marriage of the Lamb to his bride, the Holy city of Jerusalem. The great white throne of judgment in Revelation 20:11-13 was set to pronounce judgment for the dead according to what they had done.

In the Gospels, John 1:14 connects the Temple with Jesus: "And the Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us..." Jesus spoke about the temple of his body in John 2:19-22: "...Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Not only does Jesus begin to take over the role of the Jerusalem Temple, but he also predicted its imminent destruction. "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands'" (Mark 14:58). Jesus' presence brought the presence of God on earth and ushered in the New Covenant. His earthly ministry replaces the role of the temple, and after his resurrection and ascension, God's presence descended in the form of the Holy Spirit, making everyone who believes in Christ be a part of the temple. Each one of us as a believer is part of the Church as the dwelling place of God.

The Church is a community of the New Covenant that worships Him in the Spirit and truth. John 4:21-24 described the transition from temple worship: ‘Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” True worship no longer occurs at the Jerusalem temple or any other geographical place.

In Revelation 7:4-10, 144,000 were sealed from every tribe of the Israelites, and a vast multitude of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne of God in worship. With palm branches in their hands, they proclaim salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb. Palm branches (*lulav*) are associated with the Feast of Tabernacles. The branches were shaken during the recitation of Psalm 118, especially in verse 25, “Save us, we pray, O Lord!” In Revelations, it is no longer a cry for salvation but praise for the salvation which has finally been given through the Lamb.⁵⁰

Psalm 123

1. To you, I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!
2. Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us.
3. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt.
4. Our soul has had more than enough of contempt of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud. (ESV)

⁵⁰ J. A. Draper, “The Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles: Revelation 7:1-17,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 19 (1983): 138.

The first two verses of the psalm emphasize the ‘looking up’ to God. God declared that “heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool...this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at My word” (Isa 66:1). Psalm 24:3-4 sets the requirement for entering the Temple to be clean hands and a pure heart. “Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.” Matthew 5:8 reads, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The psalmist here places himself in a position of humility until God grants him mercy.

Psalm 123 paints a picture of one looking upward in humility, dependency, and hope. The first verse is an invocation of God, as the psalmist lifts his eyes toward YHWH, who is enthroned in the heavens. The psalmist compares this with two similes: like slaves looking to the hand of their masters and a maidservant looking to the hand of her mistress. Both slave and maidservant represent the lowly of the ancient Israelite society. They generally do not have any rights or freedom aside from those given by their masters or mistresses and rely on the master for provision and protection. The hand of the master or mistress symbolizes authority. The psalmist puts himself in a similar position. He is totally dependent on YHWH. At the end of verse two, the singular first-person pronoun is changed to the first-person plural, indicating evidence that this psalm was used liturgically.

Verse three and four of this psalm expressed the response of the psalmist after looking upon the LORD seated on His throne. The psalmist cries out, “Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us....” This cry for mercy is later used in Christian worship, *miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri*. When compared to the lament in Psalm 120, this psalm does not end with an answer from God or any statement of assurance. Psalm 123 does not end with a high note. However, it highlights the internal and external attitude of a worshipper who fixes his gaze upward toward God and waits upon Him.

They have had ‘more than enough of contempt and scorn.’ Scriptures have described numerous instances where the Israelites had to face opposition from other nations. They have been enslaved for hundreds of years by the Egyptians, chased down by the Egyptian army before crossing the Red Sea, driven out of Jerusalem, and later exiled to Babylon.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matt 5: 7). Psalm 123 is a prayer for mercy. One of the roles of the Temple was to be the source of mercy, and the reason for this is the covenantal relationship between God and His people.⁵¹ The Church, as the new covenant community, are called to be merciful because we have received mercy from Christ. In the eschatological messianic age, the Church will one day stand before the throne in heaven to see Him who sits on the throne and respond in worship (Rev 4).

Psalm 124

1. If it had not been the LORD who was on our side — let Israel now say —
2. If it had not been the LORD who was on our side when people rose up against us,
3. Then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us;
4. Then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us;
5. Then over us would have gone the raging waters.
6. Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth!
7. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped!
8. Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

This next psalm could not be sung at a better time than after Psalm 123. In Psalm 123, the psalmist pleads for mercy and waits upon YHWH. Psalm 124 brings the

⁵¹ Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 54.

Israelites to the past and to remember how YHWH has been on their side to rescue them from danger and from their enemies. Remembering what YHWH has done for His people in the past is an important element in our relationship with God. The Israelites celebrate Passover to remember how YHWH delivers them from slavery in Egypt.

The psalmist uses the flood imagery to picture the attack of the enemies. The flood imagery may originate in Genesis 6-9. The imageries speak of Israel's enemies as violent, powerful, raging, terrifying, and capable of utter destruction. In both Genesis and Psalm 124 passages, the water rages and sweeps over people (Gen 7:17-23; Ps 124:4-5). In both passages, God delivers from the flood (Gen 8:1-5; Ps 124:6-8). God made a covenant with Noah and his family (Gen 9) to promise that He shall not send a flood to destroy the earth.

Israel has won many battles, and all victories are attributed to YHWH, who is on their side. For the Israelites, the victories they sang about in this psalm may refer to victories over their 'physical' enemies, such as the Philistines. For the Christian, imageries in this psalm can be understood to be more than 'physical' enemies. There is a greater 'enemy' who is more powerful, terrifying, and destructive, and that is Satan.

A 'fowler' is a hunter of birds or a bird catcher. A snare is a trap that can be in various forms that are used to catch and trap unsuspecting birds. The birds are usually sold in the markets or used for sacrifices. Verse 7 suggests a divine intervention that gives freedom from the trap of the enemy. Psalm 91:3 states, "For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler...". The escape from the 'snare of the fowler' was made possible because the LORD has broken the snare.

Psalms 113-118 (the Hallel) are chanted during the Feast of Tabernacles. The seventh day of the feast, known as the day of the Great Hosanna (*Hoshana Rabbah*),

reveals this emphasis on salvation.⁵² ‘Hosanna’ comes from Psalm 118:25, “Save us, we pray, O LORD!” On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7:37-38, Jesus revealed Himself to be the source of the living water, the source of salvation for those who believe in Him. His proclamation fits the context of the water-drawing ritual at the festival where water is drawn from the Pool of Siloam along with the recitation of Isaiah 12:3, “With joy, you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”

This is a psalm that praises YHWH for His acts of deliverance in the past. The people celebrate the redemptive power of God in the past, which brings them assurance of the future. A parallel New Testament passage may be found in 1 Peter 1:3-9.⁵³ All believers as the people of God are saved by the power of God through faith for salvation. The Apostle Paul asks the believers in Rome, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31). Revelation 7:9-10 described the great multitude crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” He who sits on the throne of God shall spread His tabernacle over them (Rev 7:15).

Psalm 125

1. Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.
2. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore.
3. For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong.
4. Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts!
5. But those who turn aside to their crooked ways the LORD will lead away with evildoers! Peace be upon Israel! (ESV)

⁵² Edwin Reynolds, “The Feast of Tabernacles and the Book of Revelation,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 38, no. 2 (Autumn 2000): 256.

⁵³ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 3, *Psalms 90-150*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 223.

Jerusalem is a city that is surrounded by valleys, plains, and hills. The hills that are in and surround Jerusalem are Mount Zion, Mount of Olives, Mount Scopus, Mount Ophel, Mount Herzl, Mount of Corruption or Mount of Offense, and Mount Moriah or the Temple Mount. Jerusalem itself is situated in the Judean mountains between the northern edge of the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. Although Mount Zion now lies on the south side of Jerusalem, it was not included in the city walls of the old city of Jerusalem until the time of the Second Temple. The imagery of the LORD surrounding His people, like the mountains surround Jerusalem, brings the assurance of security and protection. Just as the surrounding mountains provide security for Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds and protects His people.

In the third verse, the scepter of wickedness refers to authority or leadership that is morally corrupt. The 'land allotted to the righteous' most likely refers to the land which was promised to Abraham as an important part of the covenant between YHWH and His people. Being under a heathen leadership brings the pressure and temptation to be influenced by the heathen customs and practices that will challenge allegiance to YHWH.

From verse three onwards, the righteous and the upright are contrasted with the wicked and the crooked. In verses four and five, YHWH is asked to acknowledge and reward the upright. To those who turn to the crooked paths, YHWH will punish them by letting them go in their evil ways. The people of God need to follow the leadership of YHWH as a theocratic society even though they may live under a wicked ruler. The psalm ends with *Peace be upon Israel*, which might be for a liturgical purpose. Bringing back the concept of peace or *shalom* connects with the desire and call for peace in Psalm 122.

When believers experience tragedies, hardships in life, or persecution that shakes them to the foundation of their faith, the only way to 'plant our feet back upon the Rock' is to refocus and reorient our faith back to trust in Him. Trusting in YHWH is

followed by walking in the ways of righteousness and not following with the influence of the wicked.

This psalm portrays the people of God to be like Mount Zion and Jerusalem. In Matthew 5:14-16, while teaching on the mountain, Jesus portrays the people of God to be the light of the world. “A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” In the Mishnah, accounts of the Feast of Tabernacles included a description of temple illumination by four enormous lampstands. The enormous lampstands which lit up the city were set up in the Court of Women in the evening of the first day of the feast, according to rabbinic accounts. The enormous lampstands, each fifty cubits high, cast a light so brilliant that “there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of the *Beth he-She’ubah*” (Sukk 5:3).⁵⁴ Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the Light of the world after the Feast of Booths (John 8:12). The Church now is the Temple of God with a call to hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt 5:6).

Psalm 126

1. When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.
2. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among nations, “The LORD had done great things for them.”
3. The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.
4. Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb!
5. Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!
6. He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him. (ESV)

⁵⁴ Reynolds, “The Feast of Tabernacles and Revelation,” 256.

The historical background of this psalm has been explained in various ways. Many psalm scholars interpret Psalm 126 as a commemoration of one of the returns of the Babylonian exiles under the decree of Cyrus, the Persian emperor, in 538 BCE. In the sixth century BCE, King Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, and this event resulted in the Babylonian exile (2 Kgs 24:12-16). Jeremiah 52: 28-30 recorded that there were 4,600 people who were carried away into exile.

In Isaiah 45, there is a prophesy that states how YHWH will use a man named Cyrus in the deliverance of His people. In Ezra chapters, one to three, the events of the return of the exiles are recorded. YHWH stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, in the first year of his reign to send out a proclamation throughout his kingdom for the people of God to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of the LORD. The first chapter of Ezra also recorded how the articles taken from the temple by King Nebuchadnezzar were brought out and given back to the exiles. These items numbered 5,400 articles of gold and silver. The people of Israel were also given more silver and gold, with goods and cattle by the people of Babylon for the rebuilding of the house of God in Jerusalem. This is strikingly similar to the account in Exodus 12: 35-36 when the Egyptians gave away silver, gold, and clothing to the Israelites before they left Egypt. The author of Exodus wrote that it was YHWH who gave the Israelites favor in the Egyptian's sight.

This freedom from exile is sometimes known as the second exodus. It was an act of God to bring redemption to His people. The first three verses of Psalm 126 celebrate how the LORD restores the "fortunes" of Zion. It was like a dream that came true, and they were filled with joy. Ezra 3: 10-13 captured the magnificent moment of joy when the builders finally laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD. The sound of the people's shout for joy could be heard far away. Other nations who also returned to their homelands under the decree of Cyrus could witness the amazing turn of events and

testify to the work of the God of Israel. Once again, YHWH brought redemption to His people and led them back to the promised land.

The building of the house of God was temporarily ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia. Ezra 6: 1-12 recorded how King Darius found Cyrus's decree in the archive stating the command to rebuild the house of the LORD and allowing the full cost to be paid from the Persian royal treasury. The animals, grain, wine, and oil for sacrificial offerings were also provided daily until the temple was finished. The LORD had restored the fortunes of Zion!

The fourth verse onwards expresses hope in the LORD that He will again bring restoration to His people just like He did in the past. Negeb is a dry region in the southern part of Judah (Gen 12:9-10). Although the region does have some amount of rainfall throughout the year, it is common for flash floods to occur during the rainy winter periods. The streams of water would have brought much relief to the parched land. YHWH says that He will do something new. He will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert (Isa 43:19-21).

A significant feature of the Feast of Tabernacles is the water-libation ceremony. Every morning during the festival, water would be carried from the Pool of Siloam to the altar to be poured. Although this gesture later carries an eschatological meaning, to the post-exilic Jews, it was a prayer for rain for the next agricultural year.⁵⁵ This water-drawing ritual is known as *simhat bet hasho'eva* (Joy at the place of water-drawing). The immense joy that accompanied this ritual is expressed by dancing, singing, music, and even acrobatics. The Mishnah records that 'anyone who has not seen the rejoicing of the ritual in his life has never seen rejoicing.'⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Reynolds, "The Feast of Tabernacles and Revelation," 253.

⁵⁶ *m. Sukkah* 5:1.

Agriculture was an important part of Israel society. A good harvest provided the people with the food they needed to survive. Sowing seeds in a dry and parched land brings weeping and a desperate need to rely on divine intervention. Israel still had to sow the seeds with tears and leave them to YHWH to bring in the harvest. YHWH has shown His faithfulness and deliverance to His people again and again in Israel's past. He will not forget His people or ignore their pleas. YHWH will bring the harvest and restoration to the land.

The harvest theme correlates with the celebration of the end of the agricultural year in the Feast of Tabernacles. The festival celebrates the abundance of the harvest and is a time of rejoicing and thanksgiving. The people enjoy the fruit of their labor after a year of physical work in the field. Just as sowing seeds in the field is hard labor, 'sowing' the seeds of the Gospel to the world often brings tears and weeping. The labor of sowing spiritual seeds will one day bring shouts of joy as the LORD brings the harvest of believers. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt 5:4). Revelation 7: 17 promises that the Lamb who sits on the throne will guide His people to springs of the water of life, and He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Psalm 127

1. Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.
2. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.
3. Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.
4. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth.
5. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be out to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. (ESV)

Psalm 127 is attributed to Solomon. YHWH made a covenant with King David in 2 Samuel 7:1-17 in which He will make a 'house,' meaning a royal line that would

inherit God's kingdom forever. Although David expressed his desire to build a house for YHWH, YHWH did not approve and chose David's offspring, Solomon, instead to build a house (a physical temple) for YHWH. It is the YHWH who builds the house of David, which eventually points to Jesus Christ, who would sit on the throne forever.

The purpose of the building and living in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles is to remind the Israelites that YHWH provided and sustained them in the wilderness in the past and continue to trust in His providence. Believers also need to recognize that true security comes from God. No matter how cautiously a person lives in this world, ultimately, it is God alone who protects. Therefore, people must place their trust in him. YHWH will bring the ultimate security to the city of God when He comes to be the king over all the earth (Zech 14:9-11).

There is an overarching message of the providence of YHWH that applies to everyday life at work and in the home. Solomon ponders upon the futility of work: 'What advantage does man have in all his work, which he does under the sun?' (Eccl 1:3). 'Thus, I considered all my activities which my hands have done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun.' (Eccl 2:11). It is a gift of God for man to see the good in his work and enjoy it. 'There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. Also, I have seen that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?' (Eccl 2: 24-25). Without God in the picture, man struggles to find a deep sense of purpose and contentment in their work. Psalm 127 teaches the people of God to understand 'work' in a godly perspective.

The people of God are to trust that YHWH is in control, and therefore they can 'sleep' in peace. The first part of the second verse described the 'workaholic' man, but the second part of the verse states that YHWH will give sleep to his beloved. Rest is also a gift from God. He commands His people to honor the Sabbath. The cycle of work and rest is designed by God for the good of man. Rest is a gift that enables man to live by

faith and trust God for their well-being. Man sleeps, but YHWH neither slumbers nor sleeps (Ps 121:4).

The Feast of Tabernacles begins and ends with a rest from all labor (Lev 23:39). The first day and the eighth day of the festival shall be a solemn rest. Hebrews 4:1-11 connects the weekly Sabbath rest with the rest God offered Israel in the Promised Land. God gave rest to Israel during the reign of David and Solomon (1 Kgs 8:56). The Sabbath rest not only points back to the creation (Gen 2:1-3), it also points forward to God's ultimate rest. Christians are to rest each week in anticipation of the future rest when God makes His dwelling with His people forever (Heb 4:9; Rev 20:1-6).

Who is God's 'beloved'? At Solomon's birth, the LORD sent a message through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah" (2 Sam 12:25). *Jedidiah* means "loved by the Lord." Nehemiah 13:26 also uses the word *beloved* to describe King Solomon as "beloved by his God." Israel is often called "beloved of God" (Deut 33:12; Jer 11:15). God chose Israel as His beloved in order to set them apart for His divine plan to save the world through Jesus.

The message of YHWH's providence is again applied to life at home in verses three to five. In the original Hebrew text, it is written that sons are a gift and a blessing from God. In the Israelite social context, the Hebrew word for sons also represents offspring or children. However, sons in the Israel family play a significant role in protecting or defending the family. In the fourth verse, children are compared to the arrows in the hand of the warrior. This comparison can be puzzling to the modern reader unfamiliar with the ancient Israelite cultural context. Arrows are tools for defense, attack, or survival. The fifth verse speaks of the time when a man is in his later life, and he is blessed with his children. In the original Hebrew translation, it is stated that 'they shall not be put to shame when they speak with their enemies at the gate.' This is slightly different than the ESV version. The plural 'they' refer to the children of the man. The children bring protection and perhaps also justice to the family.

Psalm 127 focuses on the order and involvement of YHWH in the human cycle of life. He is not aloof or distant from the concerns of our everyday life. Matthew 6:25-34 reminds us that our heavenly Father knows what we need and calls his people to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. We can trust in the LORD's provision and, at the same time, not neglecting our domestic responsibilities. Life at work and at home are set against an all-pervading divine perspective.

Psalm 128

1. Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!
2. You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.
3. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table.
4. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.
5. The LORD bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life!
6. May you see your children's children! Peace be upon Israel! (ESV)

The theme of 'blessedness' continues from Psalm 127 to Psalm 128. The Hebrew word for 'blessed' can also be translated as 'happy.' The word for the blessing (like in Ps 1:1) can include the idea of happiness, but it has the basic meaning of the joy or bliss that comes from knowing that one is right with God and that the blessings are from heaven⁵⁷ 'Happy is everyone who fears YHWH and walks in His ways.' This fear is a reverential fear which is shown through obedience to the His standards and commandments. He will be able to enjoy the fruit of his labor, which suggests that his work will be productive and fruitful. Agriculture was Israelites' main occupation, so 'the fruit of the labor of your hands' most likely be in the form of a good harvest. The Feast of Tabernacles is a time of celebration of harvest with thanksgiving and joy. Those who are

⁵⁷ Ross, *Psalms 90-150*, 693.

faithful will be able to anticipate the LORD's blessings in the form of food, a growing family, and long life.

Comparing a wife to 'a fruitful vine' refers to her ability to bear many children. Fertility is often seen as a sign of divine blessing. A literal translation from the Hebrew text says that 'your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the innermost part of your house.' The place of a good wife is in the home, even in the most private part of the home.

Olive trees are a common and important tree in the ancient Mediterranean. The olive shoots sometimes grow around the trunk of the olive tree. The psalmist used this imagery to describe the children of the 'happy' or 'blessed' man. The seemingly ordinary existence of the family is a blessing from YHWH and should not be taken for granted.

Fertility and good crops are part of the blessings promised by God to the Israelites for their obedience (Deut 28:1-5). This psalm highlights the seemingly ordinary things in life and even uses the most common imageries (vines and olive shoots) but lets the readers see their value afresh. Psalm 128 defines what happiness is for the people of God who fear Him and walk in His ways. The fear of God and obedience to Him should be the foundation of the Israelites' faith.

Zion and Jerusalem represent the dwelling place of YHWH. The temple in Jerusalem was the place of worship for the people of God, and so, the blessing would come from the LORD's dwelling place. The prosperity of Jerusalem as the spiritual center of Israel is important for a theocratic society to continue to exist and grow.

The message of Psalm 128 can easily be mistaken to support the prosperity gospel. When we understand this psalm as having the characteristics of wisdom literature, we can see that just like other wisdom literature, Psalm 128 describes the kind of life that is peaceful and prosperous because of the presence of God. Those who fear the LORD and remain obedient will enjoy the blessings of provision, good family life, and long life.

There is also a redemptive-historical context to this psalm.⁵⁸ God made promises to the people of Israel if they obeyed Him. These promises of blessing were like types and shadows of greater blessings that are to come. The blessing of food and family points the way to the greater things that God has planned and will provide for His people. These material blessings also serve to point the people back to God, who is the source of the blessed life.

Psalm 129

1. “Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth” — let Israel now say —
2. “Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me.
3. The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows.”
4. The LORD is righteous; he has cut the cords of the wicked.
5. May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward!
6. Let them be like the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up,
7. With which the reaper does not fill his hand nor the binder of sheaves his arms,
8. nor do those who pass by say, “The blessing of the LORD be upon you! We bless you in the name of the LORD!” (ESV)

“My youth” refers to the earlier part of Israel’s history. Slavery, oppression, war, and suffering have characterized Israel’s history. The Egyptians were not the only nation to cause affliction upon Israel. The Amalekites also fought the Israelites. However, these nations had not prevailed. Later in Israel’s history, the Canaanites, the Philistines, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians all have caused great pain and affliction upon Israel. When the Jews sing this psalm, memories of this oppression are represented in the first three verses. The first verse is repeated in the second, perhaps to emphasize the extent of the pain.

⁵⁸ Rhett P. Dodson, *Marching to Zion: Ancient Psalms for Modern Pilgrims* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), 139.

The third verse described the enemies' oppression like the plowers digging into the back of Israel. Plowing is a common activity in an agrarian society. Plowing the soil and making furrows are meant to prepare the land for planting seeds. The plower has to force the plowing tools to cut deep into the soil and tear the soil apart to create the furrows. The personification of Israel resulted in this excruciating imagery of 'cutting into my back.' When the prophet Micah accused Israel's false prophets and leaders of hating justice, he described that Zion would be plowed as a field, Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height (Mic 3:12). Micah then prophesied that in the latter days, there would be restoration for Jerusalem and its temple, nations will go up to Zion, and Zion will be the source of instruction, justice, and righteousness (Mic 4:1-5).

Verse four declares the righteousness of YHWH and declares His act of redeeming Israel. YHWH has 'cut the cords' that bound Israel to its enemies. Israel's enemies are labeled as 'haters of Zion' (verse five), and they will suffer shame and degradation. Shame and being turned backward are the things that Israel experienced from its enemies, but the enemies will soon suffer the same fate. Is the psalmist praying for revenge? The psalmist is praying for YHWH to exercise his justice upon those who are evil and oppose Him. Any nation or kingdom or people who oppose YHWH and His people will ultimately face judgment.

The psalmist compares the fate of Israel's enemies to be like grass on the housetops. On the tops of the Israelites' houses, there is little soil for grass to grow on. They are exposed to the heat of the day, which causes the grass to wither and die. The psalmist is saying that this grass will not grow high enough for a reaper to fill his hand with the grass, meaning that the enemies should be destroyed before they can come to full strength.⁵⁹ Verse seven and eight emphasized the fact that there will be nothing for the

⁵⁹ Ross, *Psalms 90-150*, 705.

workers to harvest, and there will be no one who passes by and wish the workers a blessed harvest. Utter destruction will come upon the enemies of Zion. This imagery is a stark contrast to the shade of the booth or *sukka*, a roofing made from branches of palms and leafy trees.

God has delivered His people again and again from their enemies in Israel's past. Remembering and celebrating God's protection in Israel's past is part of the purpose of the Feast of Tabernacles.⁶⁰ We can be confident that He will continue to deliver His people in the future. Revelation 7:14 described the great multitude of people from every nation that came out from the great tribulation. There will be more enemies in the future who will oppose God and His people (Rev 12-13). Eventually, God will defeat His enemies and cast them in the lake of fire (Rev 20:7-15). "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:10). As the new 'Israel,' the Church will suffer persecution and suffering but let the assurance of God's victory helps us to be strong and faithful. Knowing that God has delivered His people time and time again gives the Church the confidence to face the various challenges on earth.

Psalm 130

1. Out of the depths, I cry to you, O LORD!
2. O, Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!
3. If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?
4. But with you, there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.
5. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word, I hope;
6. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

⁶⁰ Reynolds, "The Feast of Tabernacles and Revelation," 251.

7. O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption.
8. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. (ESV)

Psalm 130 has become one of the seven penitential psalms in the Christian tradition. These confessional psalms include Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, and 143. Psalm 130 is famously known as the *De Profundis* (Latin for ‘out of the depths’) and has inspired numerous musical settings, major instrumental works, poetry, and even films.

The message of this psalm captures the desperation of a sinner longing for forgiveness and redemption that can only come through the love of YHWH. John Wesley, who attended St. Paul’s Cathedral one day in May 1738, heard the choir sang Psalm 130. Later in the evening of that same day, he heard the exposition of the gospel in the Book of Romans in a meeting at Aldersgate, and he was converted.⁶¹ The message of Romans answered the psalmist’s (and perhaps Wesley’s) plea for mercy and forgiveness in Psalm 130.

“Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me” (Ps 42:7). The ‘deep’ here may refer to a large body of water that, in this context, indicate divine wrath or judgment. The psalmist describes that he is like drowning. Jonah prayed from the belly of the fish: “For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me” (Jonah 2:3). In Psalm 130:1-2, the psalmist cries out with his voice from ‘the depths’ and asks YHWH to listen. The next verse, however, expresses his full awareness of his iniquities. The fourth verse proclaims the psalmist’s understanding and confidence of the character of YHWH, who forgives him. Although the psalmist is in ‘the depths,’ he does not feel despair, for he knows that there is hope in YHWH.

The water libation ceremony is a significant ritual in the Feast of Tabernacles. Water is brought from the Siloam to the altar of the Temple to be poured onto the altar.

⁶¹ Dodson, *Marching to Zion*, 164.

The water then flows from the altar down beneath the altar into the “abyss.” According to the Roman historian Tacitus, there were subterranean excavations in the Temple Mount, along with tanks and cisterns for holding rainwater.⁶² In 2012, a large First Temple period reservoir was discovered. It lies beneath the Robinson’s Arch⁶³ and branches toward the Temple Mount compound.⁶⁴ It is likely that this underground reservoir played an important role not only in providing water for Jerusalem but also in the cultic rituals of the Temple. One Rabbinic account describes a connection between the rising of the waters of the Deep with King David’s uttering the fifteen Songs of Ascents.⁶⁵

The psalmist waits for the LORD and hopes in His word. The watchmen in ancient Israel keep watch over the city in the dark of night to make sure their enemies do not attack (Isa 21:6-12). It is an important job, but it is also a difficult one. The break of dawn brings relief from the hours of waiting vigilantly that the darkness and the danger had passed. Morning brings the watchmen rest and relief from their fatigue. The watchmen know that no matter how long the night feels, the light of the morning will come, and all will be well. The psalmist’s eagerness to wait for God’s forgiveness is more than the watchmen’s wait for the morning. The passage in Isaiah equates the ‘night’ as the darkness of the world and ‘morning’ as the end of that darkness. In the new heaven and new earth where God will make His dwelling with His people, there will be no more night (Rev 21:25; 22:5).

