Psalms of Ascent

Full Commentary Companion — Psalms 120–134

Complete Beyond Today Bible Commentary text for each of the fifteen songs of ascent, compiled for personal study between the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles.

Commentary source: United Church of God — Beyond Today Bible Commentary

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The Fifteen Songs of Ascent

The songs trace a progression from distress and distance from God to worship, peace, and blessing in His presence:

Psalm 120	Crying out from a lying, hostile world.
Psalm 121	Looking to God as the ultimate helper and keeper.
Psalm 122	Rejoicing in the journey to the house of the Lord.
Psalm 123	Pleading for mercy from the sovereign Lord.
Psalm 124	Recognizing God as the helper against overwhelming trouble.
Psalm 125	The security and stability of those who trust in God.
Psalm 126	Moving from weeping in sorrow to reaping in joy.
Psalm 127	Finding rest and value in God's provision and family.
Psalm 128	Blessings of fearing the Lord and walking in His ways.
Psalm 129	Endurance and survival through past oppression.
Psalm 130	Waiting expectantly and hopefully for divine redemption.
Psalm 131	Quieting the soul like a weaned child with its mother.
Psalm 132	Remembering God's covenant promises to King David.
Psalm 133	Celebrating the deep beauty of community and unity.
Psalm 134	A final call to bless the Lord in the sanctuary.

Psalm 120

Crying out from a lying, hostile world.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-120

As the first song of ascents in the first set of three (of the five sets of three), Psalm 120 is a lament while in "distress" (verse 1). However, if the latter part of verse 1 is translated as in the NKJV, "and He [God] heard me," then the distress mentioned in this verse would seem to be a former one--forming the basis for the appeal for help in the present distress. Yet it may be that the latter part of the verse should be rendered, "and He has heard me"--in which case the present distress is the one intended, the poet merely expressing his confidence in God to help him or perhaps having received some actual assurance. Still, not knowing exactly how and when matters will be resolved, he continues to pray for deliverance (verse 2).

The deliverance he seeks is from lying deceivers (same verse). And he considers that consequences will eventually befall them--apparently expecting God to judge them accordingly (verse 3). Verse 4 mentions sharp arrows and burning coals from a broom tree, a large desert shrub with roots that can be made into charcoal. It is not clear if this is referring to the lying words of the enemies here and the damage they do (compare Psalm 57:4; Psalm 64:3; Proverbs 25:18; Proverbs 16:27; Jeremiah 9:3, Jeremiah 9:8) or to the just judgment in kind that God will bring on them for it, as the NIV translates it to mean.

Verse 5 of Psalm 120 mentions dwelling among "Meshech" and the "tents of Kedar"--equating this with dwelling too long "with one who hates peace" (verse 6) or "among those who hate peace" (NIV), the plural meaning supported by the "they" in the next verse. Meshech was a gentile nation (Genesis 10:2), which was in Old Testament times located near the Black Sea. The descendants of Meshech later migrated north and may be found today among the people of Russia, the name Moscow helping to provide this identification (see the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on Ezekiel 38). Kedar was the second son of Abraham's son Ishmael (Genesis 25:13), from whom sprang "a great tribe of Arabs settled on the northwest of the [Arabian] peninsula and on the confines of Palestine…. The tribe seems to have been one of the most conspicuous of all the Ishmaelite tribes, and hence the rabbins call the Arabians universally by this name" (Smith's Bible Dictionary, "Kedar").

As the nomads of Kedar lived southeast of the land of Israel and the people of Meshech were far to the north, we are left to ponder why the psalmist says he dwells among both (Psalm 120:5). It may be that he has gone from living with one to the other. Some see a prophetic association--as a large portion of the Jewish people in recent centuries have lived in Russia and among Arab nations (the state of Israel itself being in the midst of Arab enemies). On the other hand, many believe the psalmist to be speaking metaphorically of other Israelites--that is, in their dishonesty and mistreatment of him they were behaving not as God's covenant people but like these other far-off foreigners. Alternatively, some have postulated this translation of the verse: "Woe is me, whether I dwell in Meshech, or I dwell among the tents of Kedar!" In context, the meaning would then seem to be that no matter where he lives in this world, the psalmist remains in hostile territory-facing lying enemies who don't want peace.

Interestingly, two different words are used for "dwell" in verse 5: garti ("sojourn") and shakanti ("tabernacle"). "These verbs," says The Expositor's Bible Commentary, "are significantly chosen. Even though the psalmist may have enjoyed a permanent residence, he felt as if he was no more than a sojourner among his contemporaries. He did not feel at home among an ungodly people" (note on verse 5). Indeed, God's people are to be temporary dwellers in this world--looking for the future homeland of the Kingdom of God (Leviticus 25:23; 1 Chronicles 29:15; 1 Peter 2:11; Hebrews 11:13-16).

In this light, we should note verse 7. The beginning of the verse, though translated as "I am for peace," is literally "I peace." The poet's whole being is consumed with the desire for peace--to make peace as he is able and desiring the peace that God's Kingdom will ultimately bring. Yet the antagonists have no interest in peace. They are for war (compare Isaiah 59:8). This psalm, then, is one of crying out to God for relief from the circumstances of dwelling in a hostile world. "This may have set the stage for believers to make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In Zion they would be among the people of God. In Jerusalem they would hear the words of truth. In the temple they could pray for the peace of God (Psalm 122:6; Psalm 125:5; Psalm 128:6)" (Nelson Study Bible, note on Psalm 120:5-7).

Moreover, the annual festivals themselves portray God's plan for the salvation of mankind. The joyous Feast of Tabernacles provides a small foretaste of the peace and happiness that will at last envelop the world under the reign of the Messiah--when the sojourn of God's people in this wicked world at last comes to an end.

Psalm 121

Looking to God as the ultimate helper and keeper.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-121

Psalm 121, the second song of ascents in the first set of three, is one of trust in God as helper and keeper. It is written as a dialogue--a two-party discussion (note the use of "I" and "my" in verses 1-2 and of "you" and "your" throughout the remainder of the psalm). Some believe this suggests antiphonal, responsive singing, yet you would have one group or person singing only two verses and then others singing all the rest. It is conceivable that the first stanza, verses 1-2, was intended as a solo introduction and that the remaining three stanzas--3-4, 5-6 and 7-8--were intended as a choir response. Other commentators, however, believe the dialogue here is within an individual. That is, the one speaking in verses 1-2 is also seen as speaking in the remaining verses but to his inner self.

The song begins with looking up to the hills and considering the source of help (verse 1)--then declaring the Creator God as that source (verse 2). What do hills have to do with help? In the context of ancient Israel, hills were a place of refuge. Armies converged in war on the plains. The Israelite nation in the Promised Land began in the hill country--where they did not have to fight the Canaanites and Philistines out on the open plains. Hills provided a barrier against advancing forces. For individuals, being out in the open was dangerous. The hills provided many hiding places.

We can draw a comparison with the help and protection that God provides. Note what another of the songs of ascents has to say: "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forever" (Psalm 125:2). Jerusalem is at the top of the Judean hill country. And here the City of David and Temple Mount are surrounded by higher hills, which provided a natural defense against invasion. Sadly, the people of Israel and Judah often placed undue emphasis on such natural protection. They even used the heights of mountains and hills as false worship centers--the high places. Jeremiah 3:23 says, "Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains; truly, in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel."

The author of Psalm 121 understands this well. Lifting his eyes to the hills probably refers to looking ahead as he ascends in his journey to the hills of Jerusalem. "Psalm 120 sets the stage for the Israelites' journey to the Holy City; this poem [121] is a song 'for the road'" (Nelson Study Bible, note on Psalm 121). Rather than the natural defenses of the hills, the psalmist understands that true help is to be found in the One who made those hills and everything else--Almighty God (verse 2; compare Psalm 124:8; Psalm 134:3). There was help to be found in the hills of Jerusalem--but only because God's blessing and protection was on this place of His sanctuary, where He commanded His people to convene and observe His spiritual feasts. Note the prayer in still another song of ascents: "Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens" (Psalm 123:1).