⁶² Itzhak Brand, “Following the Path of the Water Libation,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 15 (2012): 52.

⁶³ Robinson’s Arch is a monumental staircase carried by a wide stone arch, which once stood at the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount. It was built as part of the expansion of the Second Temple by Herod the Great.

⁶⁴ Noah Wiener, “Ancient Reservoir Provided Water for First Temple Period Jerusalem,” *Biblical Archaeology Society*, September 6, 2012, <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/news/ancient-reservoir-provided-water-for-first-temple-period-jerusalem/>.

⁶⁵ Baker and Nicholson, *The Commentary of Rabbi David Kimhi*, 3.

Not only does the psalmist hope in YHWH's word, but he also calls for the people of Israel to hope in the LORD. There is a shift from the personal plea to the collective. The Israelites understand that they needed forgiveness and redemption from YHWH. They anticipate the coming of the Messiah, who would come to fulfill YHWH's promises. The sins of the people of Israel can only be forgiven through their faith in the future work of Christ on the cross.

'The steadfast love of the LORD' can also be translated as the loyal love of the LORD reminds the Israelites of the faithfulness of YHWH and the extent or degree of His love throughout their history, which justifies their hope in Him. 'Plentiful redemption' speaks of the abundance of redemption that YHWH offers to redeem Israel from the totality of her iniquities. Psalm 130 directs us to the redemptive work of Christ and to the future reality of the end of darkness on earth and the eternal 'morning' with God. After the thousand years of reign, Satan is released for a little while and finally will be defeated and punished forever (Rev 20:7-10). Those who remain faithful will be able to enjoy the presence of God in eternity (Rev 21-22).

Psalm 131

1. O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.
2. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother;
Like a weaned child is my soul within me.
3. O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. (ESV)

Psalm 131 teaches about humility and contentment. Achievement can bring about pride, arrogance, and self-reliance. The need for more achievement brings about discontentment and ambition. Society pressures people to have better jobs, have more children, make more money, have more power, be more beautiful, earn more respect from people, and keep climbing the ladder to go up. When the people of God are not satisfied with the circumstances that the LORD has given to them, they sin against Him

by complaining, grumbling, and being ungrateful. The psalmist described in the first and second verse that his heart is not lifted up (being proud and arrogant), his eyes are not raised too high (being contemptuous and looking down upon others), and occupying himself with things too great and too marvelous for him (being obsessed with things beyond the call and will of God). This verse does not mean one should not attempt great and marvelous things, but that one should not step out of the boundaries and purposes that God had set for him. The fall of man happened because of the temptation to have more than God has given (Gen 3:4-6). Eve wanted to be like God, and her ambition caused her disobedience and rebellion against God.

The second verse described a beautiful image of a contented child with his mother. The child is weaned from his mother's milk. He no longer desires to be nursed or dependent on his mother to satisfy his hunger. Before the child was weaned, he would always be attached to his mother and demand to be nursed whenever he needs food. A weaned child no longer has the need to nurse, and he can lie contently in his mother's arms. He is calm and quiet. The psalmist's soul is calm and free from the need to satisfy prideful ambitions. There is complete contentment in YHWH, being satisfied and resting peacefully, like a weaned child. The psalmist's desires no longer need to be satisfied with the things that he used to desire. His soul can be contented in YHWH. The psalmist is weaned from things that would create pride in him.

This psalm reminds us of the concept of the Sabbath. The Feast of Tabernacles begins and ends with a day of rest. Sabbath is more than just a day of rest; it is also a day of freedom. Freedom from self-expectations and idolatrous hold of any kind. Freedom of the pressures of career. Freedom from the bondage of the 'world.' Free to enjoy God in worship and experience life in Christ. This psalm gives us a glimpse of the heavenly future rest in the eternal presence of God. Psalm 131 is placed before Psalm 132 which talks about the First Temple being the resting place of God. Coming to the Temple was

coming into God's rest. Jesus invites all who labor and are heavy laden to come to Him for rest (Matt 11:28).

The third verse calls for Israel to put their hope in YHWH forever. There is an undoubted assurance in YHWH. The psalmist calls for Israel to be faithful to YHWH, to not go back to sinful temptations and desires. Amidst the temptations and pressures around them, Israel is to find security in their hope for YHWH and His promises. YHWH will fulfill His promises, purposes, and plan for His people.

The Church as the Temple is called to find its security and contentment in God. "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt 6:33). There is rest, contentment, and humility to be in the presence of YHWH. The sense of calmness, security, and comfort that a mother gives to the child in her arms is such a powerful image of our heavenly Father. May Israel and the Church put hope and trust in YHWH like a weaned child in the presence of his mother. In the new heaven and earth, where God will make His dwelling with man, He will wipe every tear from their eyes and satisfy His children with the spring of the water of life (Rev 21:4-6).

Psalm 132

1. Remember, O LORD, in David's favor, all the hardships he endured,
2. how he swore to the LORD and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,
3. "I will not enter my house or get into my bed,
4. I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids,
5. Until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."
6. Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of Jaar.
7. "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!"
8. Arise, O LORD, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.
9. Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your saints shout for joy.

10. For the sake of your servant David, do not turn away the face of your anointed one.
11. The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: “One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne.
12. If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.”
13. For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place:
14. This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
15. I will abundantly bless her provisions; I will satisfy her poor with bread.
16. Her priests I will clothe with salvation, and her saints will shout for joy.
17. There I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.
18. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but on him his crown will shine.” (ESV)

Psalm 132 belongs in the category of royal psalms because of its focus on the human king. The centrality of the human king, in this case, David, is the result of the centrality of the divine King in the life of ancient Israel.⁶⁶ The people of Israel live under the rule of YHWH and the rule of a human king appointed by YHWH to sit on the earthly throne. (1 Chr 28:5) The human earthly throne is not independent of the heavenly throne. The earthly throne represents the authority of the heavenly throne. This psalm highlights the importance of the Davidic king and the ideology of the monarchy.

In verses 2-5, King David made a pledge to bring the Ark back to Jerusalem (2 Sa 6). David’s pledge and dedication showed the significance of the Ark. The Ark was regarded as a dwelling place of YHWH. The Ark is a reminder and a symbol of the divine King of Israel. David knew that his earthly throne submits under the heavenly throne of YHWH.

The ark represented God’s ruling presence that extended from heaven to earth. The ark is repeatedly referred to as God’s ‘footstool’ (1 Chr 28:2; Ps 99:5; Ps 132:7). The

⁶⁶ Mark D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 182.

Scriptures often described God to be sitting on a throne in heaven with his feet on the ark as His footstool in the earthly temple (Isa 66:1; 2 Kgs 19:15; Lam 2:1)⁶⁷

There may have been rumors about the ark and thus the mentioning of Ephrata, the birthplace of David. The ark itself was located in Kiriath-jearim (the town of Jearim). The fields of Jaar would refer to the place where David found the Ark. David kept his pledge and led the people of Israel to find the Ark and brought it back to Jerusalem. Verse seven expressed the excitement of the people as they bring the Ark back to Jerusalem. The priest being clothed in righteousness reflect the importance and sacredness of this journey. They had to consecrate themselves before carrying the Ark and were dressed in robes of fine linen (1 Chr 15: 11-15, 27). Only the Levites were allowed to carry the Ark (1 Chronicle 15:2). Uzzah lost his life when he touched the Ark (1 Chr 13:9-10). When the Ark arrived in Jerusalem, the people shout for joy (1 Chr 15: 16-24). There was singing accompanied by instruments such as harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets. King David danced to the celebration. (1 Chr 15:29).

Verses 8 to 10 came from the prayer of King Solomon during the dedication of the Temple (2 Chr 6:41-4). The verses connected the event of bringing the Ark with the dedication of the Temple. The verses seamlessly connect the reign of David and his oath to the reign of his son, Solomon, and the complete fulfillment of that oath in the building of the Temple. Just as in the time of David, the priests consecrated themselves, and the singers sang accompanied by harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets. (2 Chr 5:11-14).

While the first half of this psalm tells of the promise of David and the fulfillment of that promise in Solomon's reign, the second half of this psalm, verses 11-18, contain the promise of God. In 2 Samuel 7, God made a covenant with David that He will establish an earthly kingdom with David and his descendants. The significance of the Davidic covenant lies in the close relationship between the earthly throne and the

⁶⁷ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 113.

heavenly one. YHWH has chosen Solomon to sit on the throne of His kingdom over Israel. YHWH will establish his kingdom forever if Solomon perseveres in keeping His commands and ordinances (1 Chr 28:5-7). YHWH also appeared to King Solomon at night and reminded him of His promise to his father David (2 Chr 7:17-22). Solomon sat on the throne over Israel but unfortunately, nearing the end of his reign, Solomon failed to be obedient to YHWH.

Psalm 132 started with the focus on David's promise to find a dwelling place for the LORD with a specific mention of the place where it was found (verses 1-10), but in verses 11 to 18, the focus is on YHWH's promise to David to preserve the 'house' of David and His expectation of the heirs of David to keep the covenant. YHWH has chosen Zion in His sovereignty to be His resting place. A cloud filled the house of the LORD as a manifestation of His presence (1 Kgs 8:10-11). He sent a fire from heaven to the altar of burnt offering (1 Chr 21:26).

There are several comparisons and contrasts in this psalm: between David's oath and the LORD's oath; David's hardship and sleepless efforts and the LORD's resting place; the earthly reign and the heavenly reign; priests clothed in righteousness/salvation and the enemies clothed in shame; the ark being outside of the sanctuary and the LORD make His dwelling in Zion; turn away the anointed one and prepare a lamp for the anointed.

David's installation of the Ark served to fulfill YHWH's sovereign initiative. The heavenly throne sets the tone for the earthly throne. Verse 15 onwards reveals YHWH's promise to bless the people, provide for the people, and protect them from their enemies. YHWH has fulfilled His promise to David by the anointing of Solomon. He will keep His promise to His people. The kings of Judah, however, did not remain obedient to Torah. Eventually, YHWH allowed the Babylonians to capture the people of God and sent them into exile.

Ezekiel 37:26-27 says, “I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Similarly, in Jeremiah 3:17, a time will come when all nations will come to Jerusalem as the throne of the LORD. The ark of the covenant will not be remembered anymore because His presence will be throughout Jerusalem itself. The vision of the temple in Ezekiel 40-44 did not include the ark of the covenant, which arguably was the most important item in the temple. In this future ‘temple,’ the presence of God will not be contained in the Holy of Holies.⁶⁸

Old Testament believers or Israel look upon David and the covenant that God made with David. God promised David that He would give a lamp to shine for him and his sons forever (2 Kgs 8:19). The New Testament church looks to the One who came from the line of David, Jesus Christ. In Matthew 27:37, a sign was placed above Jesus’ head as the Roman soldiers nailed him to the cross: ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.’ The Romans’ intention to mock ironically proclaimed the fulfillment of God’s promise: “. . . and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David” (Luke 1:69). Jesus is the ‘horn’ that sprouts out of the house of David. The lamp shone its light through the Davidic line of kings to the arrival of the Son of God.

In Psalm 132:15, there is a hunger not for physical food but for a spiritual one. The LORD will satisfy this hunger: “I will abundantly bless her provisions; I will satisfy her poor with bread.” Matthew 5:6 says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” In the marriage supper of the Lamb, the Church as the Bride, will one day be clothed with fine linen, which is the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev 19:8). The righteous deeds of the saints are acts of obedience to the covenant.

⁶⁸ Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 355.

Psalm 133

1. Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!
2. It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!
3. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore. (ESV)

Psalm 133 describes the beauty of God's people living in unity. The precious oil described here refers to the anointing oil mentioned in Exodus 30:22-33. The ingredients of the precious oil were given by YHWH Himself: "Take for yourself the finest spices. 12,5 pounds of liquid myrrh, half as much of fragrant cinnamon, 6,25 pounds of fragrant cane, 12,5 pounds of cassia (by the sanctuary shekel), and one gallon of olive oil. Prepare from these a holy anointing oil, a scented blend, the work of a perfumer; it will be holy anointing oil." (Exod 30:22-25) This oil is for the purpose of consecrating and anointing. YHWH instructed Moses to tell the Israelites: "This will be My holy anointing oil throughout your generations. It must not be used for ordinary anointing on a person's body, and you must not make anything like it using its formula. It is holy, and it must be holy to you" (E 30: 31-32). To be anointed with this oil is to be set apart for God.

The quality and quantity of these fragrant spices suggest that this was a very valuable oil used for a specific purpose: the anointing of items of the tent of meeting and the people who are to serve YHWH as priests. Unlike the earlier psalms in the collection, there is a 'running down' movement described here. This fragrant oil runs down from the head of the high priest to the beard and the opening of his robe. No doubt, the fragrance of this oil spreads through the body. How is unity like this precious and fragrant oil? The unity of believers brings about a fragrant atmosphere. The sweet aroma of brothers and sisters bound by the covenant with YHWH cannot be contained like the flow of the oil. It spreads to the rest of the people. People will be attracted by its 'sweet aroma.' This sweet

harmony among believers is not to be taken for granted because it is extraordinary and valuable.

The anointing ceremony of anointing is described in Leviticus 8. Moses poured the anointing oil on Aaron, his sons, the tabernacle, and all that was in the tabernacle to consecrate them. After the consecration ceremony, Leviticus chapter nine described the first tabernacle service where the glory of the LORD appeared to the people (Lev 9:22-24). The anointing ceremony set apart the priests and the tabernacle to prepare for the presence of God among them.

Mount Hermon, standing at more than 9,000 feet high, is the tallest mountain in the region, which is to the north of Israel in Lebanon. Snow covers the mountain top, making Mount Hermon a valuable source of water. Jeremiah 18:14 described this flow of cold water from the mountain. The abundance of dew and refreshing water sustain the vegetation and life surrounding the mountain. The dew of Hermon quenches thirst and restores life. “I will be like the dew to Israel, He will blossom like the lily and take root like the cedars of Lebanon.” (Hos 14:5) God spoke to Zechariah that He will dwell among His people, “For there shall be a sowing of peace . . . , and the heavens shall give their dew” (Zech 8:12). Although Mount Zion is nowhere near Mount Hermon, this hypothetical imagery gives the picture that the abundant and refreshing dew runs down and spread throughout the mountains of Zion. The dwelling together of the covenantal community is refreshing and life-giving.

Psalm 133 puts emphasis on Zion as the focus of divine presence, a source of blessing for the people. During the Feast of Tabernacles, pilgrims come from all over the land to celebrate together in Jerusalem. They experience ‘dwelling together’ in booths together as one covenantal people. Another use of the expression of people ‘dwelling’ together is found in Jeremiah 31:24, where it refers to the restoration of Judah and all its cities back to their land to live together again. This meaning has a specific reference to

the time of the restoration.⁶⁹ In John 17:20-23, Jesus prays for all believers: “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may they all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and you in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved Me.” This is the goal of the Church: to be united spiritually in Him as a community of the new covenant.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt 5: 9). The peacemakers here may refer to those who act as intercessors of reconciliation between God and man and between man and man. The promise to be called the sons of God is realized in the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, resulting in them becoming His sons and daughters. For the New Testament church, which is set apart of holy, God established the covenant of peace through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, which reconciled sinners with God. He will give the blessing of spiritual unity as He dwells with them.

Psalm 134

1. Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who stand by night in the house of the LORD!
2. Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD!
3. May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth! (ESV)

Psalm 134 is a call to praise YHWH. Was this a song in the night? Was this sung in a night service? Isaiah 30:29 recorded of a nocturnal singing on the night of a holy festival, but there is no information to indicate that Psalm 134 was actually sung in a night liturgy or simply refer to the servants of the LORD who keep the night watch in the

⁶⁹ Ross, *Psalms 90-150*, 748.

Temple or are involved with some preparation works for the morning. The Levites sometimes are involved with work at night (1 Chr 9:27, 33). Later, Jewish tradition associate night services with the Feast of Tabernacles/ Sukkoth. This festival is the only festival in Israel's cultic year when a night service is recorded.⁷⁰ These nocturnal events were extraordinarily festive and joyful with dance and music.

The first two verses of this psalm are believed by many psalm scholars to be sung by the people of Israel. Who are the servants of the LORD? Most likely, they are the priests (*kohanim*) who are sons of Aaron who serve in the Temple. At the time of Solomon's reign, the sons of Aaron stand every morning and night to thank and praise the LORD (1 Chr 23: 28-32). Another translation of verse one is 'Behold, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD. The Hebrew root word for 'bless,' *brk*, can be translated to 'praise' or 'worship.' It can even be understood as 'kneel.' The people ask the 'servants of the LORD' also to lift up their hands to the holy place. The holy place here may refer to the Temple. Another translation can be to 'lift up their hands in holiness,' in relation to 1 Timothy 2:8, 'lifting up holy hands.'⁷¹

The third verse is a priestly blessing, which corresponds to the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6:24.⁷² This blessing is widely accepted to be spoken by Aaron and his sons to the people (Num 6:22-27). The full blessing as recorded in Numbers 6:24-26 is as follows: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." Numbers 6:27 states, "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel,

⁷⁰ Mitchell, *The Songs of Ascents*, 209.

⁷¹ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 16 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 490.

⁷² Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21, rev. ed. (Dallas: Word, 2002), 283.

and I will bless them.” Revelation 22:4 says that God’s redeemed people will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.

There is a hand sign that is specifically associated with this *birchat kohanim* (priestly blessing), where the priest will lift both hands at shoulder height when giving the blessing to Israel.⁷³ In each hand, there will be space between the thumb and forefinger and between the middle finger and the ring finger (like the Star Trek Vulcan salute, which was inspired by the Jewish priest hand gestures). The left and right thumbs (and sometimes the two forefingers) are seen joined. This hand gesture may represent the Hebrew letter *Shin*, the initial of Shaddai (Almighty). It is not certain when this hand sign was started or whether this hand sign was practiced during the Feast of Tabernacles.

In the reign of King Solomon, the sons of Aaron served at the temple and pronounced the blessing in YHWH’s name (1 Chr 23:13). YHWH’s blessing, as found in Leviticus 26:3-13, includes rain, good harvest, peace, security, protection from enemies, and children, all of which point to the reality of God dwelling among His people. All these blessings are in the Psalms of Ascents.

The word ‘bless’ is echoed here, but YHWH is the subject instead of the object. YHWH, the maker of heaven and earth, blesses His people from Zion. What is the significance of Zion? Zion is a dominant theme in the Psalms of Ascents. Zion was the ‘stage’ for the drama of redemption, where the people of God enact the story of redemption in their daily lives with the Old Testament sacrifices and ceremonies.⁷⁴ Mount Zion, being the dwelling place of Israel’s divine King, points to the ultimate dwelling place of God in heaven. Zion sometimes also refers to Jerusalem (1 Kgs 8:1, Isa 2:3) or the people of God (Lam 4:2, Matt 21:5). Zion is also used metaphorically with

⁷³ Baker and Nicholson, *The Commentary of Rabbi David Kimhi*, 59.

⁷⁴ Dodson, *Marching to Zion*, 252.

reference to the Church, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22), and eschatologically (Rev 14:1).

Psalm 134 closes the Psalms of Ascents with the people's call to bless the LORD and a priestly blessing. When the priest pronounced this blessing, they are giving a divine blessing of the covenant that YHWH had made with His people. The promise of YHWH: "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" is also repeated by Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:16 when he talks about the Church as the temple of the living God. In the new heaven and new earth, as the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven, a loud voice from the throne calls out, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be with His people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Rev 21:3). The Aaronic blessing "the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you" (Num 6:22-27) is finally fulfilled in the new Jerusalem: "They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads" (Rev 22:4).

CHAPTER 3

THE UNDERSTANDING AND USE OF PSALMS OF ASCENTS IN WORSHIP

Throughout the centuries, Christ has taken the central place in the reading of the Psalter. This has remained unchanged in the Christian tradition amidst the differences in methods and approaches. Our desire to sing about the love and sacrifice of Christ the Savior need not result in abandoning the Psalter. Worship is a pattern of revelation and response. The psalms help us understand the nature of our response as God's people throughout the centuries to His revelation. The Hebraic context of the Psalter may often seem irrelevant to the Christian and therefore make it harder to include them in our modern worship contexts. For this reason, a clearer understanding of the dialogical relationship between the Old and the New Testament is necessary.

Recent Developments of the Reading of the Psalms

There has been a shift in the theological reading of the Psalms towards the end of the twentieth century. Earlier in the twentieth century, interpretation methods were historically oriented and form-critical (with the works of Hermann Gunkel in 1913 and 1917 and Sigmund Mowinckel in 1951 and 1962). Both scholars studied the psalms in isolated units or group types. The new approach focuses on the canonical readings of the Psalms (led by psalm scholars such as Brevard S. Childs, Gerald Wilson, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, and Erich Zenger)

Canonical Reading of the Psalms

Gordon Wenham presented Erich Zenger's principles of canonical exegesis of the Psalms:¹

1. Canonical exegesis pays attention to the connections between one psalm and its neighbors.
2. Canonical exegesis pays attention to the position of a psalm within its redactional unit.
3. Canonical exegesis sees the titles of the psalms
4. Canonical exegesis takes into consideration the connections and repetitions of psalms within the collection.

This approach helps readers to be aware of the variety of contexts each psalm has.

Wenham narrowed down three important contexts:²

1. The canonical context of the whole Psalter. A psalm can be read in relation to its neighbors and in the context of its placement in the whole psalter.
2. The context of the Hebrew Bible. Psalms can be read in comparison to other Old Testament texts as they often refer to historical figures and past events.
3. The context of the Christian canon of the Old and New Testaments. The Psalms is the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament.

Although there are still issues facing this canonical approach, it has led to deeper and richer reading and understanding of the Psalms. This approach can broaden the readers' understanding of each psalm and complement the historical and form-critical approach.

Historical Reading of the Psalms

Not all psalms have a clear historical reference for their origins. The psalms' titles were assumed to be added during the compiling or editing of the Psalter and likely to indicate its cultic use. Unfortunately, it is difficult to trace the exact history of every psalm. A helpful way to understand a psalm is to discover its meaning through exegesis

¹ Gordon Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 73-74.

² Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed*, 78-79.

and discover how it functions in a particular context. The clues for these contexts can often be found in the psalms.

Theocentric Reading of the Psalms

A theocentric interpretation is important to avoid the anthropocentric interpretation of psalms. What does the psalm say about God and God's relationship with His people? Each of the five books of the Psalter ends with a doxology. The Song of Ascents ends with a call to praise YHWH. The entire Psalter ends with a doxology. Sydney Greidanus argues that the theocentric focus of the Psalter is expressed in the many metaphors used to describe God.³ A shepherd, warrior, and king are among the many images used to describe God who has a relationship with His people. Furthermore, since the main character of the Old Testament is God, the entire Old Testament requires a theocentric interpretation, including the Psalms.

Christocentric Reading of the Psalms

The Bible reveals a progression in the redemptive history, from promises and prophecies to the fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the Psalms, there are many types, especially in the life of King David that, as New Testament Christians, we see their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Greidanus identified seven ways of understanding the Old Testament passage and moving to the New Testament:⁴

1. Redemptive-historical progression: considers how the message of the passage changes as redemptive history progresses from the text's historical setting to Jesus' First and Second Coming.
2. Promise-fulfillment: moves from God's promise of a coming Messiah to its fulfillment with Jesus' First or Second Coming.

³ Sydney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Psalms: Foundations for Expository Sermons in the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 31.

⁴ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Psalms*, 33-36.

3. Typology: moving from the types in the Old Testament, such as David, to the antitype, which is Jesus Christ.
4. Analogy: noting the similarities between the message of the psalms and the message and teaching of Jesus Christ.
5. Longitudinal themes: the uncovering of themes and sub-themes that can be found throughout Scripture. Sometimes the psalm can connect a certain theme from the Old Testament passage to the New Testament.
6. New Testament references: many psalms are quoted in the New Testament, and comparing these passages deepens the understanding of the psalm in the context of a Christian.
7. Contrast: Observing the contrast of the message of the psalm and the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Eschatological Reading of the Psalms

David Mitchell made a significant contribution in 1997 by demonstrating the plausibility of an eschatological program in the Psalter. He argues that prior to the early nineteenth century, the majority of interpreters regarded the psalms as foretelling eschatological events. This view was later opposed in the period of c. 1820-1970 by those who denied any intentional redaction behind the arrangement of the Psalter and thus making it to be an *ad hoc* collection of songs. From 1970 onwards, a new approach to the study of the Psalter focuses on the final form and the overall plan of the book. In his book, *The Message of the Psalter*, Mitchell suggested that the historical view of the Psalter as eschatological-predictive is born out of the internal features of the Masoretic text. He examined and compared specific groups of psalms (Psalms of Asaph and Psalms of Ascents) with other Old Testament books, namely Ezekiel, Joel, and Zechariah, and found that the themes of the psalms seem to correspond to the sequence of an eschatological program in the Old Testament, especially in Zechariah 9-14.

Patristic/Devotional Reading of the Psalms

The need for believers to understand the words they sing was an important motivation for patristic writers to write commentaries on Psalms. The church fathers were not concerned with canonical or historical contexts but with the health of the soul.

For Augustine, as for Ambrose and so many of his contemporaries, it was essential to “sing the psalms with understanding,” to seek out their meaning as texts within the context of the whole Christian narrative of salvation. But it was the emotive and aesthetic power of the psalms—their music, their “sweetness”—that enabled them to touch and transform these readers in a way no other book of Scripture, no preaching or theological argument, was able to do. Augustine’s own later interpretation of the psalms, delivered chiefly in the setting of public worship, would focus more often on their role as the voice of the church as the body of Christ, the *totus Christus* crying out to God in the midst of a hostile society, or as the voice of Christ, the divine Bridegroom, calling to his spouse, the church, to imitate him.⁵

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.) sees the “speaker” of the Psalms as the voice of the “Christ,” which is not just Christ but the “whole Christ” (*totus Christus*). This means that all faithful Christians throughout time, join together in voicing the Psalm. Christ, along with all who are united in Christ, join together as the “speakers.” Augustine explains this in this way in his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, as quoted by Gerard McLarney: “Our Lord Jesus Christ in both head and body, and, having deigned to die for us, he has also willed to speak in us, for he has made us his members. Sometimes he speaks in the person of his members [*ex persona membrorum suorum*] and at other times in his own person [*ex persona sua*], as our head.”⁶ This view is also reflected in how Paul made the connection between Christ and his members in 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 5:30-32, Acts 9:4, and Matthew 25:35-40.

McLarney further quoted from the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* on Augustine’s explanation of *Cantica graduum* (Song of Ascent): “When you gaze into the scriptural

⁵ Brian E. Daley and Paul R. Kolbet, eds., *The Harp of Prophecy: Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 23.