In the remainder of Psalm 121 (verses 3-8), the psalm repeatedly affirms that God is our keeper--our watcher or guardian. We should note that the word translated "keeps" in verses 3-4 is the same one translated "preserve" in verses 7-8--so that a form of the word for "keep" is used six times in this psalm.

We see in these verses that God will protect us on our journey--both on our journey to His festivals and, in a figurative sense, on our lifelong journey to His Kingdom. He will be there to keep our foot from slipping (verse 3, NIV) and, though we have to sleep along the way, God never sleeps (verses 3-4)--He is always vigilant in His care for His people.

Verses 5-6 say that God is a shade "at your right hand" (meaning readily accessible) so that the sun won't strike you by day or the moon by night. Travelers in the Middle East needed shade from the sun to prevent heat exhaustion, heatstroke and severe sunburn. Yet what of the moon? "In ancient times people saw the harmful effects of the rays of the sun, and they thought that certain illnesses (especially mental disorders) were also caused by the rays of the moon" (Word in Life Bible, note on verse 6). Thus our modern words moonstruck and lunacy. We should be careful, however, to note that verse 6 does not acknowledge this as a genuine phenomenon. The point is that God would protect the travelers from those things that posed concerns to them on their journey. Of course, a bright moon could pose a real problem in that it would make travelers more visible to bandits--and staring directly at it will briefly diminish night vision, which might be needed at that moment to better see such bandits and wild animals.

Verses 7-8 say that God will preserve us from all evil in all our goings and comings--i.e., at all times in our lives. "Preserve" here is a better sense than the English "keep," as the latter would seem to imply that nothing bad will ever happen to God's people. We have enough examples in the remainder of the psalms and throughout Scripture to show that this is not the case. The point, as we consider the rest of the Bible, is that whatever happens to us is within God's care and oversight. He watches over us and sees us through. He certainly does protect us as we go through life and keeps us from harm in far more ways than we are aware of. Yet He allows a certain degree of trials to befall us, though never more than we can handle (1 Corinthians 10:13). Most importantly, He will work things out to what is best for His people in the end (Romans 8:28)--a glorious end that will pale all present trials by comparison (verse 18). Accordingly, the focus of Psalm 121 is not merely for the here and now, but "from this time forth, and even forevermore" (verse 8). Here we have the promise of God watching over His people in such a way as to eventually lead them to the glorious future of eternal life.

Psalm 122

Rejoicing in the journey to the house of the Lord.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-122

Psalm 122, the third song of ascents in the first set of three, centers on blessing and peace in Zion. "This poem describes the joy of the pilgrim on arriving at Jerusalem to worship God" (Nelson Study Bible, note on Psalm 122). It is the first of four psalms of David among the songs of ascents.

David was "glad"--the Hebrew connotes laughter and cheerful delight--when companions encouraged him to accompany them into "the house of the Lord" at Jerusalem (verses 1-2). As David lived prior to his son Solomon's construction of the temple, this would immediately refer to the tabernacle that David erected in Jerusalem for the Ark of the Covenant, a place of public worship (2 Samuel 6:17-18). Yet David may have intended this psalm to be used in later temple worship. In a greater sense, it prefigures people coming into the spiritual temple of God--His Church--and ultimately God's Kingdom.

Because he lived in Jerusalem, David himself did not have to go far to worship in God's house. But he does mention others coming from afar--stating that the tribes of God (all His people) "go up" (ascend in their journey) to Jerusalem to give Him thanks (verse 4). Packed with throngs of pilgrims, the city is "compact together" (verse 3)--with all the tribes pressed together and blended. They come to the "Testimony of Israel" (verse 4). This likely referred to the tablets of the Testimony bearing the Ten Commandments within the Ark of the Covenant (compare Exodus 31:18; Exodus 25:21-22; Exodus 16:34). It also may entail coming to God's festivals to learn His laws generally. Indeed, the entire law was to be read every seventh Feast of Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 31:9-13).