⁶ Gerard McLarney, *St. Augustine’s Interpretation of the Psalms of Ascent* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 66.

mirror, your own cheerful face looks back at you. When in your exultant hope you observe the likeness between yourself and other members of Christ, the members who first sang these verses, you will be certain that you are among his members, and you too will sing them.”⁷

When all who are faithful in Christ are included as the ‘speakers’ of the Psalm, those ‘who first sang these verses’ are not seen as strangers of the past who have no connection with the New Testament Christians but as fellow pilgrims. This view further points to the method of aligning the text and audience within the common framework of redemptive history as the basis of Augustine’s interpretation of Psalms of Ascents. Augustine’s concern was not to see how the text conforms to the situation of the audience but rather how his audience might participate in the life of the text. His expositions are framed with the assumption that the history of redemption is unbroken and that there is a continuity between the lives of the prophets, the apostles, and his audience.⁸ Therefore, his strategy for interpreting the Psalms of Ascents is to align the audience of his time and the Psalm texts within an unfolding narrative. This approach is described as a *hermeneutic of alignment*.⁹

Augustine gave a broader interpretation to the concept of a pilgrimage than his contemporaries in his writings. *Peregrinatio* and *Peregrinus* – two terms translated as “pilgrimage” and “pilgrim” – can be found in many of Augustine’s treatises. However, his use of these terms has no connection to geographical sites. In the framework of Augustine’s perception of Christianity, a Christian is like a foreigner, far away from his homeland, who is yearning for the heavenly city and is on a journey to go back.¹⁰ The

⁷ McLarney, *Augustine’s Interpretation of the Psalms of Ascent*, 20.

⁸ McLarney, *Augustine’s Interpretation of the Psalms of Ascent*, 37.

⁹ McLarney, *Augustine’s Interpretation of the Psalms of Ascent*, 38.

¹⁰ Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 111-13.

idea of a “spiritual’ journey had been circulating in monastic circles from the fourth century onward. This concept of wandering as a metaphor for the spiritual life can also be found in Greek philosophy, which shaped the writings of Jewish philosophers such as Philo of Alexandria. After Constantine became emperor in the Roman empire, theologies of Christian pilgrimages emerged and developed.¹¹ An example of this is Origen spiritualization of the Israelites’ journey to the promised land, as cited by Craig Bartholomew: “Therefore, the ascent from Egypt to the promised land is something by which, as I have said, we are taught in mysterious descriptions the ascent of the soul to heaven and the mystery of the Resurrection from the dead.”¹²

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christians are described as “strangers and exiles on the earth” who are seeking a homeland, that which is a heavenly one (Heb 13:13-16). Augustine elaborated the idea of perceiving Jerusalem as a heavenly city in the *City of God* and *Expositions of the Psalms*. However, Augustine’s approach to the reading of Scripture is more rooted in the literal sense of the text, compared to Origen.

McLarney also quoted the words of Rowan Williams expressing Augustine’s understanding of the Psalter:¹³

It unseals deep places, emotions otherwise buried, and it provides an analogy for the unity or intelligibility of a human life lived in faith. Here is a conversation with God that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. And in the course of that conversation, the human speaker is radically changed and enabled to express what is otherwise hidden from him or her.

Jason Byassee explained how Augustine’s exegesis of Scripture is “praise seeking understanding.” Since Christians always chant the words of the psalms, it is the preacher’s job to help them understand the words they have chanted. Augustine speaks of the faithful life as the best exegesis of a psalm. For Augustine, the Christian life is a

¹¹ Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 304.

¹² Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 199.

¹³ McLarney, *Augustine’s Interpretation of the Psalms of Ascent*, 23-24.

continual effort to make Christological sense of the words that we have offered to God in praise.¹⁴

Psalm Guided Worship

A combination of the various readings of psalms is used in this ministry project. This project is not trying to argue for principles that can be abstracted from the Psalms and implemented into the modern liturgy because it would reduce the Psalms into a set of principles. Rather, this project is trying to help the Church use the Psalms as a paradigm for New Testament worship. Psalms of Ascents are contextualized for the Church as a continuous unfolding narrative by expanding the temple context of the psalms into the New Testament conception of God's dwelling place. The references on New Testament passages such as Sermon on the Mount and Revelations help to expand the context of the Psalms from Old Testament worship into a universalized conception of God's dwelling place on earth.

The purpose of psalms guided worship is to bring worshippers to enter the world of the text and be transformed by it. The Psalms of Ascents provide multi-faceted ways of connecting human lives with Scripture, especially in relation to eschatology. The worship design based on the Psalms of Ascents is included in the appendix (see appendix 4). The tables below show the Scripture references for each psalm and the possibilities of different worship contexts that the psalm can be used.

¹⁴ Jason Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 201-5.

Table 1. Psalm 120: God’s peace for those who call upon Him amid hostility

Scripture References	<p>Isa 21:16-17 Jer 49:28-29 Matt 5:9 Matt 5:11-12, 44-45 Col 1:20 Rev 20:10</p>
Contexts for Use in Worship	<p>Song/prayer of individual lament To pray for those who are suffering from persecution/ hostility (Intercessory) To pray for enemies of believers To pray for believers to wait upon the LORD as they live among those hostile toward them For believers to anticipate the future fulfillment of God dwelling with His people To remember that our future dwelling with God will be filled with peace and that He will cast punishment to those who deceive the nations For believers to remember that God answers those who call upon Him in their distress To remember and imitate Christ as the peacemaker</p>

Table 2. Psalm 121: Looking to the keeper of Israel for protection

Scripture References	<p>Exod 13:17-22 Lev 23:42-43 Rev 7:14-16</p>
Contexts for Use in Worship	<p>Declaration of trust in God (as praise or response to the Word) Song/prayer in times of trouble/ anxiety Benediction (Ps 121:8) Prayer before embarking on a journey Celebration of Feast of Tabernacles Song portraying the transcendence and immanence of God Assurance of the constant presence of God with His people (Keeper of Israel)</p>

Table 3. Psalm 122: Looking for peace in God's dwelling place

Scripture References	<p>Mark 13:1-2 Mark 14:58 John 1:14 John 2:19-22 John 4:21-24 Rev 7:4-12 Rev 19:7 Rev 20:11-13 Rev 21:22-27</p>
Contexts for Use in Worship	<p>Opening of worship Song/prayer for peace in the present and the future fulfillment of the kingdom of God Song to emphasize the presence, rule, and authority of God Celebrates the worship and unity of the Church as a covenantal community and Bride of the Lamb Song to emphasize the joyful gathering in the presence of God Song to anticipate the future new Jerusalem</p>

Table 4. Psalm 123: Looking to God in humble anticipation in the midst of derision and scorn

Scripture References	<p>Isa 66:1-2 Ps 24:3-4 Matt 5:7-8 John 17:14-15 Heb 4:16 Rev 4</p>
Contexts for Use in Worship	<p>Song of humility and prayer for mercy Lament to God for contempt and scorn Teach worshippers the internal and external posture of coming before His presence Asking God to vindicate His people</p>

Table 5. Psalm 124: God's presence serves as assurance of deliverance

Scripture Reference	<p>Gen 6-9 Ps 91:3 Ps 118:25 Isa 12:3 John 7:37-38 Rom 8:31 1 Pet 1:3-9 Rev 7:9-10</p>
Contexts for Use in Worship	<p>Song to remember and celebrate God's acts of deliverance Song of confidence that God is the source of our salvation Song to remind God's people that our 'enemies' cannot prevail with God at our side Song to celebrate freedom from the trap of the enemy (the power of sin)</p>

Table 6. Psalm 125: The good and upright who trust God will experience the peace of His protection

Scripture References	<p>Matt 5:6 Matt 5:14-16 John 8:12 1 Pet 3:14-16 Rev 18:20, 21b</p>
Contexts for Use in Worship	<p>Song to renew our trust in God Song to encourage God's people to seek their security in Him Song to encourage the Church to be a strong witness in righteousness even when they are under a wicked rule Prayer for God to intervene with the evildoers among the covenant community Prayer for God to reward the righteous Song/prayer for times of political uncertainty</p>

Table 7. Psalm 126: God brings restoration and joy when He frees His People

Scripture References	<p>Gen 12:9-10 Exod 12:35-36 2 Kgs 24:12-16 Ezra 3:10-13 Ezra 6:1-12 Isa 43:19-21 Isa 45 Jer 32:44 Jer 33:7 Jer 52:28-30 Matt 5:4 Rev 7:17</p>
Contexts for Use in Worship	<p>Prayer for hope in captivity. Song about the hardship of “sowing seeds of the gospel” to the world and hope for the future harvest that God will bring Song of great joy and thanksgiving for deliverance and restoration Song of the future restoration when God dwells among His people in eternity</p>

Table 8. Psalm 127: God’s people can trust God, who is present in human endeavors

Scripture References	<p>Gen 2:1-3 Lev 23:39 Deut 33:12 2 Sam 7:1-17 2 Sam 12:25 1 Kgs 8:56 Neh 13:26 Eccl 1:3, 14, 17 Eccl: 2:11 Eccl: 2:22-25 Zech 14:9-11 Matt 6:25-34 Prov 10: 22 Prov 23: 4-5</p>
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Table 8 continued

Contexts for Use in Worship	<p>Song to acknowledge God’s control and provision over the lives of the faithful</p> <p>Song to acknowledge that children are part of God’s blessing</p> <p>Song about the vanity of life and work outside of God</p> <p>Song to highlight the importance of God-given rest</p> <p>Song to encourage those who are driven by career ambitions and materialism</p> <p>Song to give thanks to God for the reward that He gives to His people for their work</p> <p>Song to remind us that God is also at work in our human endeavors</p>
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Table 9. Psalm 128: God blesses those who fear and obey Him with abundance and prosperity

Scripture References	<p>Deut 28:1-5</p> <p>Matt 5:3-10</p> <p>Matt 6:9-11</p> <p>Matt 6:25-34</p> <p>John 10:10b</p> <p>Phil 4:19</p>
Contexts for Use in Worship	<p>Song to remind God’s people to fear Him and to be faithful in walking in His ways</p> <p>Song to be thankful for the blessings that we have from God, especially family, children, food, and long life as a result of fearing and walking in His ways</p>

Table 10. Psalm 129: The righteous God frees His people from their enemies

Scripture References	<p>Mic 3:12</p> <p>Mic 4:1-5</p> <p>Matt 5:10</p> <p>Col 1:11; 2:15</p> <p>1 Pet 3:12, 14,16</p> <p>Rev 7:14</p> <p>Rev 12; 13; 20:7-15</p>
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Table 10 continued

Contexts for Use in Worship	<p>Song to remember how God has delivered His people from oppression in the past</p> <p>Song of confidence that the enemies of God’s people will be put to shame</p> <p>Song to praise God who fights and vindicates His people</p> <p>Song that describes how those who hate God’s people will eventually lose</p>
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Table 11. Psalm 130: In God, there is hope for forgiveness and an end of darkness

Scripture References	<p>Ps 42:7</p> <p>Isa 21:6-12; 60:1-3</p> <p>Jonah 2:3</p> <p>Col 1:13-14</p> <p>Rev 20:7-10; 21:25; 22:5</p>
Contexts for Use in Worship	<p>Prayer to express the repentance of sins and find assurance of forgiveness</p> <p>Song about the steadfast love of God</p> <p>Song to remember the height and breadth of God’s mercy</p> <p>Song to express waiting and hoping in the LORD and anticipate the future dwelling with God</p>

Table 12. Psalm 131: There is contentment and satisfaction in the presence of God

Scripture References	<p>Gen 3:4-6</p> <p>Exod 33:14</p> <p>Matt 6:33</p> <p>Matt 11:28</p> <p>Heb 4:9-11</p> <p>Rev 21:4-6</p>
Contexts for Use in Worship	<p>Song to encourage humility and contentment in God</p> <p>Song addressing issues of prideful ambitions and worldly desires</p> <p>Song about freedom to enjoy being in God’s presence</p> <p>Song that points to our rest in the eternal presence of God</p> <p>Song that describes God like a mother</p>

Table 13. Psalm 132: God has chosen to have a covenantal relationship with His people, dwell among them, and bless them holistically

<p>Scripture References</p>	<p>2 Sam 6, 7 2 Kgs 8:19 1 Chr 15:11-15, 16-24; 27; 28:2, 5-7 2 Chr 6:41-42; 7:17-22 Ps 99:5 Isa 66:1 Ezek 37:26-28 Matt 5:1-11 Matt 11:28 Luke 1:68-69 Rev 7:13-14 Rev 19:8 Rev 21:3</p>
<p>Contexts for Use in Worship</p>	<p>Song to celebrate God’s covenantal relationship with Israel and with the Church Song about the sovereign rule of God over His people and looks forward to the future establishment of His reign Song that describes God’s promises when He dwells with His people Song to encourage the Church to place God at the center of life and walk in obedience to His Word</p>

Table 14. Psalm 133: God’s dwelling place brings the blessing of unity

<p>Scripture References</p>	<p>Exod 30:22-33 Lev 9:22-24 Jer 18:14; 31:24 Hos 14:5 Zech 8:12 Matt 5:9 John 17:20-23</p>
<p>Contexts for Use in Worship</p>	<p>Song to celebrate the unity of God’s covenantal community Song that describes how the unity of the Church is abundant and refreshing Song to encourage the Church to be peacemakers for the world</p>

Table 15. Psalm 134: As God’s people worship Him, He will bless them with His glorious presence

Scripture References	<p>1 Chr 9:27, 33; 23:13, 28-32 Lev 26:3-13 Num 6:22-27 1 Kgs 8:1-2 Isa 2:3 Zech 14:9 2 Cor 6:16 Heb 12:22 Rev 14:1; 21:3; 22:4</p>
Contexts for Use in Worship	<p>Song to worship and bless the LORD Song to understand the significance of the Aaronic blessing, especially looking towards the Church’s final dwelling place with God May be used not only as a closing of worship but also as a start of worship Benediction: Ps 134:3</p>

Advantages of Psalms Guided Worship

Similar to the Psalter, the Sunday worship liturgy often demonstrates a range of affect and movement.¹⁵ There is the element of praise and lament, thanksgiving, the confessing of sins, the attitude of humility, and the expression of hope and trust in the Lord. The themes and patterns found in the Book of Psalms are themes and patterns that can be explored and developed in the context of our worship liturgy.¹⁶ The themes and patterns in the Psalms of Ascents echo throughout the rest of the psalms. The advantages of psalms guided worship are:

¹⁵ John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 56.

¹⁶ Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 62.

1. Psalms guided worship involves both the corporate and personal aspect
2. Psalms guided worship reinforces the identity of God's people
5. Psalms guided worship expresses disorientation that leads to a reorientation of faith
6. Psalms guided worship expresses the dynamics of lament, thanksgiving, and praise
7. Psalms guided worship celebrates God's restoration and strengthens hope for the future
8. Psalms guided worship reminds the people to put their trust in God in every circumstance.
9. Psalms guided worship brings various Biblical themes to worship.
10. Psalms guided worship helps people understand the progression of God's redemptive plan
11. Psalms guided worship helps to bring a Biblical (O.T. and N.T.) focus and perspective to our worship
12. Psalms guided worship guides worshippers in the internal posture of coming before God's presence by framing our worship moments with the words of the psalms.

The fact that these psalms are most likely used in the context of a liturgical procession in the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles is a strong biblical reason for their application to our worship contexts. In Ephesians 2:19-22, Paul reminds us that we, the Church, are now the 'temple' where God dwells in the Spirit.

Worship Planning Checklist for the Use of Psalms in Worship

These are the questions that pastors, worship leaders, musicians, worship planning teams, and church leaders need to consider when using Psalms in worship:

1. How does the Psalm connect to the sermon?
2. If the Psalm is the sermon's main text, how can the Psalm be used in other sections of the service?
3. What important information about the Psalm might enhance the congregation's understanding of the Psalm?
4. What is the best way to present the Psalm that best captures the meaning of the Psalm?

5. How can unfamiliar terms or phrases in a Psalm be made clearer to the congregation so that they do not become a hindrance to the effort of using the Psalm in worship?
6. Should certain parts of the Psalm be used, or the entire Psalm text be used at once?
7. How can the worship leader maintain the balance between the theological and the devotional aspects of the Psalm?
8. When using certain paraphrases of Psalms, how can the paraphrasing be as close as possible in meaning to the original Scripture text?
9. How can the congregation learn to sing new tunes to psalms without too many difficulties?
10. How can worship leaders and pastors help their congregation to understand the significance of using Psalms in worship?

CHAPTER 4

THE USE OF PSALMS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INDONESIAN CHURCH

Indonesia is a country with hundreds of ethnicities and languages. Throughout the country's history, diversity in society had always influenced its politics. Thus, the national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, and the national ideology *Pancasila* serve to remind its citizens that amidst their languages, there is one common language, and amidst their ethnicities, they have one nationality. This ideology reflects the secular and pluralistic outlook on the function of the various religions and the diversity of the Indonesian people.¹ Per this ideology, it is important to have a belief, and it does not matter which religion as long as it is one of the main religions 'legally' accepted by Indonesian law.

More than 80 percent of the population in Indonesia are Muslims. However, many Christians can be found mostly in large cities like Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, and Malang. Buddhism exists mainly among the Indonesian Chinese, and Hinduism is active in the eastern region of Java and the island of Bali. Smaller religious sects continue to thrive, mostly in rural and remote areas.

A Brief History of Religions in Indonesia

Due to its history as a maritime and trading center, various religions have characterized Indonesia's identity throughout history. In the first century, Hinduism from India spread to Indonesia through the maritime trade routes. Hindu kingdoms flourished

¹ Laurens de Rooij, "Islamic Identity in the Secular Environment of Post-Colonial Indonesia," in *Religious Transformation in Modern Asia: A Transnational Movement*, ed. David W. Kim (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2015), 202.

in a variety of places. Later in the third century, Buddhism spread through traders from China and India. From the sixth and seventh centuries onwards, Buddhist kingdoms dominated the islands.

There has been some evidence of Nestorian Eastern Christianity present in Indonesia in the seventh century. Several sources reported Christian communities during the period of the seventh century onwards to exist in different parts of the archipelago, especially Sumatra and Java.² It is unclear as to when exactly Islam arrived in the archipelago. However, it is clear that the first Islamic kingdom was established in Aceh through trade relations with Islamic countries from the thirteenth century onwards. Historical accounts suggested a plurality of Islam present in Indonesia, brought about by travelers from the Middle East, Persia, Bangladesh, and India.³

The Portuguese arrived in the Flores and Timor region for trade and brought Catholic Christianity in the sixteenth century. In the early seventeenth century, the Dutch succeeded the Portuguese colonial rule in the archipelago, and Dutch missionaries brought in Dutch Reformed Christianity. Protestantism thus started in the seventeenth century. The Indonesian Church slowly grew in size and diversity amidst various challenges from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. These religious periods in the country's history significantly influence its political, social, cultural, and religious environment.

Tribal Religion in Indonesia

Java is home to almost 150 million people. The 49,535 square miles island is Indonesia's center for government, education as well as commerce. It is located between Sumatra island and the island of Bali. Two main ethnic groups are indigenous to the

² Saphir Athyal, ed., *Church in Asia Today: Challenges and Opportunities* (Singapore: Asia Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1996), 315.

³ Rooij, "Islamic Identity," 199.

island: Sundanese and Javanese. Java attracts other ethnic groups from all over Indonesia as it is the most developed region in Indonesia. Many Chinese Indonesians also reside here and, although considered a minority group, they own the majority of businesses on the island.

An ancient and longstanding worldview in Java permeates all aspects of life called the *kejawen* (Javanism). This philosophy of life includes mythology, cosmology, theology, anthropology, sociology, metaphysics, and ethics.⁴ It is a combination of primitive mysticism and ancestral worship with Hinduism-Buddhism or Islamic principles. This *kejawen* is so embedded in the society that Islamic principles and practices in Java have a strong tendency for mysticism. An example of this would be to go to the local dukun (shaman) for success in marriage or career while keeping up with five times a day Islamic prayers to Allah. It is not uncommon for Javanese Christians to do the same. Niels Mulder gave a detailed description of this and concluded: “This much is certain, the *kejawen* philosophy of life fosters a religious attitude, mysticism, and self-centeredness, while at the same time it devalues expectations about an after-life, institutionalized religion, and the fulfillment of the latter’s religious obligations.”⁵

Tribal religions such as *kejawen* exist in other parts of Indonesia and translate into systems of rules and expectations within society that need to be obeyed to receive salvation. There is no clear boundary and separation between the ancestors, gods/goddesses, animals, and human beings in this indigenous worldview. In Christianity, God the Creator is Sovereign over His creations. In indigenous religion, humankind can perfectly fulfill the wills of the gods and ancestors and achieve perfection. In Christianity, no one can perfectly obey and therefore need a Savior.

⁴ Niels Mulder, *Inside Southeast Asia: Religion, Everyday Life, Cultural Change* (Amsterdam: Pepin Press, 1996), 45.

⁵ Mulder, *Inside Southeast Asia*, 47.

Salvation is only by grace alone. When Christianity comes into the picture, a syncretism is formed with these indigenous beliefs.⁶

In Indonesian society, indigenous beliefs, to varying degrees, have influenced the way people think, how they view themselves in relation to the society, how they interpret dreams, life events, and natural disasters, how people in a community relate to one another, etc. Aside from indigenous beliefs, two other major forces influence the dynamics of Indonesian society: religion and modernity. Sometimes these three forces fall in conflict with each other, but the inter-relationship between these forces is very complex; each has a role in the evolution of Indonesia's socio-economic, religious, and political system.⁷

The Indonesian Church in the Islamic Context

Since Christianity entered Indonesia through colonization, there had been much tension between Christians and Muslims. Although the Dutch Reformed missionaries started mission work, the primary interest of the Dutch trading company was to make a profit, so evangelism was not the main priority. The Christian Dutch people had often looked down upon the Indonesian Muslims and labeled them as “less civilized.” The years of being oppressed to make profits for the “Christian” trading company have had a lasting impact on how Indonesians view Christianity. From 1811-1816, Indonesia was briefly governed by British rule before returning to the Dutch government. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles gave the Baptist Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society permission to enter Indonesia for mission work. However,

⁶ Th. van den End, *Ragi Cerita 1: Sejarah Gereja di Indonesia 1500-1860* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1980), 14-17.

⁷ Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, “Modernitas, Agama dan Budaya Nenek Moyang: Suatu Model Masyarakat Indonesia,” *Setia: Jurnal Teologi Persetia* 1 (2001): 50-51.

the missionaries were disappointed as there were no converts on the island of Java.⁸ Often, religion was used by VOC, the Dutch Trading Company, for political benefits; for example, during the Dutch rule, mission organizations were invited to work in certain targeted areas with the hope that if the people were Christianized, they would be likely to be less rebellious toward the VOC.⁹ During the Dutch colonization period, which lasted about three centuries, the religious segregation between Christianity and Islam has resulted in lingering bitterness, suspicion, and distrust.

Suffering is commonly experienced by Christians in Indonesia. Believers have lived among people of different religions for centuries. It is common for Christians to live among the Muslims, the Hindus, and the Buddhists. Since Christianity is still a minority, with more than 80 percent of the population are Muslims, there is constant pressure on the minority. Political injustices, mockings and tauntings from the society, church burnings, and threats of being disowned by the family are just among the experiences that the Indonesian Church goes through for bearing the name of Christ.

How do the Indonesian Christians react to the constant pressure? Some have taken the attitude of self-pity, feeling sorry for the suffering that they could not avoid. Some resort to hiding their religious identity and try to ‘blend in’ and ‘go with the flow.’ Others remain passive or even pessimistic about their situation.¹⁰ It is a natural reaction for Christians who are being persecuted for being primarily concerned with their security than being spurred to fulfill the Great Commission. However, despite the constant pressure, the Indonesian Church is growing steadily. By the grace of God, it has withstood the various turmoil and bloody confrontations. Testimonies of how God has

⁸ Kees de Jong, “Dari Perpisahan Kolonial ke Perjuangan Nasional Bersama,” *Gema Teologi* 36, no. 2 (October 2012): 231.

⁹ Jong, “Dari Perpisahan Kolonial,” 230.

¹⁰ Bong Rin Ro, ed., *Christian Suffering in Asia* (Taiwan: Evangelical Fellowship of Asia, 1989), 107.

preserved the persecuted Church continue to reinforce the commitment of its members to keep the faith and hold on to God’s promises.

The Use of Psalms in Indonesian Worship Contexts

In October 2020, I launched the Survey of the Use of Psalms in Indonesian Worship Services, and it received 109 responses. The respondents belong to churches of the following denominations/synods:

Table 16. List of denominations represented by respondents

Presbyterian (liturgical)	HKBP (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan)
Presbyterian (blended)	GPIB (Gereja Protestan Indonesia Barat)
GKI (Gereja Kristen Indonesia)	GKY (Gereja Kristus Yesus)
Reformed	GBI (Gereja Bethel Indonesia)
Pentecostal	GSRI (Gereja Santapan Rohani Indonesia)
Evangelical (liturgical)	Bethany
Evangelical (blended)	Mennonite
Evangelical Reformed	GKPI (Gereja Kristen Protestan Indonesia)
Reformed Presbyterian	Orthodox
Interdenominational	Methodist
Charismatic	Lutheran
Bethel	Catholic
Baptist	GKRI (Gereja Kristus Rahmani Indonesia)
Reformed Baptist	REC (Reformed Exodus Community)

These churches represent various theological emphases, liturgical backgrounds, languages, musical styles, and ethnicities. The results of the survey are as follows:

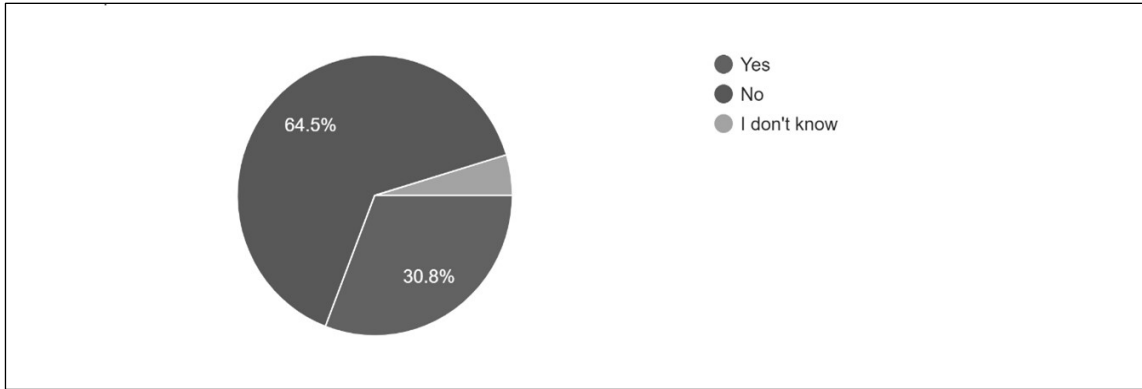


Figure 1. Percentage of churches with psalm-singing tradition

Although 64.5 percent of the churches in the survey do not have any specific tradition of Psalm singing, 30.8 percent have some form of Psalm singing tradition. The churches with Psalm traditions belong to the following denominations/synods: Presbyterian GKI, Evangelical Reformed, Bethany, GSRI, Orthodox, and the Catholic. Most of the Psalm tradition churches express various meaningful ways of how Psalms influence the dynamics of worship. However, one-fifth of this group claimed that Psalms do not have any impact on their worship.

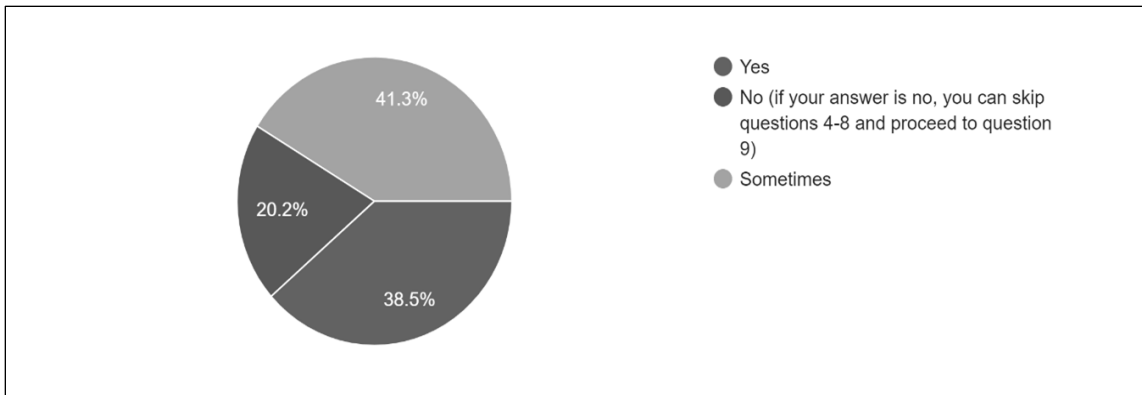


Figure 2. Percentage of churches that use psalm texts in corporate worship

More than 20 percent of the respondents claim that Psalms are not used in the worship service. These churches come from the following denominations/synods: Pentecostal, Evangelical, Reformed, Presbyterian, Baptist, HKBP, GKI, GSRI, GBI, Mennonite, and GKRI. It is interesting to note that none of the respondents from this group express the necessity or desire to incorporate Psalms into their worship, although other areas of improvements in worship are mentioned. More than half of the group are satisfied with their current worship service.

From the pie chart above, one can see that majority of the respondents, 79.8 percent, use Psalm texts either regularly or occasionally. Two-thirds of this group gave positive feedback, while one-third reported that the use of Psalms made no difference to their worship service. Here are some of the positive responses:

1. Reading about the psalmists' struggles helps to put our present struggles in perspective. We can bring our struggles and emotions before God as a church through the Psalms, knowing that He listens, cares, and walks alongside us.
2. Psalms help to focus our minds on God in worship and encourage believers to live in holiness.
3. Psalms help worshippers to express themselves in worship.
4. Psalms give us a model for expressing praise and prayer before God.
5. The poetry of Psalms guides the congregation to love His Word, repent from sins, give assurance of sins, and praise God.
6. Psalms remind us of the greatness of God and lift our hearts to worship Him.
7. Psalms bring us closer to God and each other.
8. Psalms is a special meeting place between God and His people. We approach Him with praises and laments.
9. Psalms bring worshippers into the various seasons of life. There is a time for weeping, a time for hope, a time to confirm promises, a time for praising and singing.
10. The responsorial reading of Psalms helps to encourage congregation participation.
11. Psalms contain important elements in Christian worship such as a call to worship, confession of sins, assurance of forgiveness, praise, benediction, etc.

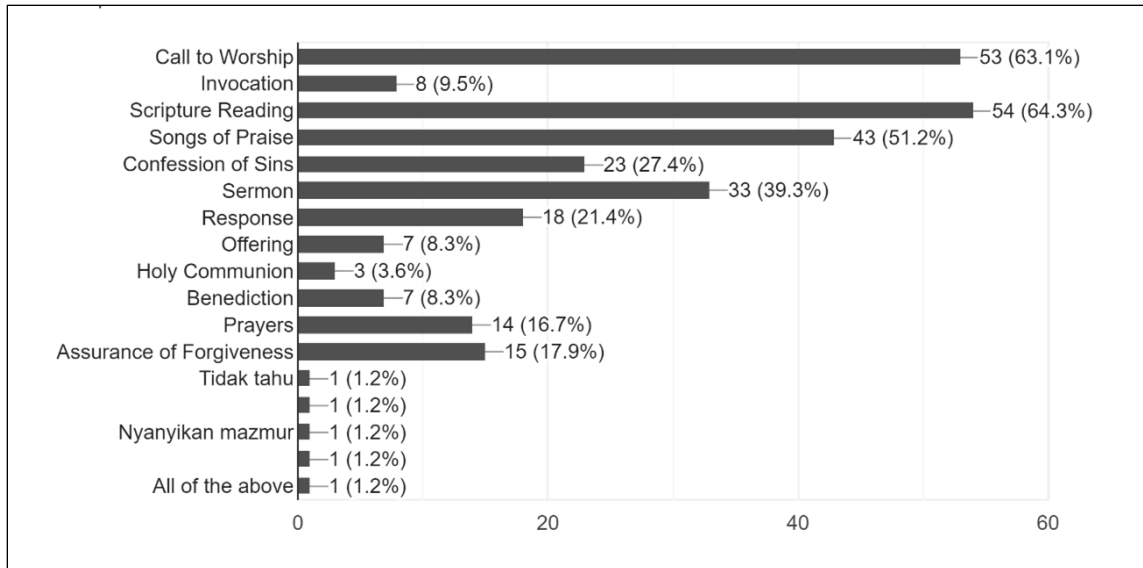


Figure 3. Frequency of the use of psalms in worship elements

Psalms are used in most parts/elements of the worship service. Certain parts such as Benediction, Response, Prayers, Holy Communion, Offering, and Confession of Sins can benefit more from reading various psalms texts.

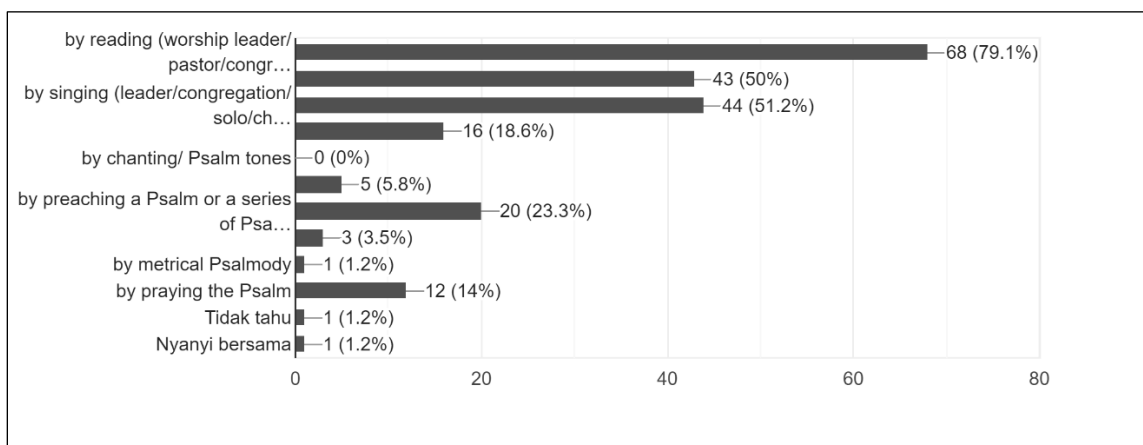


Figure 4. How psalms are being used in corporate worship

Reading/responsorial reading and singing/responsorial singing are the most common ways Psalms are used in services. 23.3 percent of respondents state that Psalms are also being included in sermons, although not regularly. Psalms are also included in the prayers of 14 percent of the churches. There is no evidence of any chanting of Psalms.

Compared to singing the Psalms, reading Psalms is still the preferred way of including Psalms in worship. This is understandable because teaching the congregation to sing different Psalms each week would be a major challenge. If Psalms are to be sung more in worship, there needs to be a way to do this with the congregation more effectively than relying only on the singing of cantor/choir.

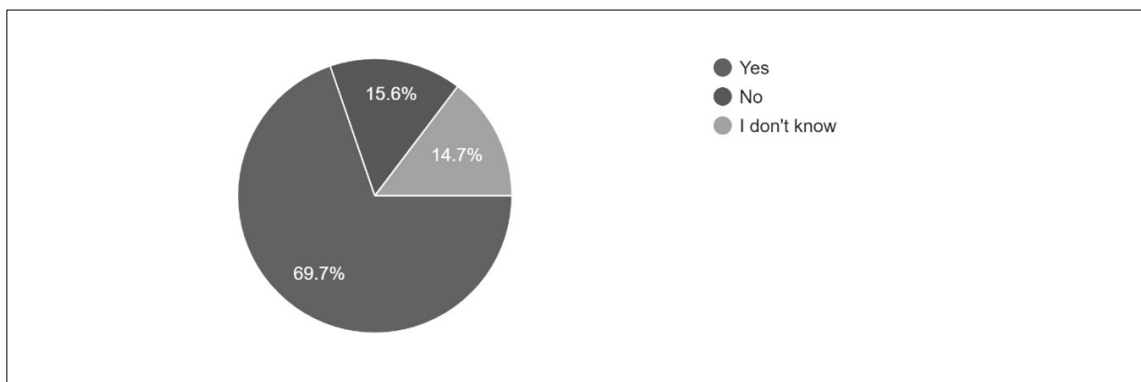


Figure 5. Percentage of churches that have used Psalms of Ascents

It is encouraging to discover that 69.7 percent of respondents are familiar with Psalms of Ascents through worship or sermons. This research will attempt to suggest more ways of using the Psalms of Ascents in the worship service.

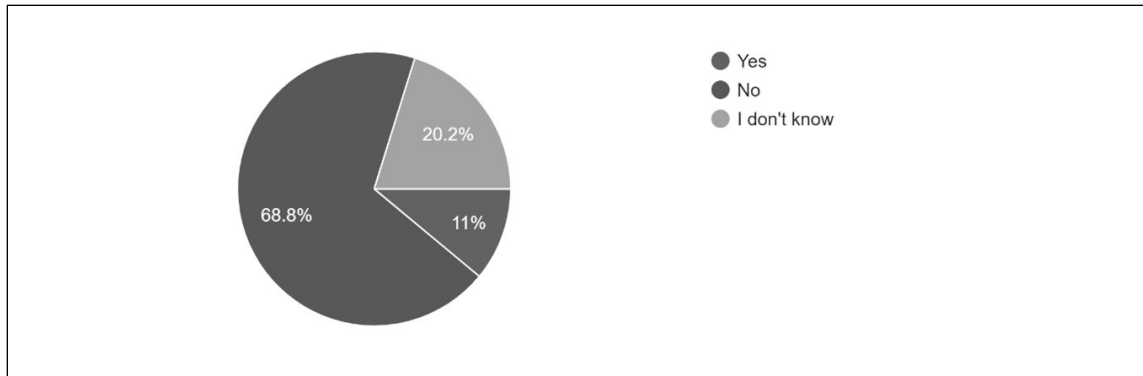


Figure 6. Percentage of respondents who have encountered challenges in incorporating Psalms in worship

Eleven percent of respondents articulated that they have faced challenges in incorporating Psalms in worship. The reasons for these challenges are:

1. Difficulty in applying the Psalms according to their original contexts
2. Limitation to the personal expression of worship
3. Lack of congregational understanding of the significance of Psalms in worship.
4. Lack of teaching from the church leadership to show how Psalms can be used in corporate worship.
5. The Church does not feel the Book of Psalms is an important part of worship.
6. The congregation does not know how to sing Psalms
7. Lack of resources in studying more about Psalms
8. Although the GKI denomination has published their psalm tunes for all the psalms in the lectionary, the songs are not easy for leaders and congregation to learn. Since different psalms are used each week, they have to learn new tunes every week.
9. Problems in translation versions in bilingual services (Indonesian and Mandarin)
10. Difficulty in connecting a Psalm with the topic of the sermon or the monthly theme.
11. Lack of skilled cantors to sing the Psalms and teach them to the congregation.
12. Difficulty in understanding the metaphors in Psalms
13. Lack of connection to the Psalms.

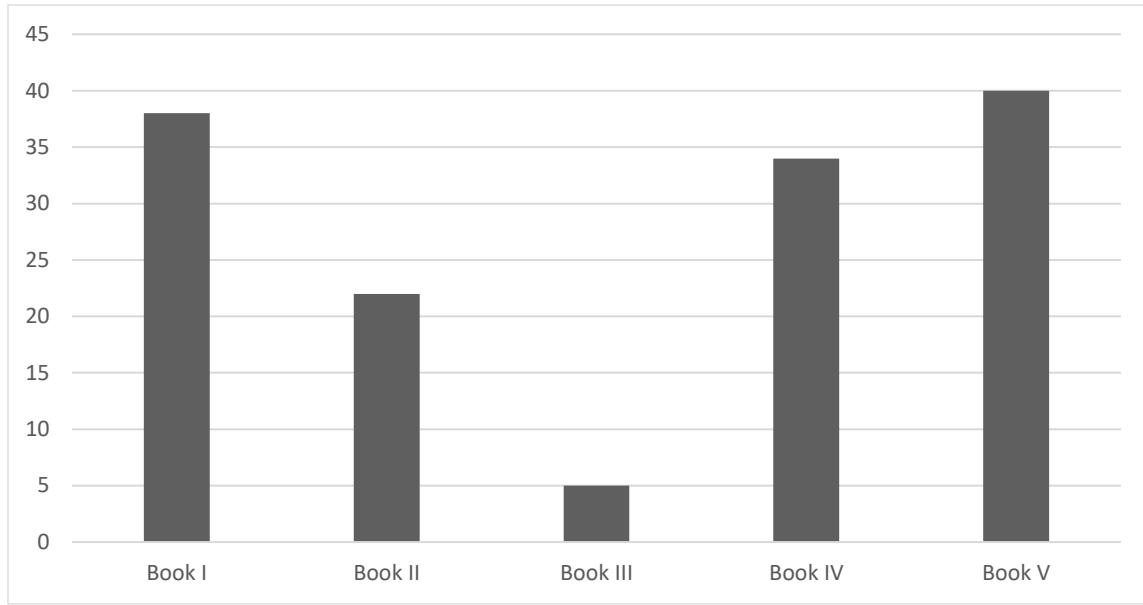


Figure 7. Commonly used psalms in worship

When respondents were asked to write the psalms commonly used in their worship services, the responses reveal that Psalms from Book I, IV, and V are the most frequently used.

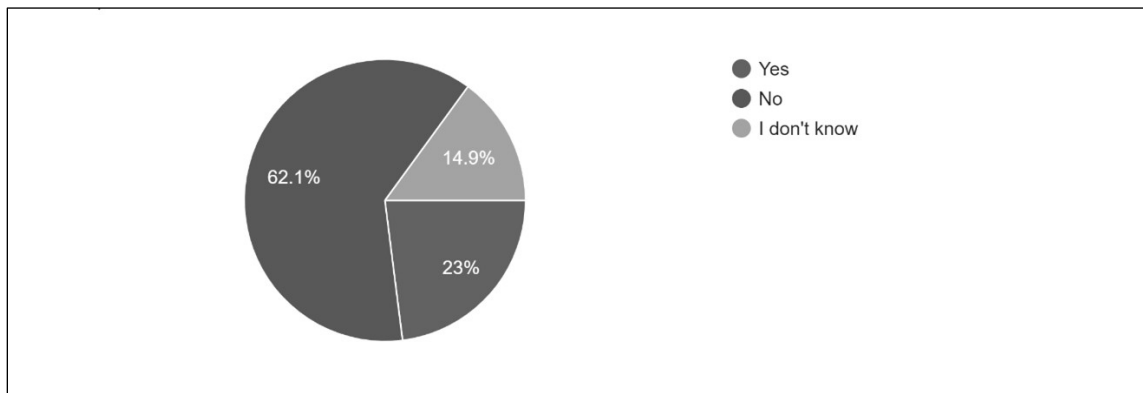


Figure 8. Openness to other ways of using psalms in worship

The majority of respondents are not open to other ways of using psalms in worship. Reading and singing the psalms are the two most popular psalm texts in the worship service.

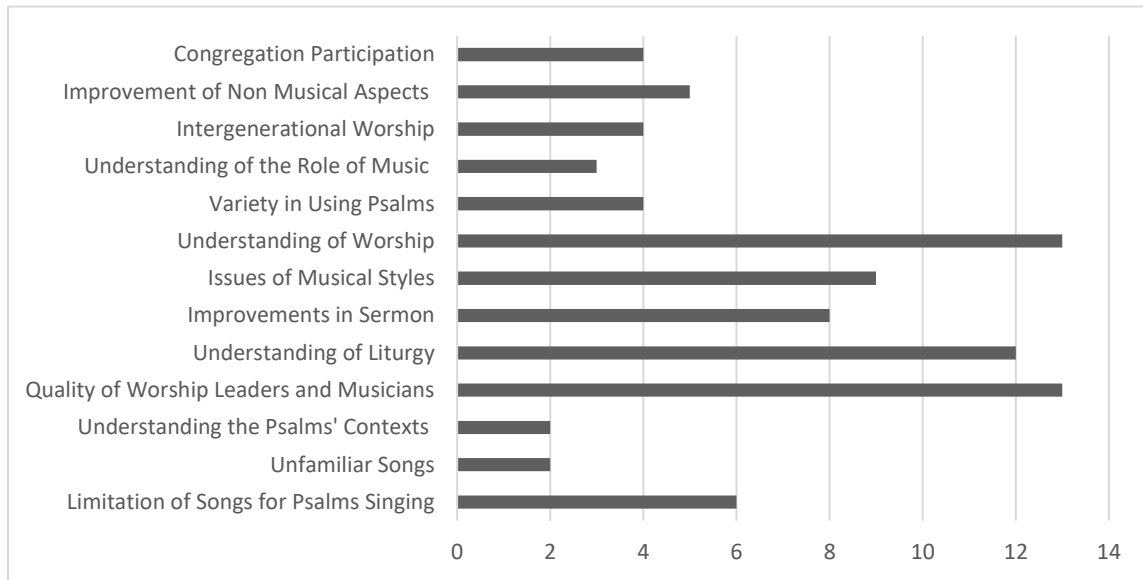


Figure 9. Observed areas for improvements in worship

Understanding the psalms' contexts did not score high as an area for improvement in worship. It is one of the lowest concerns. There are more concerns for the limitation of songs for singing psalms and the lack of variety in using psalms. It is interesting that although most respondents use psalm texts either regularly or occasionally, only a few express the need to understand them better.

Psalms of Ascents in the Context of the Indonesian Church

Just as the psalmist in Psalm 120 has suffered in his hostile environment of *Meshech* and *Kedar*, the Indonesian Church has lived among hostile neighbors and experienced slander and oppression. Just like the psalmist, the Indonesian Church is wary of living among people who hate peace and need to look to God as a source of protection

from all harm (Psalm 121). Indonesian Christians need to look upon God for His mercy. (Ps 123) They have had more than enough contempt and scorn. Despite the years of ups and downs, God has preserved His Church; He has been on their side. He has not let the enemies rip the people apart. God has delivered His people again and again. Psalm 124 is a reminder to the Indonesian Church to thank Him and that He is on their side. The people of God need to see their victory in Him even while suffering and being persecuted.

Psalm 125 describes the stability of those who trust in God. He surrounds them like the mountains surround Jerusalem. This psalm affirms God's faithfulness and protection to the faithful. The wicked will not rule over the righteous. Psalm 125 also gives a warning to those who turn aside to crooked ways. This warning is necessary for the Indonesian Church to maintain its integrity even under a corrupt government and be a strong witness to the community of other religions.

The message of the Psalms of Ascents is also about divine blessing for the faithful and obedient. Psalms 126, 127, and 128 describe the various blessings. Those who are faithful will receive a blessing. There is a promise of God's protection, in Psalm 121, 124, 125, and 129. God will vindicate the Indonesian Church from those who hate them. Psalm 130 reminds the Church that there is plentiful redemption for those who repent of their sins. The nation's culture of corruption often penetrates and destroys the Church from the inside. The call for humility and contentment in Psalm 131 warns the Indonesian Church against competitive ambitions for expanding their denominational influence.

The LORD has chosen to dwell in His Church and fulfill His promise to the people with whom He has made a covenant (Ps 132). The Indonesian Church can sing and rejoice in their privilege and look forward to dwelling eternally with Him. The description of 'brothers dwelling in unity' in Psalm 133 is certainly a vision the Church

longs for. This is a much-needed goal for the Indonesian Church. Finally, Psalm 134 reminds the Church to praise and bless the LORD and receive the blessing from God.

Recommendations to Improve the Use of Psalms in Indonesian Corporate Worship

For Indonesian churches with psalm-singing traditions, here are some suggestions to improve congregational psalm-singing.

1. For Indonesian churches with psalm-singing traditions, psalm guided worship is an alternative way to integrate psalms meaningfully into the worship design. In psalm guided worship, psalms take the central place in corporate worship, and the psalms' message can be understood.
2. For worshippers in churches with psalm-singing traditions who feel that psalm-singing has become just a routine, psalm guided worship can be implemented to give variety to the routine while placing the psalms as central to the corporate worship.
3. Psalms of Ascents can be used in specific parts of the worship service such as Call to Worship, Benediction, Response, Prayers, Holy Communion, Offertory, Confession of Sins, and Assurance of Forgiveness, as these are areas that were shown in the study to be less connected with psalms. Psalm 130 for Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness, Psalm 121, 124, 131 for Response, Psalm 134 for Call to Worship of Benediction, Psalm 121, 123 and 124 for prayers, Psalm 122 for Call to Worship, Psalm 128 for Offertory, Psalm 130 and 133 for Holy Communion.
4. Praying, chanting, singing metrical psalms are among the lowest of methods of using psalms in worship. Praying the psalms would be the easiest for a congregation to try as the words of psalms are prayerlike. The Egyptian Hallel psalms can be used as prayers of praise. Chanting can be done according to the Indonesian traditional music melodic patterns. Singing metrical psalms may not be suitable in countries where song lyrics are not always written in poetic meters. If singing the psalms is too difficult for a congregation, it is better to start with reading and praying.
5. The Bible studies or sermons on the psalms are essential in introducing the importance of the Book of Psalms. Churches who face certain challenges in making psalms a part of their worship may need to understand the message of the psalms first. The canonical reading of these psalms may help to show their relevance to understanding the rest of Scripture. Imageries and metaphors in the psalms need to be better understood through a diligent study of the Old Testament. Studying the psalms will also help tremendously in connecting its message with the sermon message.
6. As most churches feel most comfortable with the reading and singing of the psalms, the next recommended step would be to pray the psalms. Psalms 123, 130, and 131 are great examples of how psalms can be used both as individual prayer and also as corporate prayer.
7. The third book of Psalms is understandably the more difficult psalm collection to integrate into the New Testament worship. Further studies of these psalms are needed.

8. The survey shows that the use of psalms in worship did not score high as an area that needs improvement. It is hoped that this research will bring more awareness and motivation for churches to think about the role of psalms in our worship.

For churches with neither past nor present singing of psalms, several things can be recommended.

1. Psalms can be introduced in worship as benedictions, spoken introduction to hymns or songs, the Call to Worship, or simply as a psalm of response. The key to introducing psalms to worship is to introduce them with a clear connection to the worship so that the congregation understands the message of the psalm.
2. Psalm-guided worship can be easily implemented in these churches. Again, the key is to introduce the message of the psalms clearly within the context of worship.
3. Reading the psalms can be accompanied by singing the same psalm with a melody that is not complicated and in a range that can be sung by most of the congregation. It would be easier for the congregation to accept when the musical style of the psalm fits the general musical style used in worship. A contemporary setting of the psalms may not be suitable to introduce to a strictly traditional church.
4. Psalms need to be preached in the pulpit or studied in the Bible study groups of the Church.
5. If the church has a choir, have them sing the psalms as musical offertory and as the Introit, song of response, benedictions, or other parts of the service.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

In this chapter, I evaluate the ministry project in light of its purpose and goals while reflecting on the theological and personal implications for the teaching and worship ministry in Indonesia.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this ministry project was to discover the biblical and theological significance of the Psalms of Ascents and to provide suggestions for their use in worship for the Indonesian Church. At the beginning of the project, I used the spiritual journey or pilgrimage theme for the Psalms of Ascents, as the psalms were widely interpreted as being sung by pilgrims going annually to Jerusalem for the three festivals. As Jerusalem is situated on an elevated geographical location and the Temple itself was situated on high ground on the Temple Mount, the heading of the psalms, *shir ha-ma'alot*, was interpreted as describing a journey ascending to Jerusalem and the temple sanctuary. However, earlier translations of the headings in the *Septuagint* and the *Vulgate* point to the understanding of “steps” or “degrees” and their use in the temple cultic rituals. This understanding is correlated with the rabbinical accounts and writing of the Church Fathers. In my study of each psalm, I have found many more theological connections between Psalms of Ascents and the Feast of Tabernacles. Therefore, my project took on a different turn, and I rewrote certain portions of my second chapter. The concept of spiritual pilgrimage has circulated in the monastic circles from the fourth century onwards. Although the journey/pilgrimage theme may be extracted, I would argue that it is not the main theme of the psalms. There is a greater and more important

theme which is the restoration and renewal that comes from God dwelling among His people. This is shown through the significance of the Feast of Tabernacles, which points forward to the future reality of the Church's dwelling with God in the new heaven and new earth.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

This ministry project has three main goals. The first goal was to assess how psalm texts are used in the worship contexts of select Indonesian churches to identify areas for improvement. This goal was fulfilled through a survey of the use of psalms which was accessed online by 109 participants from various denominations in Indonesia. The results of this survey show not only how the psalms were used in Indonesian worship contexts but also the participants' attitudes and understanding of the psalms in general. The survey was extremely helpful in identifying ways to improve the use of psalms in worship.

The second goal was to write a Bible study curriculum for the expositions of the Psalms of Ascents to be taught to the students/congregation. Although this curriculum has not been tested in the ministry context due to its geographical location, it is being evaluated by Indonesian professors of Old Testament (the evaluation forms are included in the appendix). The curriculum was written so that congregations will know about the biblical contexts of the psalms and understand the rationale for the psalms guided worship. The process of writing the curriculum has taught me so much about how the Book of Psalms is connected to the other Old Testament and New Testament books.

The third goal was to give recommendations for how the Psalms of Ascents may be used in worship based on the result of the survey. The psalm guided worship is recommended as a way for churches to use psalms according to the content and message of the entire psalm in the corporate worship. The message of the psalm is placed at the center of the worship design. The congregation can be guided in their worship by the

psalms. The congregation can pray through the whole psalm in a relevant way. The information from the survey has helped me to assess how the psalm guided worship is able to be implemented as a solution to some of the problems revealed by the survey.