Besides God's law being housed and taught in Jerusalem, it was also administratively applied here in civil judgment--providing the blessing of the rule of law and resultant civil order to God's nation (Psalm 122:5). The leading judges in the land were Israel's kings. When David speaks of "thrones of the house of David" in the plural, he may be referring to the seats of himself and Solomon after he had Solomon crowned king prior to his own death. There may also be a prophetic foreshadowing here of the future thrones of judgment in God's Kingdom, when Jesus Christ sits on the throne of David and His faithful followers reign with Him (see Luke 1:31-33; Revelation 3:21; 20:4, Matthew 19:28).

David calls on worshippers to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6). Actually, the name Jerusalem means "Possession of Peace" or "Foundation of Peace." And there is wordplay centered on this fact in the psalm.

David's prayer--"May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces" (verse 6)--may have been looking ahead to the divinely promised peaceful and blessed reign of his son Solomon, whose name meant "Peaceful." No doubt it was also David's desire for his ongoing dynasty--that the city would be a place of peace and harmony for God's people always, especially as they came together for worship at the annual feasts.

Sadly, Jerusalem has too often failed to live up to its name as the City of Peace. In the nearly 3,000 years since Solomon's death, it has seen numerous wars and conflicts--and today it sits as a

geopolitical powder keg. Thus, the psalm looks forward to the time of the Kingdom of the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, for its complete fulfillment--a time of which Solomon's peaceful reign was only a small foretaste. The Feast of Tabernacles also provides such a foretaste.

Yet though the peace sought in the psalm was ultimately far off, because the house of the Lord was in Jerusalem, David was committed to praying for peace in his day and seeking to rule righteously for the good of the city (verse 9). As before, besides the application of the words of this psalm to David's immediate situation, we should also understand them as applying to the people of spiritual Zion who constitute the spiritual temple of God today--the Church--the peace and good of which we should all continually pray and strive for even as we look forward to ultimate peace in the Kingdom of God.

Psalm 123

Pleading for mercy from the sovereign Lord.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-123

Psalm 123, as the first song of ascents in the second set of three (of the five sets of three), is another plea in the midst of distress. As in Psalm 121, the song begins with the psalmist lifting up his eyes--in this case directly to God in heaven (Psalm 123:1). Indeed, "eyes" is the keyword in this psalm, occurring four times in the first two verses. And just behind it is the thrice--repeated "mercy" or graciousness (verses 2-3)--the Hebrew word here, chanan, implying bending or stooping to help (Strong's No. 2603). Thus we see where our sights are to be set for help during distressing times--the same place they must always be set--on God.

Looking to God is compared with servants looking to the hand of their masters and mistresses (verse 2). One commentator notes: "In eastern countries, masters often commanded their servants by means of hand signals [clapping for summoning and gesturing for directives], so the servants kept their eyes on the master's hand. This is what gave them direction for their work. But the master's hand was also the source of their provision, what they needed for their daily sustenance. Finally, the master's hand protected them in times of danger" (Warren Wiersbe, Be Exultant--Psalms 90-150: Praising God for His Mighty Works, 2004, note on verse 2). As God's servants, we are to look intently to Him for the slightest nuance of direction, for our daily bread and for help in times of need.

The psalmist pleads for God's gracious intervention because he and his compatriots are "exceedingly filled with contempt" (verse 3). Twice he uses the words "contempt" and "exceedingly" to describe their treatment by those who are proud and at ease (verses 3-4). The NIV translates these verses as: "We have endured much contempt. We have endured much ridicule from the proud, much contempt from the arrogant."