Strengths of the Project

The first strength of this ministry project lies in pushing me to dig deeper, look at the translations of the Hebrew, compare different translations, read canonically, discover more about the Old Testament history and theology, and explore the different types of readings of the psalms. It has not been an easy process, but it has been worthwhile. It has also led me to the realization of the connections between the Jewish festivals and psalms.

The second strength that this ministry project has is the information gathered through the survey. The survey revealed various positive ways that churches are using psalms in their worship. The survey also revealed several areas that needed improvement, such as using psalms as prayers. These areas for improvement give opportunities to think creatively about different solutions. I consider the areas for improvement as a strength because they are opportunities for growth. Praying the psalms in various contexts with understanding can be a meaningful way of introducing psalms in corporate worship. The survey encouraged me to think more about the solutions to these areas of improvement.

The third strength of this ministry project is the psalm guided worship. In essence, it is designing worship based on the message of the psalms rather than using psalm texts to support a theme-based worship design. A study of the psalms helps me to use psalms in a worship design that connects theologically to other passages in the New Testament. The psalm guided worship can be implemented to address some of the issues presented in the survey.

Weaknesses of the Project

The first weakness of this project is the geographical distance between me and my ministry context. This geographical distance has prevented me to directly apply the curriculum to the Indonesian students/congregation. The application of this ministry project will be made sometime after the completion of this project.

The second area of weakness in this project is my lack of training in Old Testament exegesis. However, this has not discouraged me from this project; rather, it has motivated me to study more and equip myself more in the study of God's Word.

The third weakness of the project is a certain lack of resources for congregational songs in Indonesian churches that would support the psalms guided worship. I resorted to using a combination of Indonesian and English songs. When I implement this project in Indonesia, I will need to make changes in the choice of songs according to the different contexts.

What I Would Do Differently

After evaluating the project's purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses, there is one thing that I would do differently if I were to replicate this ministry project. The one thing I would do differently is to have a ministry context to evaluate that is geographically closer. This would enable me to test the Bible study curriculum and observe the changes that the curriculum may bring. The impact of the application of the psalm guided worship based on the Bible study curriculum would have been observable. Having a local ministry context with an actual congregation would also help me think more about contextualizing and integrating the psalm-guided worship into the congregation's weekly worship design. I hope this will help others who are interested in implementing similar projects in their own contexts.

Theological Reflections

Through the process of this ministry project, I have learned to see much more from the psalms than before. The simple words of the psalmist can carry deep theological meanings. The psalms help me to learn the development of God's redemptive plan from the Old Testament to the New Testament. This ministry project connects the Psalms of Ascents to the development of the Feast of Tabernacles as a theological thread that runs through the Scriptures. The study of this collection of psalms led to understanding the continuity between God's dwelling place first in heaven, then on Mount Sinai, the tabernacle, the Most Holy Place in the Temple, in Christ, the Church, and ultimately in the new heaven and new earth.

The study of these psalms has also given me a new perspective on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in light of the temple context. Thematic parallels can be drawn from the psalms and the Sermon on the Mount, especially in the Beatitudes. The themes of the kingdom of heaven, covenant, blessings, and peace/*shalom* are among the theological themes that can be found in both the psalms and the Sermon on the Mount. These thematic connections help to bridge the message of the psalms, in this case, the Psalms of Ascents, to the New Testament church as the people of the new covenant. The Church is the 'already but not yet' establishment towards the future new heaven and earth in Revelation. Each believer, as part of the Church, is the dwelling place of God. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount expounds on the 'ideal' witness of the New Testament Church as people of the new covenant and, most importantly, as a place where God the Holy Spirit dwells.

Psalm guided worship places psalms central to the worship of the Church but also gave many ways to expand the direction of worship to other parts of Scripture. Each psalm can be sung in a variety of contexts in the New Testament worship. The context of the entire psalm is important to understand the message of the psalm. Taking certain

psalm texts out of the psalm's context may seem like a good way of incorporating psalms into modern worship, but we may lose much of the overall psalm's message.

Personal Reflections

I am completely humbled by the richness of His Word, and I am more convicted in placing Scripture as central in our congregational singing to revitalize our worship services. As worship is a central theme in the psalms, the centrality of psalms in Christian worship should be nurtured. Whether read and sung in corporate worship or read in personal worship, the words of the psalmist now become the voice of God's people, that is, everyone who is united in Christ. I am eager to study the rest of the Book of Psalms and excited about what each psalm can teach us.

Conclusions

It is unfortunate that there has not been a wealth of resources for psalm-singing in the Baptist church tradition. Many resources for psalmody came from other church denominations such as the Presbyterian, Reformed, Reformed Presbyterian, Episcopal, Catholic, and Orthodox. There is a great need for resources devoted to psalmody for the Baptist Church. To lose the psalms in our worship is to lose the 'heart of Scripture' and as according to Augustine, "the voice of the Church as the Body of Christ."

This ministry project is an attempt to address the challenge of the psalms for this generation and the next. It is often said that psalms are like hidden treasures waiting to be reclaimed. Many believers believe that the Book of Psalms is precious for their worship and devotional life, although the language and the meaning of the psalms do not easily connect with them in today's culture. The psalms call for an intentional time for reading, studying, meditating, and praying to discover their potential for worship and the spiritual life of the Church.

May we be like the psalmist, long to dwell in the house of the LORD and gaze upon the beauty of the LORD (Ps 27:4), thirst for God as a deer pants for flowing streams

(Ps 42:1-2), behold His power, and glory in the sanctuary (Ps 63:2), be satisfied with the goodness and holiness of His Temple (Ps 65:4), finds joy in His dwelling place like a sparrow in her nest with her young (Ps 84:2-4), and sing Him a new song and rejoice in the King! (Ps 149:1-2).

APPENDIX 1

A SURVEY OF THE USE OF PSALMS IN INDONESIAN WORSHIP SERVICES

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to discover how select churches in Indonesia use psalm texts in their worship services. This research is being conducted by Sylvia Santoso for the purpose of collecting background data for a Doctoral ministry project. The result of the survey will provide valuable insights on the current practices of psalm singing in Indonesian churches which will be used to support and complement the teaching of Psalms in Christian worship, especially in the Indonesian context. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time your name will be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time. By completing these questions, you are giving your informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Directions: Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. Please briefly describe your church's denominational background, style of worship as well as the hymnals or psalters used in your congregation. *Harap jelaskan secara singkat latar belakang denominasi gereja, model tata ibadah, dan buku nyanyian yang biasa digunakan setiap minggu.*
2. Is there a specific tradition of Psalm singing in the history of your church?
Apakah gereja Saudara memiliki latar belakang tradisi menyanyikan Mazmur?
 Yes, there is a tradition of Psalm singing
 No, there isn't a tradition of Psalm singing

___ I don't know

3. Does the church's Sunday worship service use texts from the Psalms? *Apakah ibadah hari Minggu di gereja Saudara menggunakan teks dari Kitab Mazmur?*

___ Yes, Psalms are used regularly

___ No, Psalms are not used at all (if your answer is no, you can skip questions 4-8 and proceed to question 8)

___ Sometimes Psalms are used

4. If Psalm texts are used in your service, in what parts of the service does your church use them? (you may choose more than one) *Jika teks Mazmur digunakan dalam tata ibadah gereja, teks tersebut digunakan di bagian tata ibadah apa saja? (boleh memilih lebih dari satu pilihan)*

___ Call to Worship

___ Invocation

___ Scripture Reading

___ Praise

___ Confession of Sins

___ Sermon

___ Response

___ Offering

___ The Lord's Supper

___ Benediction

___ Prayers

___ Assurance of Forgiveness

___ others

5. How does your church use Psalm texts in the service? *Bagaimanakah cara teks Mazmur digunakan di dalam ibadah?*

___ by reading (worship leader/pastor/congregation)

___ by responsorial reading (leader and congregation)

___ by singing (leader/congregation/soloist/choir)

___ by responsorial singing (solo/choir and congregation)

___ by chanting/ Psalm tones

___ by designing the service around a Psalm

___ by preaching a Psalm or a series of Psalms

___ by poetic reading of the Psalms

___ by metrical Psalmody

___ by praying the Psalm

___ others

6. According to your observation, how do the Psalms influence the dynamics of your worship service? *Menurut pengamatan Saudara, bagaimana teks Mazmur*

mempengaruhi dinamika dalam ibadah?

7. Please give some examples of the commonly used Psalm texts in your church context. *Harap berikan beberapa contoh teks Mazmur yang biasa digunakan dalam ibadah gereja.*
8. Has your church ever tried reading or singing the Psalms in a different way than what the congregation is accustomed to? (for example, with dramatized reading, chanting, or Taize style) *Pernahkah gereja Saudara mencoba membaca atau menyanyikan Mazmur dengan cara yang baru seperti dengan drama, gaya chant, atau lagu Taize?*

Yes, we have tried different ways of using Psalms

No, we have not tried a different way of using Psalms

I don't know

If you answer yes to question 8, please describe the congregation's response? *Jika jawaban no.8 Yes, harap jelaskan tanggapan jemaat.*

9. Has your church ever used texts from Psalms 120-134 (Psalms of Ascents) in the worship service or sermon? *Pernahkah gereja Saudara menggunakan teks dari Mazmur 120-134 dalam tata ibadah atau kotbah?*

Yes, we have used the Psalms of Ascents

No, we have not used the Psalms of Ascents

I don't know

10. Have you encountered any challenges in incorporating Psalms in your worship service? *Pernahkan Saudara mengalami kesulitan ketika hendak menggunakan Mazmur dalam ibadah gereja?*

___ Yes, I have encountered challenges in incorporating Psalms

___ No, I have not encountered challenges in incorporating Psalms

___ I don't know

If you answer Yes to question 10, please elaborate on the challenges of using Psalms in worship services. *Jika jawaban no. 10 Yes, harap jelaskan mengenai kesulitan yang dihadapi ketika hendak menggunakan Mazmur dalam ibadah.*

11. In your opinion, what area of your church's worship service needs to be improved or developed? *Menurut pendapat Saudara, apa yang perlu diperbaiki atau dikembangkan lebih lanjut dalam ibadah gereja Saudara?*

APPENDIX 2

PSALMS OF ASCENTS BIBLE STUDY CURRICULUM

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 1

Passage: Psalm 120 (ESV)

1. In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me.
2. Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue
3. What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue?
4. A warrior's sharp arrows, with glowing coals of the broom tree!
5. Woe to me, that I have sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!
6. Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace.
7. I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war!

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to not be hopeless or helpless when we face hate and slander
 2. Cognitive: to know that God is the source of *shalom* and able to deliver us
 3. Behavioral: to call out to God in our distress, wait upon Him, and be peacemakers for Christ.

Teaching Idea: We can express our lament to God when we face hate and slander, wait upon Him as the source of *shalom*, and imitate Christ as peacemakers.

HOOK

Have you ever been a victim of hate or slander? Has anyone ever lied about you? Have you ever had people opposing you? As a Christian, you may sometimes feel like everyone, and everything is against us. The psalmist also lived in a world where he faced lies, slander, and opposition against him. He laments to God and longs for peace.

Psalm 120 gives us an insight and guide to help us in this situation.

BOOK

The psalmist begins with a lament. He called out to YHWH in his distress, and YHWH answered him. The first verse of this psalm tells the readers multiple things: the psalmist's helplessness, his realization of his need for help, his personal relationship with the Lord, his hope in the Lord to come to his aid, his trust in the wisdom and power of the Lord, and his experience of receiving the Lord's answer. He finds confidence in his answered prayer.

Verses two and three describe the distressing situation the psalmist is in. He is a victim of lies or slander. He is suffering because of the falsehood made against him. In verse three, the psalmist assures the source of the deceitful tongue of divine retribution. God will repay those with deceitful tongues with the punishment that he deserves. Verse four gives the answer to the question in verse three. The sharp arrows and the glowing coals of broom figuratively express divine punishments. The broom is a type of plant whose bitter root gives a charcoal that glow and retains heat for a long period of time. The sharpness of the warrior's arrow and the lasting heat of the broom tree reflect the severity of the divine punishment and retribution. In Revelation 20:10, God will cast punishment to the devil for deceiving the nations by throwing him into the lake of burning sulfur.

Meshech and *Kedar* are geographically distant from each other. The word *Meshech* is used to denote the people who are living between the Black and the Caspian seas. There is another Semitic tribe called Mesekh, who are Arameans who live on the border of both Israel and *Kedar*. The latter may be the one being referred to. *Kedar* is a word used to denote a nomadic Arab tribe who was known for living in tents. They live in the northwest Arabian desert and are known to be archers. The Israelites lived among people of other nations who do not worship YHWH and may be hostile towards them.

In verse six, there is a tension of the psalmist living too long among those who hate peace. This tension arises from dwelling in a place where there is no peace, and there is no presence of God. The psalmist is reminded of this tension with the world around him and anticipates the peace that can only be found in YHWH. This reality stands in contrast with the ritual of ‘dwelling in booths’ in the Feast of Tabernacles, where the Jewish community remembers YHWH’s presence, faithfulness, and provision.

Verse seven expresses the dilemma that often describes man’s struggle with sin. Even when the psalmist desires peace, his spoken words do not reflect peace. The words ‘that are for war’ probably be filled with anger, self-defense, desire for revenge, accusations, and perhaps even cursing. The psalmist cries out to YHWH for justice in his anger. He does not seek revenge or retribution with his own hands.

Psalm 120 portrays the hostility of the psalmist’s world. This hostility is very much a part of the believer’s world today. This is a psalm that believers in any century can identify with. The longing for peace echoes throughout every generation. The peace that the psalmist is longing for is not just to be free from conflict but a holistic concept of *shalom* that only YHWH can give. The biblical concept of peace or *shalom* contains a deep and broad range of meanings, including health, wholeness, and completeness.

Jesus came to bring reconciliation and peace between God and man. He has become the peacemaker through His sacrifice on the cross, and His disciples are called to share the message of peace to the rest of the world. Matthew 5:9 calls for us to be peacemakers: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.” To be a peacemaker means to imitate Christ. To be a peacemaker means bringing reconciliation even when faced with persecution. Matthew 5:11-12 says, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Jesus goes on in Matthew 5:44-45, “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that

you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven....” Like the psalmist, we may see no lasting resolution to terror and conflict in this world, but we know that when Christ comes, He will be the source of peace.

LOOK

Are you harboring anger and bitterness toward someone or people who have hurt you in the past? What are some of the ways that you relate to what the psalmist is saying? How does knowing the fact that Christ is the source of *shalom* help us deal with our present situation on earth?

TOOK

Pray to the LORD to deliver you when you find falsehood and conflicts around you. The LORD will deliver His people from those who deceive the faithful and are hostile to them. Just as the psalmist called to the Lord and longed for the peace that only He can give, pray that you will also turn to Him in your distress and find *shalom*. Lastly, pray that you become peacemakers for His kingdom.

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 2

Passage: Psalm 121 (ESV)

1. I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?
2. My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.
3. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
4. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
5. The LORD is your keeper, the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
6. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
7. The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
8. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to feel secure and confident in faith and trust in God
 2. Cognitive: to know that He who created heaven and earth will be faithful to keep you.
 3. Behavioral: to put our trust in Him in our times of trouble

Teaching Idea: We can feel secure and confident as we look to God our Creator and Keeper as our source of protection in times of trouble.

HOOK

Have you ever encounter challenges or dangers while traveling? (Share a story or personal experience). Most of you probably have experienced situations that caused fear and anxiety. Pandemics, persecution, and terrorism constantly occur, no matter where we are. Psalm 121 teaches us how to move from our lament to confidence by looking to God as our source of protection.

BOOK

For the Israelites, traveling by foot or on the back of an animal is anything but easy. On their journeys from one place to another, the Israelites go through uneven terrain, sweltering deserts, and mountains. There is danger from the Middle East climate with soaring high temperatures during the day and low temperatures at night. There is danger from robbers who might hide in the hills and attack unsuspecting travelers. There might even be danger from wild animals. Psalm 121 moves the feeling of distress in psalm 120 to the feeling of confidence and optimism. This confidence and optimism come from faith and trust in YHWH, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Did the psalmist look up to the mountains in fear or in hope? Mountains were believed to be dwelling places for the gods, so the psalmist could be looking toward the mountains in hope of YHWH. The mountains may also hide dangers or present difficult obstacles for the psalmist. Travelers need divine protection, and just as modern travelers pray for safety and buy travel insurance before starting on a journey, the ancient pilgrims

seek their protection from the keeper of Israel. He who watches over Israel is always vigilant. When the people rest at night, He keeps watch over them as the LORD is not like other pagan gods who need to eat and rest. He protects His people every step of the way.

Verse six can seem a little odd for modern readers. The possibility of sunstroke is a real threat to ancient travelers walking during the heat of the day. The Israelites also have a belief that the moon can have a harmful effect on their physical and even mental health. YHWH's protection continues from day to night. A shade is very necessary and comforting for a traveler. The comparison of divine protection with 'shade' reminds the people of Israel of how they were led by the pillar of cloud, which provided shade when the LORD brought them out of Egypt (Exod 13:17-22). He also commanded them to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles/ Feast of Booths/ Sukkot by living in temporary booths for seven days (Lev 23:42-43). The booths were called *sukka*, from which the feast got its Hebrew name. The word *sukka* is derived from the same root that means 'to weave together', 'to cover with branches', or 'to form shade'

Succoth is the name of a place where the Israelites camped in after they left Egypt (Exod 13:20). The 'booth' is a significant symbol. As they celebrate this festival, the people also remember that YHWH dwells with his people. Revelation 7:14-16 reminds us that those who have come out of the great tribulation will stand before the throne of God, and He will spread his tent over them; the sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.

Verse eight reminds us that He will watch your coming and going both now and forevermore. This psalm celebrates YHWH, the Almighty Creator, to be the alert and faithful protector of His people. The Israelites remember how YHWH led and protected them in the wilderness after escaping from Egypt. Now believers can look to the future manifestation of His promises. YHWH dwelled among His people through the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit. Not only that, but He will

also make His dwelling throughout His heavenly kingdom on earth in the future.

This psalm celebrates YHWH, the Almighty Creator, to be the sovereign and faithful protector of His people. The Israelites remember how YHWH led and protected them in the wilderness after escaping from Egypt. Psalm 121 beautifully portrays the transcendence and the immanence of YHWH: The Maker of heaven and earth who will keep the psalmist's foot from slipping. As the Israelites make their journey through the desert, they may remember this psalm for assurance of the constant presence and protection of YHWH. Those who trust the LORD for protection find assurance that He will protect them from danger.

LOOK

What are some of the things that cause you worry or anxiety? Share some of the challenges that you faced as a Christian in the past. How has God protected you or answered your prayers? Share some of the concerns for the future (in the ministry context, mission field, family context, workplace).

TOOK

Meditate on God as the Creator and Keeper. We are secure because He will keep our going out and coming in. We rejoice with confidence and assurance that God is all we need. Our journey in this hostile world may be uncertain and full of challenges, but we can set our heart on the promise that we will someday enter the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem. He will walk with us every step of the way.

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 3

Passage: Psalm 122 (ESV)

1. I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!"
2. Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!
3. Jerusalem — built as a city that is bound firmly together,

4. To which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord.
5. There, thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David.
6. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! “May they be secure who love you!
7. Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!”
8. For my brothers and companions’ sake, I will say, “Peace be within you!”
9. For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to be glad to come and worship as a church in the presence of God
 2. Cognitive: to understand the significance of coming together as a covenant community to worship God as our source of shalom.
 3. Behavioral: to put importance in worshipping together in a community of believers where God dwells and leads His people in the Spirit.

Teaching Idea: We come with gladness to come and worship God as a covenantal people of God in Spirit and in truth.

HOOK

What is ‘church’ to you? What do you observe draws people to the church? What draws people into your church? Why do we go to church? For the Israelites, Jerusalem was the central place of worship. Psalm 122 emphasizes the importance of Jerusalem as the central sanctuary for God’s people. The earthly Jerusalem points ultimately to the heavenly Jerusalem. Before the fulfillment of the heavenly Jerusalem, we worship God not bounded by geography but in Spirit and truth.

BOOK

The pilgrim has arrived in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the city that unites the Israelites as a nation. Jerusalem was the center of their worship and festivals. Being in Jerusalem, the “city of peace,” reinforces and celebrates the Israelites’ identity as the people of God. The fifteen songs of the Psalms of Ascents suggest a time when the twelve tribes of Israel were united. Although the tribes of Israel were divided for most of their history, they were united under the rule of Saul, David, and Solomon. After the

death of Solomon, Israel was again divided into rival kingdoms. The reign of Saul to Solomon is the only period in Israel's history when the twelve tribes live in the Holy Land as a peaceful and united monarchy with common access to Jerusalem.

As the psalmist arrives, he admires the structure of Jerusalem, which is built with solid gates and fortresses. To the tribes of Israel, Jerusalem represented the authority of YHWH over them as a theocratic nation and a place to offer worship and thanks. YHWH is also recognized as a judge of the nation. In the Old Testament, Jerusalem takes the role of the 'city of God' where YHWH dwells, rules, and executes justice.

The prayers for *shalom* in verses six to nine are appropriate because of the meaning of Jerusalem (city of peace). This is the first psalm in the collection that was written by David. David, who did not live to see the completion of the temple, may have written this psalm in anticipation of this great moment. The desire for peace mentioned in Psalm 120 is found in Jerusalem, where Israel unites as a covenant community in the presence and rule of YHWH.

One of the significant elements of the Feast of the Tabernacles is the joyful gathering of His people. There is joy in the psalmist's heart as he comes to Jerusalem. Revelation 19:7 declares, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready." In the eschatological messianic age, the great multitude shouted before God in worship and celebration of the marriage of the Lamb to his bride, the Holy city of Jerusalem. The great white throne of judgment in Revelation 20:11-13 was set to pronounce judgment for the dead according to what they had done.

In the Gospels, John 1:14 connects the Temple with Jesus: "And the Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us...." Jesus spoke about the temple of his body in John 2:19-22: "...Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Not only does Jesus begin to take over the role of the Jerusalem Temple, but he also predicted its imminent destruction. "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with

hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands” (Mark 14:58). Jesus’ presence brought the presence of God on earth and ushered in the New Covenant. His earthly ministry replaces the role of the temple, and after his resurrection and ascension, God’s presence descended in the form of the Holy Spirit, making everyone who believes in Christ be a part of the temple. Each one of us as a believer is part of the Church as the dwelling place of God.

The Church is a community of the New Covenant that worships Him in the Spirit and truth. John 4:21-24 described the transition from temple worship: ‘Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” True worship no longer occurs at the Jerusalem temple or any other geographical place.

In Revelation 7:4-10, 144, 000 were sealed from every tribe of the Israelites, and a vast multitude of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne of God in worship. With palm branches in their hands, they proclaim salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb. Palm branches (*lulav*) are associated with the Feast of Tabernacles. The branches were shaken during the recitation of Psalm 118, especially in verse 25, “Save us, we pray, O Lord!” In Revelation, it is no longer a cry for salvation but praise for the salvation which has finally been given through the Lamb.

LOOK

Is there anything that hinders you from being a part of your local church? Have you found a church community that you can worship and belong in? How can you serve your local church? What does this passage teach us about the church? In what ways is

your church different from what is described in this psalm?

TOOK

Pray for your church community and its worship. Pray for the leaders of your church. Pray that your church community embodies the concept of *shalom* and be a strong Gospel witness to the community. We may sing this psalm with joy as we come to worship Him with our church community and anticipate the revealing of the heavenly city of peace. Spend some time in joyful worship with your group.

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 4

Passage: Psalm 123 (ESV)

1. To you, I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!
2. Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us.
3. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt.
4. Our soul has had more than enough of contempt of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

Aims 1. Affective: to be humble, hopeful, and dependent on God

2. Cognitive: to know that God listens and grants mercy to us

3. Behavioral: to lament to God when we experience contempt from the world

Teaching Idea: We can turn to God in humility, hope, and dependency to express lament to God when we experience contempt and scorn and know that He listens and grants mercy.

HOOK

Those who choose to live their lives without God may have the attitude of pride or arrogance. They love their life just the way it is, without God or any religion to

waste time on. Maybe you know people in your life who are like these. They do not like to waste time talking about God and certainly do not think they are sinners who need a Savior. They may speak words of contempt and scorn to Christians. Even if you have never encountered such a person, this is a generally widespread attitude of our world. This attitude is prevalent in the media, entertainment industry, literature, workplace, etc. Nonbelievers who had seen a negative testimony of a believer also might speak words of contempt or scorn to all Christians because they have been hurt.

BOOK

The first two verses of the psalm emphasize the ‘looking up’ to God. God declared that “heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool...this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at My word” (Isa 66:1). Psalm 24:3-4 sets the requirement for entering the Temple to be clean hands and a pure heart. “Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.” Matthew 5:8 reads, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The psalmist here places himself in a position of humility until God grants him mercy.

Psalm 123 paints a picture of one looking upward in humility, dependency, and hope. The first verse is an invocation of God, as the psalmist lifts his eyes toward YHWH, who is enthroned in the heavens. “To you I lift up my eyes, O You who are enthroned in the heavens!” (Ps 123:1). The psalmist compares this with two similes: like slaves looking to the hand of their masters and a maidservant looking to the hand of her mistress. Both slave and maidservant represent the lowly of the ancient Israelite society. They generally do not have any rights or freedom aside from those given by their masters or mistresses and rely on the master for provision and protection. The hand of the master or mistress symbolizes authority. The psalmist puts himself in the position of a slave. He

is totally dependent on YHWH. At the end of verse two, the singular first-person pronoun is changed to the first-person plural, indicating evidence that this psalm was used liturgically.

Verse three and four of this psalm expressed the response of the psalmist after looking upon the LORD seated on His throne. The psalmist cries out, “Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us....” This cry for mercy is later used in worship, *miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri*. When compared to the lament in psalm 120, this psalm does not end with an answer from God or any statement of assurance. Psalm 123 does not end with a high note, however it highlights the internal and external attitude of a worshipper who fixes his gaze upward toward God and waits upon Him.

They have had ‘more than enough of contempt and scorn’. Scriptures have described numerous instances where the Israelites had to face opposition from other nations. They have been enslaved for hundreds of years by the Egyptians, chased down by the Egyptian army before crossing the Red Sea, driven out of Jerusalem, and later exiled to Babylon.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matt 5: 7). Psalm 123 is a prayer for mercy. One of the roles of the Temple was to be the source of mercy, and the reason for this is the covenantal relationship between God and His people. The Church, as the new covenant community is called to be merciful because we have received mercy from Christ. In the eschatological messianic age, the Church will one day stand before the throne in heaven to see Him who sits on the throne and respond in worship (Rev 4).

LOOK

Do you have a family member, friend, or colleague who is opposing you for being a believer? How many of you can relate to that experience? Maybe you have a son or daughter whom you raised as a believer, and when he or she grows up, turn away from

God and break your heart. Take this time to share about them and pray for them. Encourage one another to wait upon God to deliver His people from the contempt of the world.

TOOK

Ask the Lord for His grace and mercy so that we can extend mercy and forgiveness to those who mocked and scorned us. Reflect on John 17:14-15: 'I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.' Spend time in worship.

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 5

Passage: Psalm 124 (ESV)

1. If it had not been the LORD who was on our side — let Israel now say —
2. If it had not been the LORD who was on our side when people rose up against us,
3. Then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us;
4. Then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us;
5. Then over us would have gone the raging waters.
6. Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth!
7. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped!
8. Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to be joyful and thankful that God is on our side
 2. Cognitive: to remember that God has delivered us from sin
 3. Behavioral: to give Him our praise and put our trust in God

Teaching Idea: We praise God and be thankful as we remember His acts of deliverance

and salvation and put our trust in Him.

HOOK

How do we know that God is on our side? When things in our life take a downturn, or when we feel like we can't catch a break, how do we know that God is still with us? Often when we feel discouraged, we feel that everyone and everything is against us. Psalm 124 reminds us of what the Israelites had gone through in the past. They did not have it easy. The psalmist reminded God's people that though their situation seemed bleak, God was their source of salvation.

BOOK

This next psalm could not be sung at a better time than after Psalm 123. In Psalm 123, the psalmist pleads for mercy and waits upon YHWH. Psalm 124 brings the Israelites to the past and to remember how YHWH has been on their side to rescue them from danger and from their enemies. Remembering what YHWH has done for His people in the past is an important element in our relationship with God. The Israelites celebrate Passover to remember how YHWH delivers them from slavery in Egypt.

The psalmist uses the flood imagery to picture the attack of the enemies. The flood imagery may originate in Genesis 6-9. The imageries speak of Israel's enemies as violent, powerful, raging, terrifying, and capable of utter destruction. In both Genesis and Psalm 124 passages, the water rages and sweeps over people (Gen 7:17-23; Ps 124:4-5). In both passages, God delivers from the flood (Gen 8:1-5; Ps 124:6-8). God made a covenant with Noah and his family (Gen 9) to promise that He shall not send a flood to destroy the earth.

Israel has won many battles, and all victories are attributed to YHWH, who is on their side. For the Israelites, the victories they sang about in this psalm may refer to victories over their 'physical' enemies, such as the Philistines. For the Christian, imageries in this psalm can be understood to be more than 'physical' enemies. There is a

greater 'enemy' who is more powerful, terrifying, and destructive, and that is Satan.

A 'fowler' is a hunter of birds or a bird catcher. A snare is a trap that can be in various forms that are used to catch and trap unsuspecting birds. The birds are usually sold in the markets or used for sacrifices. Verse 7 suggests a divine intervention that gives freedom from the trap of the enemy. Psalm 91:3 states, "For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler...". The escape from the 'snare of the fowler' was made possible because the LORD has broken the snare.

Psalms 113-118 (the Hallel) are chanted during the Feast of Tabernacles. The seventh day of the feast, known as the day of the Great Hosanna (*Hoshana Rabbah*), reveals this emphasis on salvation. 'Hosanna' comes from Psalm 118:25, "Save us, we pray, O LORD!..." On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7:37-38, Jesus revealed Himself to be the source of the living water, the source of salvation for those who believe in Him. His proclamation fits the context of the water-drawing ritual at the festival where water is drawn from the Pool of Siloam along with the recitation of Isaiah 12:3, "With joy, you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

This is a psalm that praises YHWH for His acts of deliverance in the past. The people celebrate the redemptive power of God in the past, which brings them assurance of the future. A parallel New Testament passage may be found in 1 Peter 1:3-9. All believers as the people of God are saved by the power of God through faith for salvation. The Apostle Paul asks the believers in Rome, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31). Revelation 7:9-10 described the great multitude crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." He who sits on the throne of God shall spread His tabernacle over them (Rev 7:15).

LOOK

This psalm is also our song. He is the source of our salvation. Reflect on how God has broken the bondage of sin in your life and set you free.

TOOK

Give praise to God for His acts of deliverance. Pray that we will be willing to submit to Him in our life, trusting Him and obeying Him for His grace is sufficient for us. God is on our side, and He has set us free.

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 6

Passage: Psalm 125 (ESV)

1. Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.
2. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore.
3. For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong.
4. Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts!
5. But those who turn aside to their crooked ways the LORD will lead away with evildoers! Peace be upon Israel!

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to renew our trust in him as the people of God.
 2. Cognitive: to know that in Him there is a strong foundation, security, righteousness, and judgment
 3. Behavioral: to seek our security in Him and to walk in righteousness.

Teaching Idea: As God's people, we need to trust Him, for He is our foundation and security and to walk in the way of righteousness.

HOOK

In the Austrian Alps, there is a castle called The Hohenwerfen Fortress, which was built in 1077. Since then, the castle has withstood wars and remained intact. Not once has it fall to its enemies. The Hohenwerfen Fortress remained secure until this day because it sits on a hill surrounded by the Alps. This reminds us of what Psalms 125 tells us about Mount Zion.

BOOK

Jerusalem is a city that is surrounded by valleys, plains, and hills. The hills that are in and surround Jerusalem are Mount Zion, Mount of Olives, Mount Scopus, Mount Ophel, Mount Herzl, Mount of Corruption or Mount of Offense, and Mount Moriah or the Temple Mount. Jerusalem itself is situated in the Judean mountains between the northern edge of the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. Although Mount Zion now lies on the south side of Jerusalem, it was not included in the city walls of the old city of Jerusalem until the time of the Second Temple. The imagery of the LORD surrounding his people, like the mountains surround Jerusalem, brings the assurance of security and protection. Just as the surrounding mountains provide security for Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds and protects His people.

In the third verse, the scepter of wickedness refers to authority or leadership that is morally corrupt. The 'land allotted to the righteous' most likely refers to the land which was promised to Abraham as an important part of the covenant between YHWH and His people. Being under a heathen leadership brings the pressure and temptation to be influenced by the heathen customs and practices that will challenge allegiance to YHWH.

From verse three onwards, the righteous and the upright are contrasted with the wicked and the crooked. In verses four and five, YHWH is asked to acknowledge and reward the upright. To those who turn to the crooked paths, YHWH will punish them by letting them go in their evil ways. The people of God need to follow the leadership of YHWH as a theocratic society even though they may live under a wicked ruler. The psalm ends with *Peace be upon Israel*, which might be for a liturgical purpose. Bringing back the concept of peace or *shalom* connects with the desire and call for peace in psalm 122.

When believers experience tragedies, hardships in life, or persecution that shakes them to the foundation of their faith, the only way to 'plant our feet back upon the

Rock' is to refocus and reorient our faith back to trust in Him. Trusting in YHWH is followed by walking in the ways of righteousness and not following with the influence of the wicked.

This psalm portrays the people of God to be like Mount Zion and Jerusalem. In Matthew 5:14-16, while teaching on the mountain, Jesus portrays the people of God to be the light of the world. "...A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." In the Mishnah, accounts of the Feast of Tabernacles included a description of temple illumination by four enormous lampstands. The enormous lampstands which lit up the city were set up in the Court of Women in the evening of the first day of the feast, according to rabbinic accounts. The enormous lampstands, each fifty cubits high, cast a light so brilliant that "there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of the *Beth he-She'ubah*" (*Sukk* 5:3). Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the Light of the world after the Feast of Booths (John 8:12). The Church now is the Temple of God with a call to hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt 5:6).

LOOK

People will try to achieve their security in many ways. For some, the security lies in how much money they have. For others, it is their job and career. For some students, it could be their grades. What do you put your security in? We need to put our security in Christ. Only He can offer true security in life. As we put our security in Him, do we have a hunger and thirst for righteousness and resist the temptations of sin around us? Can we hold on to our integrity amidst those who are unrighteous?

TOOK

Reflect on the things that would give you the most insecurity if they were

taken away. Pray that we always find our security in Christ and let our light shine for Him. Pray also that when our life becomes unstable, and we feel insecure, we find peace in knowing that the Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forevermore.

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 7

Passage: Psalm 126 (ESV)

1. When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.
2. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among nations, "The LORD had done great things for them."
3. The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.
4. Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb!
5. Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!
6. He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to rejoice in God's remarkable restoration
 2. Cognitive: to know that God is faithful in restoring His people with what they need in His time
 3. Behavioral: to trust God that He will bring restoration to His people

Teaching Idea: We can trust God, who is faithful, that He will bring about remarkable restoration to His people in His time.

HOOK

We know that we need to trust the Lord to provide for our needs. However, do we really believe that He knows exactly what we need? (Share a story of a specific way that God fulfilled a personal need). Psalm 126 tells of how the Lord brought His people out from exile and brought restoration in the promised land. The Israelites were in captivity for seventy years. At the right time, God led them back to their own land and fulfilled their needs in the most remarkable way.

BOOK

The historical background of this psalm has been explained in various ways. Many psalm scholars interpret Psalm 126 as a commemoration of one of the returns of the Babylonian exiles under the decree of Cyrus, the Persian emperor, in 538 BCE. In the sixth century BCE, King Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, and this event resulted in the Babylonian exile (2 Kgs 24:12-16). Jeremiah 52: 28-30 recorded that there were 4,600 people who were carried away into exile.

In Isaiah 45, there is a prophesy that states how YHWH will use a man named Cyrus in the deliverance of His people. In Ezra chapters one to three, the events of the return of the exiles are recorded. YHWH stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, in the first year of his reign to send out a proclamation throughout his kingdom for the people of God to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of the LORD. The first chapter of Ezra also recorded how the articles taken from the temple by King Nebuchadnezzar were brought out and given back to the exiles. These items numbered 5,400 articles of gold and silver. The people of Israel were also given more silver and gold, with goods and cattle by the people of Babylon for the rebuilding of the house of God in Jerusalem. This is strikingly similar to the account in Exodus 12: 35-36 when the Egyptians gave away silver, gold, and clothing to the Israelites before they left Egypt. The author of Exodus wrote that it was YHWH who gave the Israelites favor in the Egyptian's sight.

This freedom from exile is sometimes known as the second exodus. It was an act of God to bring redemption to His people. The first three verses of Psalm 126 celebrate how the LORD restores the "fortunes" of Zion. It was like a dream that came true, and they were filled with joy. Ezra 3: 10-13 captured the magnificent moment of joy when the builders finally laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD. The sound of

the people's shout for joy could be heard far away. Other nations who also returned to their homelands under the decree of Cyrus could witness the amazing turn of events and testify to the work of the God of Israel. Once again, YHWH brought redemption to His people and led them back to the promised land.

The building of the house of God was temporarily ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia. Ezra 6: 1-12 recorded how King Darius found Cyrus's decree in the archive stating the command to rebuild the house of the LORD and allowing the full cost to be paid from the Persian royal treasury. The animals, grain, wine and oil for sacrificial offerings were also provided for daily until the temple was finished. The LORD had restored the fortunes of Zion!

The fourth verse onwards expresses hope in the LORD that He will again bring restoration to His people just like He did in the past. Negeb is a dry region in the southern part of Judah (Gen 12:9-10). Although the region does have some rainfall throughout the year, it is common for flash floods to occur during the rainy winter periods. The streams of water would have brought much relief to the parched land. YHWH says that He will do something new, He will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert (Isa 43:19-21).

A significant feature of the Feast of Tabernacles is the water-libation ceremony. Every morning during the festival, water would be carried from the Pool of Siloam to the altar to be poured. Although this gesture later carries an eschatological meaning, to the post-exilic Jews, it was a prayer for rain for the next agricultural year. This water-drawing ritual is known as *simhat bet hasbo'eva* (Joy at the place of water-drawing). The immense joy that accompanied this ritual is expressed by dancing, singing, music, and even acrobatics.

Agriculture was an important part of Israel society. A good harvest provided the people with the food they needed to survive. Sowing seeds in a dry and parched land brings weeping and a desperate need to rely on divine intervention. Israel still had to sow

the seeds with tears and leave it to YHWH to bring in the harvest. YHWH has shown His faithfulness and deliverance to His people again and again in Israel's past. He will not forget His people or ignore their pleas. YHWH will bring the harvest and restoration to the land.

The harvest theme correlates with the celebration of the end of the agricultural year in the Feast of Tabernacles. The festival celebrates the abundance of the harvest and is a time of rejoicing and thanksgiving. The people enjoy the fruit of their labor after a year of physical work in the field. Just as sowing seeds in the field is hard labor, 'sowing' the seeds of the Gospel to the world often brings tears and weeping. The labor of sowing spiritual seeds will one day bring shouts of joy as the LORD brings the harvest of believers. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt 5:4). Revelations 7: 17 promises that the Lamb who sits on the throne will guide His people to springs of the water of life, and He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

LOOK

The Israelites experienced God's intervention in a remarkable way in this second exodus from exile. Just as God has brought the harvest and restoration for Israel, He will bring restoration and spiritual harvest to the Church. How can we participate in sowing the seeds of the Gospel to the people around us?

TOOK

Now we wait for His return. When God comes the second time, there will be an even more remarkable restoration and shouts of joy. How does knowing this affect our present attitude on earth?

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 8

Passage: Psalm 127 (ESV)

1. Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.
2. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.
3. Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.
4. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth.
5. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be out to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to not be anxious and be able to enjoy our work knowing that He provides and is in control and be grateful for God's blessing of children and rest without being anxious.
 2. Cognitive: to understand that children are God's blessings; to understand how God intends for us to view and enjoy our work; to understand that rest is His gift and His command.
 3. Behavioral: make God the center of your work and family life

Teaching Idea: We need to view our family and work from the Biblical perspective and have him at the center of our daily life.

HOOK

What drives you every day? What motivates you to do the things you need to do? People can be driven by many different motivations such as money, prestige, branded items, promotions, fame, popularity, self-glory, compliments, etc. In Ecclesiastes 1: 14, 17, Solomon described that living with these kinds of motivations is like chasing after the wind. It is vanity because you will quickly discover that it is a never-ending pursuit. Psalm 127 teaches us to see life from a perspective that is different from what the perspective of the world.

BOOK

Psalm 127 is attributed to Solomon. YHWH made a covenant with King David

in 2 Samuel 7:1-17 in which He will make a 'house,' meaning a royal line that would inherit God's kingdom forever. Although David expressed his desire to build a house for YHWH, YHWH did not approve and chose David's offspring, Solomon, instead to build a house (a physical temple) for YHWH. It is the YHWH who builds the house of David, which eventually points to Jesus Christ, who would sit on the throne forever.

The purpose of the building and living in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles is to remind the Israelites that YHWH provided and sustained them in the wilderness in the past and continue to trust in His providence. Believers also need to recognize that true security comes from God. No matter how cautiously a person lives in this world, ultimately, it is God alone who protects. Therefore, people must place their trust in him. YHWH will bring the ultimate security to the city of God when He comes to be the king over all the earth (Zech 14:9-11).

There is an overarching message of the providence of YHWH that applies to everyday life at work and in the home. Solomon ponders upon the futility of work: 'What advantage does man have in all his work, which he does under the sun?' (Eccl 1:3). 'Thus, I considered all my activities which my hands have done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun.' (Eccl 2:11). It is a gift of God for man to see the good in his work and enjoy it. 'There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?' (Eccl 2: 24-25). Without God in the picture, man struggles to find a deep sense of purpose and contentment in their work. Psalm 127 teaches the people of God to understand 'work' in a godly perspective.

The people of God are to trust that YHWH is in control, and therefore they can 'sleep' in peace. The first part of the second verse described the 'workaholic' man, but the second part of the verse states that YHWH will give sleep to his beloved. Rest is also a gift from God. He commands His people to honor the Sabbath. The cycle of work and

rest is designed by God for the good of man. Rest is a gift that enables man to live by faith and trust God for their well-being. Man sleeps, but YHWH neither slumbers nor sleeps (Ps 121:4).

The Feast of Tabernacles begins and ends with a rest from all labor (Lev 23:39). The first day and the eighth day of the festival shall be a solemn rest. Hebrews 4:1-11 connects the weekly Sabbath rest with the rest God offered Israel in the Promised Land. God gave rest to Israel during the reign of David and Solomon (1 Kgs 8:56). The Sabbath rest not only points back to the creation (Gen 2:1-3), it also points forward to God's ultimate rest. Christians are to rest each week in anticipation of the future rest when God makes His dwelling with His people forever (Heb 4:9; Rev 20:1-6).

Who is God's 'beloved'? At Solomon's birth, the LORD sent a message through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah" (2 Sam 12:25). *Jedidiah* means "loved by the Lord." Nehemiah 13:26 also uses the word *beloved* to describe King Solomon as "beloved by his God." Israel is often called "beloved of God" (Deut 33:12; Jer 11:15). God chose Israel as His beloved in order to set them apart for His divine plan to save the world through Jesus.

The message of YHWH's providence in the first two verses is again applied to life at home in verses three to five. In the original Hebrew text, it is written that sons are a gift and a blessing from God. In the Israelite social context, the Hebrew word for sons also represents offspring or children. However, sons in the Israel family play a significant role in protecting or defending the family. In the fourth verse, children are compared to the arrows in the hand of the warrior. This comparison can be puzzling to the modern reader unfamiliar with the ancient Israelite cultural context. Arrows are tools for defense, attack, or survival. The fifth verse speaks of the time when a man is in his later life, and he is blessed with his children. In the original Hebrew translation, it is stated that 'they shall not be put to shame when they speak with their enemies at the gate.' This is slightly different than the ESV version. The plural 'they' refer to the children of the man. The

children bring protection and perhaps also justice to the family.

Psalm 127 focuses on the order and involvement of YHWH in the human cycle of life. He is not aloof or distant from the concerns of our everyday life. Matthew 6:25-34 reminds us that our heavenly Father knows what we need and calls his people to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. We can trust in the LORD's provision and, at the same time, not neglecting our domestic responsibilities. Life at work and at home are set against an all-pervading divine perspective.

LOOK

How do you view your work? Do you have a tendency to be a workaholic? How do you view your family life? If you have children, how have they taught you to trust in the Lord? If you do not or are unable to have children, will you trust in the Lord in spite of your situation? Share and encourage one another to have Christ at the center of our family and work life.

TOOK

Develop a time for family worship with your children. Teach your children to worship God together and make Scripture and prayer a regular part of your family life. For those in the workplace, let God have control over your work. Make God a part of your work life, and do your work responsibly and as best as you can. The psalmist reminds us that sleep and rest is a gift from God. We can rest knowing that God knows our needs and is in control.

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 9

Passage: Psalm 128 (ESV)

1. Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!
2. You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.

3. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table.
4. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.
5. The LORD bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life!
6. May you see your children's children! Peace be upon Israel!

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to rejoice be thankful for what we have as blessings from God.
 2. Cognitive: to understand the blessed life that God gives to those who walk in His ways
 3. Behavioral: to appreciate the family, longevity, and being able to enjoy the fruit of our labor as part of God's blessings.

Teaching Idea: We can understand the psalmist's description of the blessed life that God gives to those who walk in His ways which points back to Him as the source of blessing and peace.

HOOK

We often use the word 'bless' in a casual way. When someone sneezes, we say, 'bless you!' We also say 'God bless you' and 'bless your heart' to friends or strangers. Do we fully understand this word, and do we think about where the blessing comes from? Most believers want to be blessed in life, but what does it mean to be blessed? The psalmist described the blessed life in Psalm 128.

BOOK

The theme of 'blessedness' continues from Psalm 127 to Psalm 128. The Hebrew word for 'blessed' can also be translated as 'happy.' The word for the blessing (like in Ps 1:1) can include the idea of happiness, but it has the basic meaning of the joy or bliss that comes from knowing that one is right with God and that the blessings are from heaven. 'Happy is everyone who fears YHWH and walks in His ways.' This fear is

a reverential fear which is shown through obedience to the His standards and commandments. He will be able to enjoy the fruit of his labor, which suggests that his work will be productive and fruitful. Agriculture was Israelites' main occupation, so 'the fruit of the labor of your hands' most likely be in the form of a good harvest. The Feast of Tabernacles is a time of celebration of harvest with thanksgiving and joy. Those who are faithful will be able to anticipate the LORD's blessings in the form of food, a growing family, and long life.

Comparing a wife to 'a fruitful vine' refers to her ability to bear many children. Fertility is often seen in the Old Testament as a sign of divine blessing. A literal translation from the Hebrew text says that 'your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the innermost part of your house,' which probably refers to the most private room in the house for the wife.

Olive trees are a common and significant plant in the ancient Mediterranean. The olive shoots sometimes grow around the trunk of the olive tree. The psalmist used this imagery to describe the children of the 'happy' or 'blessed' man. The seemingly ordinary existence of the family is a blessing from YHWH and should not be taken for granted.

Fertility and good crops are part of the blessings promised by God to the Israelites for their obedience (Deut 28: 1-5). This psalm highlights the seemingly ordinary things in life and even uses the most common imageries (vines and olive shoots) but lets the readers see their value afresh. Psalm 128 defines what happiness is for the people of God who fear Him and walk in His ways. The fear of God and obedience to Him should be the foundation of the Israelites' faith.

Zion and Jerusalem represent the dwelling place of YHWH. The temple in Jerusalem was the place of worship for the people of God, and so the blessing would come from the LORD's dwelling place. The prosperity of Jerusalem as the spiritual center of Israel is important for a theocratic society to continue to exist and grow.

The message of Psalm 128 can easily be mistaken to support the prosperity gospel. When we understand this psalm as having the characteristics of wisdom literature, we can see that just like other wisdom literature, Psalm 128 describes the kind of life that is peaceful and prosperous because of the presence of God. Those who fear the LORD and remain obedient will enjoy the blessings of provision, good family life, and long life.

There is also a redemptive-historical context to this psalm. God made promises to the people of Israel if they obeyed Him. These promises of blessing were like types and shadows of greater blessings that are to come. The blessing of food and family points the way to the greater things that God has planned and will provide for His people. These material blessings also serve to point the people back to God, who is the source of the blessed life.

LOOK

Obedience comes as a result of the reverential fear of the LORD. The LORD blesses those who fear Him and walk in His ways. Many Christians want blessings from God but forget the worship and obedience. Reflect on our worship and walk with God. Scripture study, prayer, worship, and fellowship with the body of Christ are important elements in nurturing our walk of obedience with God. Which area do you need to grow in? Share with your group. Share some of the things that God has blessed us with as a testimony.

TOOK

Spend time in worship. Be in awe at the majesty and glory of the LORD and reflect on the fact that worshipping Him requires us to walk in a life of obedience to His Word.

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 10

Passage: Psalm 129 (ESV)

1. “Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth” — let Israel now say —
2. “Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me.
3. The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows.”
4. The LORD is righteous; he has cut the cords of the wicked.
5. May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward!
6. Let them be like the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up,
7. With which the reaper does not fill his hand nor the binder of sheaves his arms,
8. nor do those who pass by say, “The blessing of the LORD be upon you! We bless you in the name of the LORD!”

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to be grateful for God’s acts of redemption
 2. Cognitive: to remember the oppression that God’s people faced in the past and how God has brought redemption.
 3. Behavioral: to ask for God’s judgment upon those who oppose Him and His people and proclaim His redemptive acts.

Teaching Idea: We remember and proclaim God’s acts of redemption for His people and ask Him to exercise justice upon those who are evil and oppose Him and His people.

HOOK

As God’s chosen people, Israel did not have a conflict-free history. What can we as God’s people learn from Israel’s journey? Psalm 129 encapsulates the agony Israel faced and the hope that God will prevail over its enemies.

BOOK

“My youth” refers to the earlier part of Israel’s history. Slavery, oppression, war, and suffering have characterized Israel’s history. The Egyptians were not the only nation to cause affliction upon Israel. The Amalekites also fought the Israelites. However, these nations had not prevailed. Later in Israel’s history, the Canaanites, the Philistines,

the Assyrians, and the Babylonians all have caused great pain and affliction upon Israel. When the Jews sing this psalm, memories of this oppression are represented in the first three verses. The first verse is repeated in the second, perhaps to emphasize the extent of the pain.

The third verse described the enemies' oppression like the plowers digging into the back of Israel. Plowing is a common activity in an agrarian society. Plowing the soil and making furrows are meant to prepare the land for planting seeds. The plower has to force the plowing tools to cut deep into the soil and tear the soil apart to create the furrows. The personification of Israel resulted in this excruciating imagery of 'cutting into my back.' When the prophet Micah accused Israel's false prophets and leaders of hating justice, he described that Zion would be plowed as a field, Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height (Mic 3:12). Micah then prophesied that in the latter days, there would be restoration for Jerusalem and its temple, nations will go up to Zion, and Zion will be the source of instruction, justice, and righteousness (Mic 4:1-5).

Verse four declares the righteousness of YHWH and declares His act of redeeming Israel. YHWH has 'cut the cords' that bound Israel to its enemies. Israel's enemies are labeled as 'haters of Zion' (verse five), and they will suffer shame and degradation. Shame and being turned backward are the things that Israel experienced from its enemies, but the enemies will soon suffer the same fate. Is the psalmist praying for revenge? The psalmist is praying for YHWH to exercise his justice upon those who are evil and oppose Him. Any nation or kingdom or people who oppose YHWH and His people will ultimately face judgment.

The psalmist compares the fate of Israel's enemies to be like grass on the housetops. On the tops of the Israelites' houses, there is little soil for grass to grow on. They are exposed to the heat of the day, which causes the grass to wither and die. The psalmist is saying that this grass will not grow high enough for a reaper to fill his hand

with the grass, meaning that the enemies should be destroyed before they can come to full strength. Verse seven and eight emphasized the fact that there will be nothing for the workers to harvest, and there will be no one who passes by and wish the workers a blessed harvest. Utter destruction will come upon the enemies of Zion. This imagery is a stark contrast to the shade of the booth or *sukka*, which is roofing made from branches of palms and leafy trees.

God has delivered His people again and again from their enemies in Israel's past. Remembering and celebrating God's protection in Israel's past is part of the purpose of the Feast of Tabernacles. We can be confident that He will continue to deliver His people in the future. Revelation 7:14 described the great multitude of people from every nation that came out from the great tribulation. There will be more enemies in the future who will oppose God and His people (Rev 12-13). Eventually, God will defeat His enemies and cast them in the lake of fire (Rev 20:7-15). "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:10). As the new 'Israel,' the Church will suffer persecution and suffering but let the assurance of God's victory helps us to be strong and faithful. Knowing that God has delivered His people time and time again gives the Church the confidence to face the various challenges on earth.

LOOK

We are living in the kingdom of God on earth. On this earth, Satan and his kingdom also are at work. This is not to say that everything bad that happens to God's people is because of Satan, but spiritual warfare is what God's people are up against in this world. Think about some of the ways God's people are being 'attacked' or 'tested' for their faith in the family, workplace, school, government, etc.

TOOK

Christ has won over the power of evil in the resurrection. Give thanks that God

has won the battle and will bring judgment to our ‘enemies’ and bring defeat to the work of the kingdom of Satan. Pray that God’s people put on the armor of God and fight against evil in the name of the Lord.