The exact circumstances here are not known, and we might wonder how this relates to observing God's festivals. Certainly the very fact of following God's ways, including observing His Sabbaths and festivals, will provoke scorn from the world. A prime example of this occurred in the time of King Hezekiah after he restored true worship and sent runners through what was left of the Northern Kingdom of Israel with an invitation for the people to come to Jerusalem to keep the Passover. "So the runners passed from city to city though the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun; but they laughed at them and mocked them. Nevertheless some from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. Also the hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to obey the command of the king and the leaders, at the word of the Lord " (2 Chronicles 30:10-12).

May we always look to God's hand to direct us--and to help us when the world around us ridicules and persecutes us for obeying Him.

Psalm 124

Recognizing God as the helper against overwhelming trouble.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-124

Psalm 124, the second song of ascents of the second set of three, expresses trust in God--acknowledging Him as the reason for Israel's survival. This is the second of four songs of ascents attributed to King David.

David encourages national participation in this hymn with the formula "Let Israel now say" (verse 1; compare 118:2; 129:1). The repeated opening statement "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side…" (verses 1-2) takes as a given that God had been on their side. Indeed, God is on the side of His people. This was historically true for Israel, just as it is for spiritual Israel--God's Church. Being on the side of His people does not mean that God endorses everything that they do, as they stumble and sin. The sense here is of being with them, supporting them. God works with His people to guide them, help them and ultimately save them-often against antagonists who try to thwart them. In a powerful New Testament parallel, the apostle Paul remarks, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Without God's aid, the enemies of His people, in both the physical and spiritual realm, would have swallowed them up (Psalm 124:2-3)--in the metaphoric senses of a flood running over them (verses 4-5) and of predatory wild animals devouring them (verse 6). David used such flood imagery in other psalms for threats and persecution (Psalm 18:16; Psalm 32:6; Psalm 69:1-2; compare also Job 27:20; Revelation 12:15-16). And he elsewhere compares persecution to being attacked by lions (Psalm 7:1-2; Psalm 10:8-11; Psalm 57:4).

Yet God has given deliverance, seen also in the figure of a bird escaping the fowler's snare--the trap of a bird trapper (compare Psalm 91:3). The Zondervan Student Bible comments: "Some trouble is quick--bang and it's over…but with other trouble, trying to escape only gets you more deeply entangled…if you try to undo the damage, you only make it worse. That's exactly the picture of 'the fowler's snare.' The bird that caught its neck in the noose only tightened the snare's choke-hold by struggling. The bird could not get out by its own effort. But this time, says David, the snare has miraculously broken, and the bird has flown to safety. When you escape that way, there's only one person to thank: the Lord" (note on verse 7).

Indeed, the past deliverance on which the song reflects is the basis for continued trust in the help of the Almighty Creator God--the One who made heaven and earth (verse 8; compare Psalm 121:2; Psalm 134:3). This confidence is essential for our journey to God's Kingdom.

Psalm 125

The security and stability of those who trust in God.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-125

As the third song of ascents in the second set of three, Psalm 125 brings us again to blessing and peace in Zion. As the previous psalm expressed trust in God, so this one picks up from there in commencing with "those who trust in the Lord " (verse 1).

These are compared with the abiding presence of Mount Zion, probably meaning all of Jerusalem as it expanded from the original City of David (see verses 1-2). As the mountain is immovable and enduring, both in natural terms and because God has declared it His eternal Holy City, so those with faith in God will themselves continue with God in His city forever. As the City of David and temple mount were surrounded by higher hills, providing a natural defense against encroaching armies, so God surrounds His covenant people with protection to preserve them (verse 2). The comparison here is all the more fitting because God's faithful spiritual people--those of His Church-are collectively referred to in various passages as Zion or Jerusalem in a spiritual sense. They will forever inhabit the heavenly Zion or New Jerusalem that will come down to the earth at the culmination of God's plan of salvation for mankind.