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 11

Passage: Psalm 130 (ESV)

1. Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!
2. O, Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!
3. If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?
4. But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.
5. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
6. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.
7. O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption.
8. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to long for God’s mercy and forgiveness in our sinfulness and have hope in His steadfast love.
 2. Cognitive: to know the assurance of forgiveness that God gives
 3. Behavioral: to repent of our sins and ask for His forgiveness, and to be hopeful as we grow in our sanctification.

Teaching Idea: We come to God in repentance of our sins and be assured of His forgiveness as we grow in being sanctified in Christ.

HOOK

Someone once asked Martin Luther, ‘Which are the best psalms?’ Luther answered that the best psalms were 32, 52, 130, and 143. Why did Luther consider these psalms to be the best? The reason is that these psalms express a person’s conviction of sin and desire for repentance. Psalm 130 has become one of the seven penitential psalms in

the Christian tradition. The group of these confessional psalms includes Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, and 143. Psalm 130 is famously known as the *De Profundis* (Latin for ‘out of the depths’) and has inspired numerous musical settings, major instrumental works, poetry, and even films.

BOOK

The message of this psalm captures the desperation of a sinner longing for forgiveness and redemption that can only come through the love of YHWH. John Wesley, who attended St. Paul’s Cathedral one day in May 1738, heard the choir sang Psalm 130. Later in the evening of that same day, he heard the exposition of the gospel in the Book of Romans in a meeting at Aldersgate, and he was converted. The message of Romans answered the psalmist’s (and perhaps Wesley’s) plea for mercy and forgiveness in Psalm 130.

“Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me” (Ps 42:7). The ‘deep’ here may refer to a large body of water that, in this context, indicate divine wrath or judgment. The psalmist describes that he is like drowning. Jonah prayed from the belly of the fish: “For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me” (Jonah 2:3). In Psalm 130:1-2, the psalmist cries out with his voice from ‘the depths’ and asks YHWH to listen. The next verse, however, expresses his full awareness of his iniquities. The fourth verse proclaims the psalmist’s understanding and confidence of the character of YHWH, who forgives him. Although the psalmist is in ‘the depths,’ he does not feel despair, for he knows that there is hope in YHWH.

The water libation ceremony is a significant ritual in the Feast of Tabernacles. Water is brought from the Siloam to the altar of the Temple to be poured onto the altar. The water then flows from the altar down beneath the altar into the “abyss.” According to the Roman historian Tacitus, there were subterranean excavations in the Temple Mount,

along with tanks and cisterns for holding rainwater. In 2012, a large First Temple period reservoir was discovered. It lies beneath the Robinson's Arch and branches toward the Temple Mount compound. It is likely that this underground reservoir played an important role not only in providing water for Jerusalem but also in the cultic rituals of the Temple. One Rabbinic account describes a connection between the rising of the waters of the Deep with King David's uttering the fifteen Songs of Ascents.

The psalmist waits for the LORD and hopes in His word. The watchmen in ancient Israel keep watch vigilantly over the city in the dark of night to make sure their enemies do not attack (Isa 21:6-12). It is an important job, but it is also a difficult one. The break of dawn brings relief from the hours of waiting vigilantly that the darkness and the danger had passed. Morning brings the watchmen rest and relief from their fatigue. The watchmen know that no matter how long the night feels, the light of the morning will come, and all will be well. The psalmist's eagerness to wait for God's forgiveness is more than the watchmen's wait for the morning. The passage in Isaiah equates the 'night' as the darkness of the world and 'morning' as the end of that darkness. In the new heaven and new earth where God will make His dwelling with His people, there will be no more night (Rev: 21:25; Rev 22:5).

Not only does the psalmist hopes in YHWH's word, but he also calls for the people of Israel to hope in the LORD. There is a shift from the personal plea to the collective. The Israelites understand that they needed forgiveness and redemption from YHWH. They anticipate the coming of the Messiah, who would come to fulfill YHWH's promises. The sins of the people of Israel can only be forgiven through their faith in the future work of Christ on the cross.

'The steadfast love of the LORD' can also be translated as the loyal love of the LORD reminds the Israelites of the faithfulness of YHWH and the extent or degree of His love throughout their history, which justifies their hope in Him. 'Plentiful redemption' speaks of the abundance of redemption that YHWH offers to redeem Israel from the

totality of her iniquities. Psalm 130 directs us to the redemptive work of Christ and to the future reality of the end of darkness on earth and the eternal ‘morning’ with God. After the thousand years of reign, Satan is released for a little while and finally will be defeated and punished forever (Rev 20:7-10). Those who remain faithful will be able to enjoy the presence of God in eternity (Rev 21-22).

LOOK

Read through the psalm again and think of the many ways that God has shown his steadfast love for us. In Him, there is forgiveness of sins. Share with the group the story of your conversion and how you became a believer.

TOOK

We live in the hope of the coming of Christ when He removes all sins and all their effects. As we wait for that final redemption, let us always seek forgiveness for our sins. Let us pray according to Psalm 130 in humility and a broken spirit.

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 12

Passage: Psalm 131 (ESV)

1. O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.
2. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother;
Like a weaned child is my soul within me.
3. O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore.

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to come to God in humility and to desire to be contented in Him
 2. Cognitive: to know the source of our pride and discontentment and to know that true contentment is found in God and His purposes for us.
 3. Behavioral: to be satisfied with the LORD and to not step out of the purposes

that God had set for us.

Teaching Idea: We come to God in humility and seek to be contented in Him and the purpose that God has for us.

HOOK

The pressures of daily life can bring a lot of stress. Students may be stressed over getting the best grades for college. College students are stressed juggling between coursework and jobs. Young adults are stressed over becoming financially independent. There is another source of stress that people face, and that is the desire to acquire and achieve more things in life. The desire to buy the latest gadgets, move to a bigger house, buy the branded clothes, or be accepted into the right circle of friends show a lack of contentment that is prevalent in our society.

BOOK

Psalm 131 teaches about humility and contentment. This message ties in with the brokenness in Psalm 130. Achievement can bring about pride, arrogance, and self-reliance. The need for more achievement brings about discontentment and ambition. Society pressure people to have better jobs, have more children, make more money, have more power, be more beautiful, earn more respect from people, and keep climbing the ladder to go up. When the people of God are not satisfied with the circumstances that the LORD has given to them, they sin against Him by complaining, grumbling, and being ungrateful. The psalmist described in the first and second verse that his heart is not lifted up (being proud and arrogant), his eyes are not raised too high (being contemptuous and looking down upon others) and occupying himself with things too great and too marvelous for him (being obsessed with things beyond the call and will of God). This verse does not mean one shouldn't attempt great and marvelous things, but that one should not step out of the boundaries and purposes that God had set for him. The fall of man happened because of the temptation to have more than what God has given (Gen

3:4-6). Eve wanted to be like God, and her ambition caused her disobedience and rebellion against God.

The second verse described a beautiful image of a contented child with his mother. The child is weaned from his mother's milk. He no longer desires to be nursed or dependent on his mother to satisfy his hunger. Before the child was weaned, he would always be attached to his mother and demand to be nursed whenever he needs food. A weaned child no longer has the need to nurse, and he can lie contently in his mother's arms. He is calm and quiet. The psalmist's soul is calm and free from the need to satisfy prideful ambitions. There is complete contentment in YHWH, being satisfied and resting peacefully, like a weaned child. The psalmist's desires no longer need to be satisfied with the things that he used to desire. His soul can be contented in YHWH. The psalmist is weaned from things that would create pride in him.

This psalm reminds us of the concept of the Sabbath. The Feast of Tabernacles begins and ends with a day of rest. Sabbath is more than just a day of rest; it is also a day of freedom. Freedom from self-expectations and idolatrous hold of any kind. Freedom of the pressures of career. Freedom from the bondage of the 'world.' Free to enjoy God in worship and experience life in Christ. This psalm gives us a glimpse of the heavenly future rest in the eternal presence of God.

The third verse calls for Israel to put their hope in YHWH forever. There is an undoubted assurance in YHWH. The psalmist calls for Israel to be faithful to YHWH, to not go back to sinful temptations and desires. Amidst the temptations and pressures around them, Israel is to find security in their hope for YHWH and His promises. YHWH will fulfill His promises, purposes, and plan for His people.

The Church as the Temple is called to find its security and contentment in God. "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt 6:33). There is rest, contentment, and humility to be in the presence of YHWH. The sense of calmness, security, and comfort that a mother gives to the child

in her arms is such a powerful image of our heavenly Father. May Israel and the Church put hope and trust in YHWH like a weaned child in the presence of his mother. In the new heaven and earth, where God will make His dwelling with man, He will wipe every tear from their eyes and satisfy His children with the spring of the water of life (Rev 21:4-6).

LOOK

How do you find rest in the LORD? What are some of the areas in your life that you struggle with in terms of contentment? What are some of the signs of pride and sinful ambitions? Do you detect any sign of pride or ambitions in your life right now?

TOOK

Take some time to pray and confess to God our sins of pride and lack of contentment. Ask the Lord to help us be like a ‘weaned’ child and rest upon Him, and be contented in His presence. Pray that we will no longer need to be satisfied with the things that we used to desire and seek His kingdom above all else. Observe the Sabbath.

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 13

Passage: Psalm 132 (ESV)

1. Remember, O LORD, in David’s favor, all the hardships he endured,
2. how he swore to the LORD and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,
3. “I will not enter my house or get into my bed,
4. I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids,
5. Until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.”
6. Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of Jaar.
7. “Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!”
8. Arise, O LORD, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.
9. Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your saints shout for joy.
10. For the sake of your servant David, do not turn away the face of your anointed one.

11. The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: “One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne.
12. If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.”
13. For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place:
14. This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
15. I will abundantly bless her provisions; I will satisfy her poor with bread.
16. Her priests I will clothe with salvation, and her saints will shout for joy.
17. There I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.
18. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but on him his crown will shine.”

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to desire and delight in the presence of God as the center of our life.
 2. Cognitive: to understand God’s covenantal relationship with His Church by examining the significance of David and the Davidic covenant and how this confirms the inauguration of the new covenant.
 3. Behavioral: to be devoted in desiring God’s presence and to seek Him as Lord over our lives through faith in Jesus Christ as we wait for His second coming.

Teaching Idea: As a response to God’s initiative and covenantal commitment to the Church, we can seek to desire His presence and lordship in our lives in a covenantal relationship with Him and look forward to the future establishment of the reign of Christ.

HOOK

Have you ever spent days searching for something? If you have, what does this tell you about the value of the thing being searched? David was devoted to searching for the Ark as a symbol of God’s presence. It was the utmost priority for David, as we can see from the first half of Psalm 132. The Ark was not only a symbol of God’s presence but also of God’s leadership over His people. In the second half, God made a promise to David and chose to dwell with His chosen people.

BOOK

Psalm 132 belongs in the category of royal psalms because of its focus on the human king. The centrality of the human king, in this case, David, is the result of the

centrality of the divine King in the life of ancient Israel. The people of Israel live under the rule of YHWH and the rule of a human king who is appointed by YHWH to sit on the earthly throne. (1 Chr 28:5) The human earthly throne is not independent of the heavenly throne. The earthly throne represents the authority of the heavenly throne. This psalm highlights the importance of the Davidic king and the ideology of the monarchy.

In verses 2-5, King David made a pledge to bring the ark back to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6). David's pledge and dedication showed the significance of the ark. The ark was regarded as a dwelling place of YHWH. The ark is a reminder and a symbol of the divine King of Israel. David knew that his earthly throne submits under the heavenly throne of YHWH.

The ark represented God's ruling presence that extended from heaven to earth. The ark is repeatedly referred to as God's 'footstool' (1 Chr 28:2; Ps 99:5; Ps 132:7). The Scriptures often described God to be sitting on a throne in heaven with his feet on the ark as His footstool in the earthly temple (Isa 66:1; 2 Kgs 19:15; Lam. 2:1).

There may have been rumors about the ark might be and thus the mentioning of Ephrata, the birthplace of David. The ark itself was actually located in Kiriath-jearim (the town of Jearim). The fields of Jaar would refer to the place where David found the ark. David kept his pledge and led the people of Israel to find the ark and brought it back to Jerusalem. Verse seven expressed the excitement of the people as they bring the ark back to Jerusalem. The priest being clothed in righteousness reflect the importance and sacredness of this journey. They had to consecrate themselves before carrying the ark and were dressed in robes of fine linen (1 Chr 15: 11-15, 27). Only the Levites were allowed to carry the ark (1 Chr 15:2). Uzzah lost his life when he touched the ark (1 Chr 13:9-10). When the ark arrived in Jerusalem, the people shout for joy (1 Chr 15: 16-24). There was singing accompanied by instruments such as harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets. King David danced to the celebration. (1 Chr 15:29).

Verses 8 to 10 came from the prayer of King Solomon during the dedication of

the Temple (2 Chr 6:41-4). The verses connected the event of bringing the ark with the dedication of the Temple. The verses seamlessly connect the reign of David and his oath to the reign of his son, Solomon, and the complete fulfillment of that oath in the building of the Temple. The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated during the dedication of the First Temple. The text of Psalm 132 fits with the context of the procession of bringing the ark of the covenant to the Holy of Holies in the Temple. The connection between this psalm and the temple festival is further shown in verses 13-14.

While the first half of this psalm tells of the promise of David and the fulfillment of that promise in Solomon's reign, the second half of this psalm, verses 11-18, contain the promise of God. In 2 Samuel 7, God made a covenant with David that He will establish an earthly kingdom with David and his descendants. The significance of the Davidic covenant lies in the close relationship between the earthly throne and the heavenly one. YHWH has chosen Solomon to sit on the throne of His kingdom over Israel. YHWH will establish his kingdom forever if Solomon perseveres in keeping His commands and ordinances (1 Chr 28:5-7). YHWH also appeared to King Solomon at night and reminded him of His promise to his father David (2 Chr 7:17-22). Solomon sat on the throne over Israel but unfortunately, nearing the end of his reign, Solomon failed to be obedient to YHWH.

Psalm 132 started with the focus on David's promise to find a dwelling place for the LORD with a specific mention of the place where it was found (verses 1-10), but in verses 11 to 18, the focus is on YHWH's promise to David to preserve the 'house' of David and His expectation of the heirs of David to keep the covenant. YHWH has chosen Zion in His sovereignty to be His resting place. A cloud filled the house of the LORD as a manifestation of His presence (1 Kgs 8:10-11). He sent a fire from heaven to the altar of burnt offering (1 Chr 21:26).

There are several comparisons and contrasts in this psalm: between David's oath and the LORD's oath; David's hardship and sleepless efforts and the LORD's resting

place; the earthly reign and the heavenly reign; priests clothed in righteousness/salvation and the enemies clothed in shame; the ark being outside of the sanctuary and the LORD make His dwelling in Zion; turn away the anointed one and prepare a lamp for the anointed.

David's installation of the Ark served to fulfill YHWH's sovereign initiative. The heavenly throne sets the tone for the earthly throne. Verse 15 onwards reveals YHWH's promise to bless the people, provide for the people, and protect them from their enemies. YHWH has fulfilled His promise to David by the anointing of Solomon. He will keep His promise to His people. The kings of Judah, however, did not remain obedient to Torah. Eventually, YHWH allowed the Babylonians to capture the people of God and sent them into exile.

Ezekiel 37:26-27 says, "I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Similarly, in Jeremiah 3:17, a time will come when all nations come to Jerusalem as the throne of the LORD. The ark of the covenant will not be remembered anymore because His presence will be throughout Jerusalem itself. The vision of the temple in Ezekiel 40-44 did not include the ark of the covenant, which arguably was the most important item in the temple. In this future 'temple,' the presence of God will not be contained in the Holy of Holies.

Old Testament believers or Israel look upon David and the covenant that God made with David. God promised David that He would give a lamp to shine for him and his sons forever (2 Kgs 8:19). The New Testament church looks to the One who came from the line of David, Jesus Christ. In Matthew 27:37, a sign was placed above Jesus' head as the Roman soldiers nailed him to the cross: 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.' The Romans' intention to mock ironically proclaimed the fulfillment of God's promise: "...and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David..."

(Luke 1:69). Jesus is the ‘horn’ that sprouts out of the house of David. The lamp shone its light through the Davidic line of kings to the arrival of the Son of God.

In Psalm 132:15, there is a hunger not for physical food but for a spiritual one. The LORD will satisfy this hunger: “I will abundantly bless her provisions; I will satisfy her poor with bread.” Matthew 5:6 says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” In the marriage supper of the Lamb, the Church as the Bride, will one day be clothed with fine linen, which is the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev 19:8). The righteous deeds of the saints are acts of obedience to the covenant.

LOOK

Do you long for His presence in your life? Having the presence of God also means having Him govern all aspects of your life as Lord. Is God present in all areas of your life? He has made a new covenant with the Church through Jesus Christ. God has done the work on the cross and sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. The Holy Spirit is present with us, and we can let Him lead our lives.

TOOK

Pray for God to be present at the center of your life. Pray for the Holy Spirit to lead us to a life in the Spirit to help us live in obedience to His Word. We continue to pray that God will fulfill the promises that He made to us in the new covenant.

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 14

Passage: Psalm 133 (ESV)

1. Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!
2. It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!

3. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to have hope on having unity among believers and desire the unity that is refreshing, precious, and ‘aromatic.’
 2. Cognitive: to understand the nature of unity with God as the source and the center.
 3. Behavioral: to work towards dwelling among fellow believers in unity.

Teaching Idea: We should desire the refreshing, precious, and ‘aromatic’ unity among believers that places God as the source and the center.

HOOK

Christians are often not united with each other. Disagreements often happen in the church, and churches of different denominations cannot get along. Theological issues can divide Christians. Unity seems to be an impossible thing to achieve. Will believers ever be able to dwell in unity with one another?

BOOK

Psalm 133 describes the beauty of God’s people living in unity. The precious oil described here refers to the anointing oil mentioned in Exodus 30:22-33. The ingredients of the precious oil were given by YHWH Himself: “Take for yourself the finest spices. 12,5 pounds of liquid myrrh, half as much of fragrant cinnamon, 6,25 pounds of fragrant cane, 12,5 pounds of cassia (by the sanctuary shekel), and one gallon of olive oil. Prepare from these a holy anointing oil, a scented blend, the work of a perfumer; it will be holy anointing oil.” (Exod 30:22-25) This oil is for the purpose of consecrating and anointing. YHWH instructed Moses to tell the Israelites: “This will be My holy anointing oil throughout your generations. It must not be used for ordinary anointing on a person’s body, and you must not make anything like it using its formula. It

is holy, and it must be holy to you” (Exod 30: 31-32). To be anointed with this oil is to be set apart for God.

The quality and quantity of these fragrant spices suggest that this was a very valuable oil used for a very specific purpose: the anointing of items of the tent of meeting and the people who are to serve YHWH as priests. Unlike the earlier psalms in the collection, there is a ‘running down’ movement described here. This fragrant oil runs down from the head of the high priest, to the beard and to the opening of his robe. No doubt, the fragrance of this oil spreads through the body. How is unity like this precious and fragrant oil? The unity of believers brings about a fragrant atmosphere. The sweet aroma of brothers and sisters bound by the covenant with YHWH cannot be contained like the flow of the oil. It spreads to the rest of the people. People will be attracted by its ‘sweet aroma.’ This sweet harmony among believers is not to be taken for granted because it is extraordinary and valuable.

The anointing ceremony of anointing is described in Leviticus 8. Moses poured the anointing oil on Aaron, his sons, the tabernacle, and all that was in the tabernacle to consecrate them. After the consecration ceremony, Leviticus chapter nine described the first tabernacle service where the glory of the LORD appeared to the people (Lev 9:22-24). The anointing ceremony set apart the priests and the tabernacle to prepare for the presence of God among them.

Mount Hermon, standing at more than 9,000 feet high, is the tallest mountain in the region, which is to the north of Israel in the area of Lebanon. Snow covers the mountain top, making Mount Hermon a valuable source of water. Jeremiah 18:14 described this flow of cold water from the mountain. The abundance of dew and refreshing water sustain the vegetation and life surrounding the mountain. The dew of Hermon quenches thirst and restores life. “I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like the lily and take root like the cedars of Lebanon.” (Hos 14:5) God spoke to Zechariah that He would dwell among His people, “For there shall be a sowing of peace...and the

heavens shall give their dew.” (Zech 8:12). Although Mount Zion is nowhere near Mount Hermon, this hypothetical imagery gives the picture that the abundant and refreshing dew runs down and spread throughout the mountains of Zion. The dwelling together of the covenantal community is refreshing and life-giving.

Psalm 133 puts emphasis on Zion as the focus of divine presence, a source of blessing for the people. During the Feast of Tabernacles, pilgrims come from all over the land to celebrate together in Jerusalem. They experience ‘dwelling together’ in booths together as one covenantal people. Another use of the expression of people ‘dwelling’ together is found in Jeremiah 31:24, where it refers to the restoration of Judah and all its cities back to their land to live together again. This meaning has a specific reference to the time of the restoration. In John 17:20-23, Jesus prays for all believers: “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may they all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and you in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved Me.” This is the goal of the Church: to be united spiritually in Him as a community of the new covenant.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt 5: 9). The peacemakers here may refer to those who act as intercessors of reconciliation between God and man and between man and man. The promise to be called the sons of God is realized in the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, resulting in them becoming His sons and daughters. For the New Testament church, which is set apart of holy, God established the covenant of peace through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, which reconciled sinners with God. He will give the blessing of spiritual unity as He dwells with them.

LOOK

Unity reflects God's Trinitarian nature. Believers are united through the work of Christ on the cross. Are there things within your church community that are causing disunity among the members? What do you think is the cause of the disunity? How does this affect church life? How does this psalm remind us of the importance of unity?

TOOK

Pray for your church leadership. If there is an existing conflict in your church, pray for God to bring about reconciliation and restoration. Think of some ways we can do to promote peace and unity in the local church.

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN 15

Passage: Psalm 134 (ESV)

1. Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who stand by night in the house of the LORD!
2. Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD!
3. May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth!

Target Group: Church congregation/ Youth group/ Seminary

- Aims
1. Affective: to be awed by who God is and everything He has done
 2. Cognitive: to understand the context of Psalm 134 as the last psalm in the Psalms of Ascents
 3. Behavioral: to lift up our hands, bless and praise the LORD

Teaching Idea: To understand the significance of the blessing we give in our worship and the blessing we receive in the benediction.

HOOK

At the end of the journey through the Psalms of Ascents, we gather with a call to bless the Lord. Psalm 134 closes this collection of psalms not only with a call to bless the LORD but also a blessing for the people. What does it mean to bless the Lord?

BOOK

Psalm 134 is a call to praise YHWH. Was this a song in the night? Was this sung in a night service? Isaiah 30:29 recorded of a nocturnal singing on the night of a holy festival, but there is no information to indicate that Psalm 134 was actually sung in a night liturgy or simply refer to the servants of the LORD who keep the night watch in the Temple or are involved with some preparation works for the morning. The priests sometimes are involved with work at night (1 Chr 9:27, 33). Later, Jewish tradition associate night services with the Feast of Tabernacles. This festival is the only festival in Israel's cultic year when a night celebration is recorded. These nocturnal events were extraordinarily festive and joyful with dance and music.

The first two verses of this psalm are believed by many psalm scholars to be sung by the people of Israel. Who are the servants of the LORD? Most likely, they are the priests (*kohanim*) who are sons of Aaron who serve in the Temple. At the time of Solomon's reign, the sons of Aaron stand every morning and night to thank and praise the LORD (1 Chr 23: 28-32). Another translation of verse one is 'Behold, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD. The Hebrew root word for 'bless,' *brk*, can be translated to 'praise' or 'worship.' It can even be understood as 'kneel.' The people ask the 'servants of the LORD' also to lift up their hands to the holy place. The holy place here may refer to the Temple. Another translation can be to 'lift up their hands in holiness,' in relation to 1 Timothy 2:8, 'lifting up holy hands.'

The third verse is a priestly blessing, which corresponds to the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6:24. This blessing is widely accepted to be spoken by Aaron and his sons to the people (Num 6:22-27). The full blessing as recorded in Numbers 6:24-26 is as follows: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." Numbers 6:27 states, "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel,

and I will bless them.” Revelation 22:4 says that God’s redeemed people will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.

There is a hand sign that is specifically associated with this *birchat kohanim* (priestly blessing), where the priest will lift both hands at shoulder height when giving the blessing to Israel. In each hand, there will be space between the thumb and forefinger and between the middle finger and the ring finger (like the Star Trek Vulcan salute, which was inspired by the Jewish priest hand gestures). The left and right thumbs (and sometimes the two forefingers) are seen joined. This hand gesture may represent the Hebrew letter *Shin*, the initial of Shaddai (Almighty). It is not certain when this hand sign was started or whether this hand sign was practiced during the Feast of Tabernacles.

In the reign of King Solomon, the sons of Aaron served at the temple and pronounced the blessing in YHWH’s name (1 Chr 23:13). YHWH’s blessing, as found in Leviticus 26:3-13, includes rain, good harvest, peace, security, protection from enemies, and children, all of which point to the reality of God dwelling among His people. All these blessings are in the Psalms of Ascents.

The word ‘bless’ is echoed here, but YHWH is the subject instead of the object. YHWH, the maker of heaven and earth, blesses His people from Zion. What is the significance of Zion? Zion is a dominant theme in the Psalms of Ascents. Zion was the ‘stage’ for the drama of redemption, where the people of God enact the story of redemption in their daily lives with the Old Testament sacrifices and ceremonies. Mount Zion, being the dwelling place of Israel’s divine King, points to the ultimate dwelling place of God in heaven. Zion sometimes also refers to Jerusalem (1 Kgs 8:1, Isa 2:3) or the people of God (Lam 4:2, Matt 21:5). Zion is also used metaphorically with reference to the Church, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22), and eschatologically (Rev 14:1).

Psalm 134 closes the Psalms of Ascents with the people’s call to bless the LORD and a priestly blessing. When the priest pronounced this blessing, they are giving a divine blessing of the covenant that YHWH had made with His people. The promise of

YHWH: “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” is also repeated by Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:16 when he talks about the Church as the temple of the living God. In the new heaven and new earth, as the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven, a loud voice from the throne calls out, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be with His people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev 21:3). The Aaronic blessing: “the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you...” (Num 6:22-27) is finally fulfilled in the new Jerusalem, “They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads” (Rev 22:4).

LOOK

In what ways can you relate to the Psalms of Ascents in your own journey as a Christian in your own contexts as a parent, child, student, employee, or employer? Each Sunday, when we hear the blessing and benediction pronounced by the pastor, we receive the benediction and blessing with thanksgiving and know that we are blessed in the name of the Almighty. The words of benediction at the end of worship are not just words that pastors say at the end of the service out of a ritual, but they are meant to remind us throughout the week of the blessings we receive from above.

TOOK

We, as servants of the LORD, can bless and praise the LORD in His sanctuary and proclaim His blessing to the people. This priestly blessing helps us to look forward to the time when He will one day reveal His glorious face to us.