The psalmist says that the "scepter of wickedness"--evil rule (compare Psalm 94:20)--would not "rest" on the allotted land of the righteous, inducing the righteous to veer in their character (Psalm 125:3). God did allow evil kings to rule over Israel and Judah-both domestic and foreign--and many people in the land were corrupted by this. Yet such wicked rule did not persist. Indeed, the context here is one of "forever" (verse 2). In an ultimate sense, God would not allow the wicked to prevail over the land promised to God's people--this referring to not only the Holy Land but to the whole world. The rule of Satan the devil and his corrupting influence over this planet will be broken at the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of God's Kingdom so that people will be drawn not to iniquity, but to the joy of righteousness and peace--conditions represented in the fall festivals.

In the meantime, though confident in God to protect and preserve His people, the psalmist still prays with a sense of urgency that God will "do good…to those who are good…who are upright" (verse 4). No one by nature is truly good, but those who are forgiven of sin and live upright lives with the help of God's Spirit are nevertheless classified as "good." These people follow godly ways in contrast with those who "turn aside" to follow "crooked ways." As for those who follow wicked examples of disobedience, God will lead them away to the same consequences (verse 5)--perhaps meaning out of the Promised Land and into captivity, as referred to in the next psalm.

Psalm 125 ends with a call for peace on Israel (same verse)--the true Israel being those who faithfully continue in covenant with God. The same closing prayer ends Psalm 128, the concluding song of ascents in the next set of three.

Psalm 126

Moving from weeping in sorrow to reaping in joy.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-126

Psalm 126, the first song of ascents in the third set of three (of the five sets of three), returns to the theme of distress in this world, as most of Israel remains in exile and the psalm speaks of sowing in tears (compare verses 4-5). Exile was a consequence of disobedience, as was hinted at in the previous psalm. However, there is also great joy for those restored to Zion-another theme repeated from the previous psalm. "Psalm 125 and 126 are thematically linked and precisely balanced, each being composed (in Hebrew) of 116 syllables. Their juxtaposition was no doubt deliberate" (Zondervan NIV Study Bible, note on Psalm 125).

This psalm poses a difficulty for those who would link King Hezekiah with the songs of ascents--since he lived prior to the return from Babylonian Exile apparently referred to in this psalm. However, as was noted at the outset with respect to this idea, it is possible that the psalm was originally written about what was yet to come and that the specific wording was modified following the return from captivity. In any case, the psalm as we have it appears to date from after the Exile. Even so, there is a prophetic aspect regarding the complete return from captivity in the future.

Psalm 126 is harmonized with Ezra 6:14-22 in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary, in the account of the completion of the rebuilding of the temple following the Exile. Some of what follows is a repeat of earlier comments.

The return from captivity in Babylon had been anticipated for so long that when it came, it seemed like a dream (verse 1). Was this really happening? It was! And when the reality set in, joy was overflowing in laughter and song. The events that Judah experienced through the decrees of the Persian emperors Cyrus and Darius and the temple reconstruction all stood as a great testimony among other nations (compare verse 2). And it was a great witness to those who returned of the reality and power of their God. "The Lord has done great things for us," they cried, "and we are filled with joy" (verse 3, NIV).

Still, all was not yet accomplished. God had "brought back the captivity of Zion" (verse 1). And yet the people pray in verse 4, "Bring back our captivity, O Lord …" Only a small percentage of the Jews who had been exiled to Babylon had returned. And the rest of the tribes of Israel, taken away previously in the Assyrian captivity, remained scattered. Ultimately, therefore, this prayer was for the end-time work of Jesus Christ in bringing Israel and Judah back from around the globe.

"…As the streams in the South [the Negev]" (same verse) is a request that this happen quickly and with great force. "The wadis in the steppe south of Hebron, around Beersheba, were generally dry; but on the rare occasions when during the winter months it rained even as little as one inch, the water ran down its 'streams' with great rapidity and often with destructive force…. Roads and bridges [have been] destroyed by the force of these torrential streams. The 'streams in the Negev' are not ordinary phenomena, as much as they represent proverbially the sudden unleash of God's blessing" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on verse 4).