APPENDIX 3

PSALMS OF ASCENTS BIBLE STUDY
EVALUATION RUBRIC

The completed evaluation rubrics begin on the next page.

The Psalms of Ascents Bible Study Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 120-134 Evaluation by Dr. Philip Chia					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson presented is biblically and theologically sound.				X	Psalm 124:1-2 could have more exposition. Psalm 126 has a valuable historical background. Psalm 128 needs more exposition.
The lesson fulfills the goals presented in the lesson plan.				X	Each lesson has affective, cognitive, and behavioral aims. These aims could be backed up by the survey.
The content of the lesson is relevant to the needs of the target group.				X	
The language and illustrations used are appropriate for the target group.			X		Psalm 121 relates well to seminarians and adults, but it seems less relevant to the youth group. Lesson on Psalm 131: needs further explanation, how to “observe the Sabbath” for target groups.
The lesson is clear in explaining the ideas and concepts.				X	It is clear and concise
The lesson contains relevant practical applications.			X		Less application for a specific group in the church, such as youth, and how these lessons relate to seminarians.

The Psalms of Ascents Bible Study Evaluation Tool					
Psalms 120-134 Evaluation by Dr. Martus Maleakhi					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson presented is biblically and theologically sound.				X	The lesson has been well researched and well presented. It is not only focuses on the psalms but also moves to the other Old Testament and New Testament books. It brings the readers to see the Bible in unity from creation to the new creation.
The lesson fulfills the goals presented in the lesson plan.				X	The presentation of the lesson as Hook, Book, Look, and Took helps to focus and refocus the goals of the lesson plans. It helps the reader to not only learn the biblical understanding of a particular psalm, but also to take the lesson for themselves.
The content of the lesson is relevant to the needs of the target group.			X		The target groups of audiences are too broad. They may find the same experience in the world, such as difficulties in applying their faith in this world, but the application may be different. It can be improved by adjusting the Hook, Look and Took sections to each specific audience.
The language and illustrations used are appropriate for the target group.			X		As indicated in the previous comment, there is a need to focus to the different groups of audiences. In the future, this lesson may be published to address the youth, church leaders, or even different ethnic groups.

The Psalms of Ascents Bible Study Evaluation Tool					
Psalms 120-134 Evaluation by Dr. Martus Maleakhi					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clear in explaining the ideas and concepts.				X	Very clear.
The lesson contains relevant practical applications.			X		In general, it is sufficient. The practical applications will be determined by the life situations of the different target groups. It would be helpful if there was a guide for small group discussions.

APPENDIX 4

PSALM GUIDED WORSHIP SERIES

Each psalm of the Psalms of Ascents is developed into a short worship order/design, which can be used individually or combined with another psalm in the collection. The psalm text can be read responsorially (see the underlined text) between the worship leader and the congregation. Alternatively, the psalm text can be read as a prayer whenever appropriate. The worship design can be developed, expanded, or shortened according to different liturgical contexts.

God's peace for those who call upon Him in the midst of hostility

Scripture Reading: Lament in a hostile world

Psalm 120

- 1 *In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.*
- 2 *Deliver me, O Lord,
from lying lips,
from a deceitful tongue.*
- 3 *What shall be given to you,
and what more shall be done to you,
you deceitful tongue?*
- 4 *A warrior's sharp arrows,
with glowing coals of the broom tree!*
- 5 *Woe to me, that I sojourn in Meshech,*

that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!

6 *Too long have I had my dwelling
among those who hate peace.*

7 *I am for peace,
but when I speak, they are for war!*

Congregational Song:

Be Still, My Soul

Katharina A. von Schlegel

Prayer to be peacemakers:

*God of peace, in the middle of a world filled with warfare and violence,
we pray for the coming of the Prince of Peace. We cling to the promise
that you will break the bow and shatter the spear. We long to live up to
our calling as instruments of peace. Through our prayers and through
our actions, help us to plant seeds of peace. Then, by your Spirit, turn
them into blossoms of hope, the fruit of righteousness. Amen
(Lift Up Your Hearts, 283)*

Scripture Reading: A Call for God's people to persevere, love our enemies, and be peacemakers

Matthew 5: 9, 11-12, 44-45

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of
God...Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and
utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.*

*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they
persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

*But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute
you,*

so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."

Congregational Song:

Comfort, Comfort Now My People

Johannes G. Olearius, Louis Bourgeois

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 59)

Looking to the Keeper of Israel for protection

Scripture Reading: Journey to the Wilderness

Exodus 13: 18, 20-22

But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle.

And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness.

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.

The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

Congregational Song:

Guide Me, O My Great Redeemer

William Williams, John Hughes

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 43)

Scripture Reading: Confidence in God's presence and protection

Psalm 121

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come?

2 My help comes from the LORD,

who made heaven and earth.

3 *He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.*

4 *Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

Soloist:

Mazmur 121 (verse 1-2 with refrain)

Juswantori Ichwan

5 *The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.*

6 *The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.*

7 *The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.*

8 *The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.*

Soloist:

Mazmur 121 (verse 3-4 with refrain)

Juswantori Ichwan

Prayer for protection:

*Maker of heaven and earth, we trust you to keep us in your care. Guard us from evil, protect us from harm. Help us to know you, and knowing you to follow you, so that all our comings and goings may conform to your purpose for our lives, through Jesus Christ our LORD. Amen.
(Psalms for All Seasons, 792)*

Scripture Reading: Hope in God's future protection

Revelation 7:15-16

...and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

*They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.*

Congregational Song:

Before the Throne of God Above

Charitie Lees DeCheney Bancroft, Vikki Cook

Sovereign Grace Music

Looking for peace in God's dwelling place

Scripture Reading: Coming to the House of the LORD

Psalm 122

1 *I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”*

2 *Our feet have been standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem!*

3 *Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together,*

4 *to which the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,*

to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

5 *There thrones for judgment were set,*

the thrones of the house of David.

6 *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!*

“May they be secure who love you!

7 *Peace be within your walls
and security within your towers!”*

8 *For my brothers and companions' sake*

I will say, “Peace be within you!”

9 *For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,*

I will seek your good.

Leader and congregation: As we gather to the house of the LORD (leader)

We are glad! (Congregation)

As we give thanks to the LORD,

We are glad!

As we sing your praise,

We are glad!

As we pray to the LORD,

We are glad!

As we hear your Word,

We are glad!

Congregational Song:

Praise to the LORD, the Almighty

Catherine Winkworth, Joachim Neander

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 575)

Scripture Reading: Worship in the Spirit and Truth

John 4:21-24

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Congregational Song:

I Rejoiced when I Heard Them Say

Bernadette Farrell

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 508)

Scripture Reading: Worship in the New Jerusalem

Revelations 21:22-26

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it,

and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.

They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

Prayer of hope:

O Lord, we long for the day when our feet will stand within the gates of the New Jerusalem. Until then, as we journey toward home, guide and protect your church: be our unity, clothe us in truth, and keep us in your peace. We pray in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

(Psalms for All Seasons, 806).

Congregational Song:

Jerusalem the Golden

Bernard of Cluny, Alexander Ewing

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 488)

Looking to the LORD God in humble anticipation in the midst of derision and scorn

Scripture Reading: Looking and waiting upon God

Psalm 123

To you I lift up my eyes,

O you who are enthroned in the heavens!

2 *Behold, as the eyes of servants*

look to the hand of their master,

as the eyes of a maidservant

to the hand of her mistress,

so our eyes look to the LORD our God,

till he has mercy upon us.

3 *Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us,*

for we have had more than enough of contempt.

4 *Our soul has had more than enough*

of the scorn of those who are at ease,

of the contempt of the proud.

Congregational Song:

Up to You I Lift My Eyes

Emma Turl, Ralph Vaughan Williams

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 421)

Scripture Reading: Being followers of Christ in the world

John 17:14-15

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

Congregational Song:

Lord, Have Mercy

Jordan Kauflin, Marc Willerton

Prayer to look upon God:

Lord Jesus, our only comfort in life and in death, the world's contempt did not dissuade you from accomplishing our salvation. We look to no one but you to sustain us now and through all that is yet to come. Amen
(Lift Up Your Hearts, 421)

Scripture Reading: Coming to the Throne of Grace

Hebrews 4:16

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Congregational Song:

Behold, Our God

Jonathan Baird, Meghan Baird, Ryan Baird, Stephen Altrogge

God's Presence serves as an assurance of deliverance

Scripture Reading: Remembering God's acts of deliverance

Psalm 124

- 1 *If it had not been the LORD who was on our side—
let Israel now say—*
- 2 *if it had not been the LORD who was on our side
when people rose up against us,*
- 3 *then they would have swallowed us up alive,
when their anger was kindled against us;*
- 4 *then the flood would have swept us away,
the torrent would have gone over us;*
- 5 *then over us would have gone
the raging waters.*

Soloist:

Mazmur 124 (verse 1 and 2 with refrain)

Untung Ongkowidjaja

- 6 *Blessed be the LORD,
who has not given us
as prey to their teeth!*
- 7 *We have escaped like a bird
from the snare of the fowlers;
the snare is broken,
and we have escaped!*
- 8 *Our help is in the name of the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.*

Soloist:

Mazmur 124 (verse 3 with refrain)

Untung Ongkowidjaja

Scripture Reading: Rejoicing in trials and trusting God

1 Peter 1:6

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials

Romans 8:31

If God is for us, who can be against us?

Congregational Song:

Afflicted Saints, to Christ Draw Near

Connie Dever, John Fawcett

Sovereign Grace Music

Prayer for protection:

Maker of heaven and earth, as you rescued Daniel from the lions, protect us from the evil that would consume us. As you saved Noah from the flood, keep us from drowning in trouble. You have freed us from the power of sin, blessed the work of our minds and hands and given us eternal life - all through Jesus Christ. We praise and thank you, now and always. Amen

(Psalms for All Seasons, 818)

Scripture Reading: Celebrating God's presence and assurance of salvation

Revelation 7:9-10

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

*and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God
who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*

Congregational Song:

A Mighty Fortress is Our God

Martin Luther

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 776)

The good and upright who trust God will experience the peace of His protection

Scripture Reading: Seeking security in God

Psalm 125

*Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved, but abides forever.*

*2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the LORD surrounds his people,
from this time forth and forevermore.*

*3 For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest
on the land allotted to the righteous,
lest the righteous stretch out
their hands to do wrong.*

*4 Do good, O LORD, to those who are good,
and to those who are upright in their hearts!*

*5 But those who turn aside to their crooked ways
the LORD will lead away with evildoers!*

Peace be upon Israel!

Soloist:

Mazmur 125 (verse 1-3 and refrain)

Caroline Sharmiyanti

Prayer to renew trust in God:

*God, renew our trust in You: ground us in Your righteousness, protect us in times of trouble, guide us through times of testing, and deliver us from the Evil One. We ask all this through Jesus Christ our LORD.
Amen* (Psalms for All Seasons, 825)

Scripture Reading: Walking in righteousness

Matthew 5:6, 14-16.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Congregational Song:

Church of God, Elect and Glorious

James E. Seddon, Cyril V. Taylor

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 252)

Scripture Reading: Judgment for the wicked ruler

Revelation 18:20, 21b

“Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!

“So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more.”

Congregational Song:

Rejoice, Rejoice Believers

Laurentius Laurenti

God brings restoration and joy when He frees His people

Scripture Reading: Rejoicing in the freedom from exile and restoration of fortunes

Ezra 6:3-5

*In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king issued a decree:
Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the
place where sacrifices were offered, and let its foundations be retained.
Its height shall be sixty cubits and its breadth sixty cubits,*

*with three layers of great stones and one layer of timber. Let the
cost be paid from the royal treasury.*

*And also let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which
Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that is in Jerusalem and
brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple that is
in Jerusalem, each to its place. You shall put them in the house of
God.”*

Psalm 126

*1 When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.*

*2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,*

“The LORD has done great things for them.”

*3 The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad.*

Soloist:

Mazmur 126 (verse 1 and refrain)

Juswantori Ichwan

4 *Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
 like streams in the Negeb!*

5 *Those who sow in tears
 shall reap with shouts of joy!*

6 *He who goes out weeping,
 bearing the seed for sowing,
 shall come home with shouts of joy,
 bringing his sheaves with him.*

Soloist:

Mazmur 126 (verse 2 and 3 with refrain)

Juswantori Ichwan

Prayer of thanksgiving:

*We are overwhelmed, O LORD, by your love and saving goodness. In
Christ Jesus you restore both our lives and our world. Like reapers at
an unexpected harvest, we shout your praise and sing your goodness.
Amen* (Psalms for All Seasons, 829)

Scripture Reading: The promise of comfort in trials

Matthew 5:4

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

Congregational Song:

Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior

Fanny J. Crosby, William H. Doane

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 422)

Scripture Reading: The promise of future restoration

Revelation 7:17

*For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

Congregational Song:

Like a River Glorious

Frances Havergal, Bob Kauflin

Sovereign Grace Music

God’s People Can Trust God who is present in human endeavors

Scripture Reading: Trusting God who provides

Ecclesiastes 2:22-25

*What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he
toils beneath the sun?*

*For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation.
Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.*

*There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and
drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of
God,*

for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

Psalm 127

*1 Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.*

Unless the LORD watches over the city,

the watchman stays awake in vain.

- 2 *It is in vain that you rise up early
 and go late to rest,
 eating the bread of anxious toil;
 for he gives to his beloved sleep.*

Soloist:

Mazmur 127 (verse 1 with refrain)

Juswantori Ichwan

- 3 *Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
 the fruit of the womb a reward.*

- 4 *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
 are the children of one's youth.*

- 5 *Blessed is the man
 who fills his quiver with them!
 He shall not be put to shame
 when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.*

Soloist:

Mazmur 127 (verse 2 with refrain)

Juswantori Ichwan

Prayer to trust God:

*Heavenly Father, in all our toil and striving, at work and in the home,
may we always trust in your blessing rather than in our own efforts,
through the finished work of Jesus Christ our LORD. Amen.
(Psalms for All Seasons, 838)*

Scripture Reading: Seeking first the Kingdom of God

Matthew 6:33

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Congregational Song:

Seek Ye First

Karen Lafferty

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 899)

God blesses those who fear and obey Him with abundance and prosperity

Scripture Reading: God is the source of blessings

Psalm 128

1 *Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways!*

2 *You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.*

3 *Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.*

4 *Behold, thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the LORD.*

5 *The LORD bless you from Zion!
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life!*

6 *May you see your children's children!
Peace be upon Israel!*

Soloist:

Mazmure 128 (verse 1 and 2)

Juswantori Ichwan

Scripture Reading: The abundant life in Jesus Christ

Phil. 4:19

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 6:10-11

*Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread*

Congregational Song:

The Lord's Prayer

Albert Hay Malotte
(Lift Up Your Hearts, 912)

Prayer recognizing God as the source of blessing:

Source of unending blessings, be present in our homes and families and in the fellowship and ministry of your church. As we gather at our tables, and as we gather at your table, unite us in the vision of the great wedding feast of the Lamb, in whose name we ask this. Amen.

(Psalms for All Seasons, 842)

Scripture Reading: The blessed life in Christ

John 10:10b

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Congregational Song:

Christ is Mine Forevermore

Jonny Robinson, Rich Thompson

CityAlight Music

The Righteous God Frees His people from their enemies

Scripture Reading: Proclaiming God's acts of redemption

Psalm 129

1 *“Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth”—*

let Israel now say—

2 *“Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth,*

yet they have not prevailed against me.

3 *The plowers plowed upon my back;*

they made long their furrows.”

4 *The LORD is righteous;*

he has cut the cords of the wicked.

5 *May all who hate Zion*

be put to shame and turned backward!

6 *Let them be like the grass on the housetops,*

which withers before it grows up,

7 *with which the reaper does not fill his hand*

nor the binder of sheaves his arms,

8 *nor do those who pass by say,*

*“The blessing of the LORD be upon you!
We bless you in the name of the LORD!”*

Congregational Song:

I Will Sing a Song of Triumph

Martin Leckebusch, Greg Scheer (arr.)

(Psalms for All Seasons, 847)

Scripture Reading: Strength, endurance, patience, and joy for believers under wicked rule

Colossians 1:11

*being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for
all endurance and patience with joy*

Congregational Song:

Dear Refuge of My Weary Soul

Anne Steele, Matthew Merker

Prayer for redemption:

*O God, the cords of sin are strong, they bind us close to death. But the
victory you have given us in Jesus Christ has severed those cords and
loosed the bonds of evil. We now live to bless you and to sing your
praise in all the world. Amen.*

(Psalms for All Seasons, 846)

Scripture Reading: Justice for those who oppose God

1 Peter 3:12, 16

*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.*

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

...when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

Congregational Song:

His Eye is on the Sparrow

Civilla D. Martin

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 441)

Scripture Reading: Triumph for God's people

Colossians 2:15

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Congregational Song:

All Glory Be Forever

Jordan Kauflin

Sovereign Grace Music

In God, there is hope for forgiveness and an end of darkness

Scripture Reading: Longing for forgiveness and hope in His steadfast love

Psalm 130

1 *Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!*

2 *O Lord, hear my voice!*

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

3 *If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,*

O Lord, who could stand?
4 *But with you there is forgiveness,*
that you may be feared.
5 *I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,*
and in his word I hope;
6 *my soul waits for the Lord*
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
7 *O Israel, hope in the LORD!*
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
8 *And he will redeem Israel*
from all his iniquities.

Soloist:

Mazmur 130 (verse 1-4 and refrain)

Juswantori Ichwan

Prayer for repentance:

*When we realize the depth of our sin, O God, we are driven into dark
despair. It is only when we realize the height of your mercy and the
breadth of your forgiveness, that we begin to see the dawning of new
life in Jesus Christ. Thanks be to you, O Lord our Redeemer. Amen.*

(Psalms for All Seasons, 848)

Scripture Reading: Assurance of forgiveness of sins

Colossians 1:13-14

*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to
the kingdom of his beloved Son,*

in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Congregational Song:

Out of the Depths

Bob Kauflin

Sovereign Grace Music

Scripture Reading: The end of all darkness

Revelation 22:5

And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Congregational Song:

When We See Your Face

Bob Kauflin, Jordan Kauflin

Sovereign Grace Music

There is Contentment and satisfaction in the presence of God

Scripture Reading: Humility and contentment in the presence of God

Psalm 131

1 *O LORD, my heart is not lifted up;
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.*

2 *But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child is my soul within me.*

3 *O Israel, hope in the LORD*

from this time forth and forevermore.

Soloist:

Mazmur 131 (verse 1 and 2)

Juswantori Ichwan

Prayer for contentment:

*O Christ, our lives and our world seem so tangled and complicated.
Help us to desire nothing else but that you will always be present to us,
and that we may always be present to you. Amen.
(Psalms for All Seasons, 858).*

Scripture Reading: Resting in God

Hebrews 4:9-11

*So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,
for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works
as God did from his.*

*Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall
by the same sort of disobedience.*

Hebrews 33:14

My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.

Congregational Song:

Like a Child Rests

Christopher Walker

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 335)

Prayer to be satisfied in God:

*Loving God, may our words be simple, our hearts humbled, our
attention focused, and our thoughts pure. Thank you that we may lean
upon you, as a child with its mother. You are our hope and we praise*

you, now and forever. Amen. (Lift Up Your Hearts, 335)

God has chosen to have a covenantal relationship with His people, dwell among them, and bless them wholistically

Congregational Song:

Once in Royal David's City

Michael Morgan

(Psalms for All Seasons, 866)

Scripture Reading: God covenantal relationship with Israel

Psalm 132

Remember, O LORD, in David's favor,

all the hardships he endured,

2 *how he swore to the LORD*

and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,

3 *"I will not enter my house*

or get into my bed,

4 *I will not give sleep to my eyes*

or slumber to my eyelids,

5 *until I find a place for the LORD,*

a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."

6 *Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah;*

we found it in the fields of Jaar.

7 *"Let us go to his dwelling place;*

let us worship at his footstool!"

8 *Arise, O LORD, and go to your resting place,*

you and the ark of your might.

- 9 Let your priests be clothed with righteousness,
and let your saints shout for joy.
- 10 For the sake of your servant David,
do not turn away the face of your anointed one.

Soloist:

Mazmur 132 (verse 1-2 and refrain)

Kristian Feri Arwanto

- 11 *The LORD swore to David a sure oath*
from which he will not turn back:
“One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.
- 12 *If your sons keep my covenant*
and my testimonies that I shall teach them,
their sons also forever
shall sit on your throne.”
- 13 For the LORD has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his dwelling place:
- 14 “This is my resting place forever;
here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
- 15 *I will abundantly bless her provisions;*
I will satisfy her poor with bread.
- 16 *Her priests I will clothe with salvation,*
and her saints will shout for joy.
- 17 There I will make a horn to sprout for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.
- 18 His enemies I will clothe with shame.

but on him his crown will shine.”

Soloist:

Mazmur 132 (verse 3-4 and refrain)

Kristian Feri Arwanto

Scripture Reading: The coming of the Anointed to initiate the new covenant

Luke 1:68-69

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.

Congregational Song:

Blessed be the God of Israel

Carl P. Daw Jr.

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 67)

Scripture Reading: The future establishment of God’s reign

Revelation 21:3

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

Prayer of thanksgiving:

Eternal God, you fulfilled your promise to give us a Messiah of David’s household. In Jesus Christ, you have clothed us with life and fed us the living bread of his body. Crowned with the victory of his resurrection, we shout for joy. Amen. (Psalms for All Seasons, 864).

Congregational Song:

Jesus Shall Reign

Isaac Watts, John Hatton

God's dwelling place brings the blessing of unity

Scripture Reading: Unity among believers

Psalm 133

*1 Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!*

*2 It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!*

*3 It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!*

*For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.*

Congregational Song:

Sungguh Alangkah Baiknya (Mazmur 133)

Traditional

Prayer for unity and peace:

*O God, let the overflowing of your Holy spirit cover your church with
the blessing of unity and the anointing of your peace, through our Lord
Jesus Christ. Amen*

(Psalms for All Seasons, 869)

Scripture Reading: United in Christ

John 17:20-23

*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me
through their word,*

*that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in
you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you
have sent me.*

*The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they
may be one even as we are one,*

*I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so
that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you
loved me.*

Congregational Song:

Oh, Look and Wonder/ Miren qué Bueno

Pablo Sosa

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 260)

As God's people worship Him, He will bless them with His glorious presence

Scripture Reading: The blessing from God

Numbers 6:24-27

The LORD bless you and keep you;

*the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to
you;*

the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

*“So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless
them.”*

Psalm 134

*1 Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD,
who stand by night in the house of the LORD!*

2 *Lift up your hands to the holy place
and bless the LORD!*

3 *May the LORD bless you from Zion,
he who made heaven and earth!*

Congregational Song:

Come, Bless the Lord

Traditional

(Psalms for All Seasons, 875)

Scripture Reading: Worship in the new heaven and new earth

Revelation 22:4

They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

Congregational Song:

Joyous Light of Heavenly Glory

Marty Haugen

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 389)

Closing Prayer :

*O God, you have made and redeemed all that is, and blessed your
people in immeasurable ways. We lift our hands and hearts to you in
worship, glorifying and enjoying you forever, through Jesus Christ, our
Lord. Amen. (Psalms for All Seasons, 873)*

Congregational Song:

Be Thou My Vision

Irish text and melody (tr. by Mary E. Byrne)

Blessing:

May God go before you to lead you;

May God go behind you to guard you;
May God go beneath you to support you;
May God go beside you to befriend you.

Do not be afraid.

Let the blessing of God come upon you today.

Do not be afraid.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

(Lift Up Your Hearts, 947)

APPENDIX 5

PSALM GUIDED WORSHIP SERIES
EVALUATION RUBRICS

The completed evaluation rubrics begin on the next page.

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 120 Evaluation by Dr. Lydia Siah					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.			x		
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.			x		May include silence for personal lamentation

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 121 Evaluation (By Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.				x	
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.				x	

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 122 Evaluation (by Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.				x	
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.				x	

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 123 Evaluation (by Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.			x		Older congregation may need some time to get familiar with some songs.
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.				x	

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 124 Evaluation (by Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.				x	
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.			x		May include silence for personal reflection of remembering God's acts of deliverance.

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 125 Evaluation (by Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.				x	
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.				x	

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 126 Evaluation (by Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.				x	
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.				x	

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 127 Evaluation (by Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.			x		The guided worship lead participants to trust God rather than viewing God as the center of daily life
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.				x	
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.			x		
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.			x		

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 128 Evaluation (by Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.				x	
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.				x	

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 129 Evaluation (by Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.		x			Not clear if the message of Ps 129 focused on delivery from wickedness or redemption of sin.
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.			x		
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.		x			Some songs do not reflect the spiritual war against the enemy.
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.			x		

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 130 Evaluation (by Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.				x	
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.			x		
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.				x	

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 131 Evaluation (by Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.				x	
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.				x	

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 132 Evaluation (by Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.			x		Should include the desire and resting in God's presence while looking forward for the reign of Christ.
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.			x		
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.			x		
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.			x		

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 133 Evaluation (by Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.		x			Should include reflections on disunity in the local church context.
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.				x	

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 134 Evaluation (by Dr. Lydia Siah)					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.				x	
The centrality of God is evident in worship				x	
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.				x	
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.				x	

Psalm Guided Worship Series Evaluation Tool					
Psalm 120-134 Evaluation by Dr. Martus Maleakhi					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The psalm guided worship is accurate in reflecting the biblical and theological aspects of the psalms.				X	The Scripture reading in the psalm guided worship is drawn from the Psalms as well as from other scriptures that move toward eschatology.
The psalm guided worship is practically applicable to the local church worship service.			X		Yes, but it needs to be applied to more specific contexts. This can be done by giving some suggestions such as sermon themes or contextual reflections that will be written by the users.
The centrality of God is evident in worship				X	Yes, this guided worship focuses on God as the source and provider of life.
The choice of songs is accurate in reflecting the theme and narrative of the psalms.				X	Yes, very good
The psalm guided worship is effective in inviting congregation participation.			X		Not all invite the participation of the congregations. It would be better if the reciprocal reading or other worship element ideas could be added

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ABSTRACT

DWELLING WITH GOD: PSALMS 120-134 FOR INDONESIAN WORSHIP

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This ministry project seeks to discover the biblical and theological significance of Psalms 120-134 and provide suggestions for their use in Indonesian worship. Chapter 1 introduces the Indonesian context and the rationale, purpose, goals, methodology, limitations, and delimitations. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological foundation. Although the pilgrimage theme may be present, there is a greater theme: the restoration, renewal, and blessings from God dwelling among His people. Chapter 3 elaborates the canonical, historical, theocentric, Christocentric, eschatological, and devotional reading used in this project. It also proposes the psalm guided worship based on Psalms 120-134 as a paradigm for worship. Chapter 4 describes the Indonesian Church in its religious context, results of the survey, and recommendations to improve the use of psalms in corporate worship. Chapter 5 concludes with an evaluation of the project's purpose and goals, strengths and weaknesses, theological and personal reflections, and suggestions for improvement.

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