Verses 5-6 give us the beautiful word picture of sowing in tears yet reaping in joy. All our wearisome toil and trials in this life, including Israel's exile, is working toward a wonderful outcome. "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17, RSV). How well this is symbolized in God's festivals, which celebrate in part the harvests of produce after the toil of planting and tending crops. Pentecost is alternatively referred to as the Feast of Harvest. The Feast of Tabernacles is also known as the Feast of Ingathering--and it is to be kept with rejoicing (Deuteronomy 16:13-15). The ancient Jewish return to the Promised Land after decades of loss, heartache and shame was a source of great rejoicing. How much more joyful will it be when the people of all Israel are at last gathered again to their homeland at the establishment of God's Kingdom-simultaneous with the reunion of God's spiritual family!

As we assemble annually to observe God's feasts, let us all go with such a mindset--as if leaving the captivity of this world to rejoice before the Almighty King who has done great things for us, knowing that all our toil and sorrow in this age will ultimately reap a joyous reward in His presence for all eternity.

Psalm 127

Finding rest and value in God's provision and family.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-127

Psalm 127, the central psalm of the songs of ascents, is one of only two psalms with Solomon's name in the title (the other being Psalm 72). As the second song of ascents in the third set of three, Psalm 127 is one of trust in God--acknowledging Him as the source of security and posterity. The key word here is the thrice-repeated "vain" (verses 1-2)--showing the futility of life apart from God. "It reminded the pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem that all of life's securities and blessings are gifts from God rather than their own achievements (see Deuteronomy 28:1-14 [compare 8:10-18])" (Zondervan NIV Study Bible, note on Psalm 127).

The building of the house in verse 1 perhaps calls to mind the work that Solomon did on building God's house--the temple--as well as his own house or royal palace and other great building projects in Jerusalem and throughout the land of Israel. Yet the meaning of "house" here could also signify a family--on which the latter part of the psalm concentrates. It could even mean a nation--a family grown large--such as the whole house of Israel or house of Judah. Moreover, God had promised David an enduring house--meaning his royal dynasty, Solomon himself being the first successor. In building a house of any sort, the idea is to provide shelter or protection, promote community or family within and ensure perpetuity. Yet without God's involvement, such building is ultimately wasted effort--for only He can give true and lasting security, belonging and permanence.

If God is not the One doing the safeguarding, as verse 1 shows in the example of city watchmen, there is no guarantee of safety. Furthermore, apart from God, working from early morning to late at night to make ends meet is an uncertain venture--the earned sustenance being accompanied by the anguish of life's worries. Conversely, God's vigilant care for His people who trust Him frees them from restlessness and allows them the blessing of peaceful slumber (verse 2; Psalm 128:2; compare Matthew 6:28-34).

God is the One who perpetuates home and family--through His overseeing care and, as related in the song's second stanza, through the miracle of childbirth. Children are, in fact, His gifts--an inheritance and blessing from Him (Psalm 127:3; compare Psalm 128:3). They build and bring joy to a family, they help with family responsibilities, they guard against loneliness and abandonment in old age, they perpetuate and bring honor to the family name. "In ancient times, having many children was regarded as a symbol of strength. This was particularly true in an agricultural economy, since the extra hands of children increased the productivity of the farmer" (Nelson Study Bible, note on verses 3-5). A man with a large family enjoyed a measure of respect and recognition among his peers. When citizens met at the city gates to discuss business, such a man was not ashamed to speak his mind--even to enemies, who would think twice before acting against a person with a large family, fearing his many defenders against accusations, an increased possibility of retribution and the perceived evidence of God's favor (verse 5).

The blessing of family, a theme carried over into the next psalm, is an important focus of the annual festivals of God, during which the songs of ascent were sung. For not only do the feasts look forward to the redemption and restoration of the family of Israel and that of all mankind (which truly is one great family), but this is all part of God's plan of building His spiritual family-an eternal inheritance in which we may all share.

Psalm 128

Blessings of fearing the Lord and walking in His ways.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-128

Psalm 128, the third song of ascents in the third set of three, returns to the theme of blessing and peace in Zion--here as a continuation of the focus on the wonderful blessings of family in the previous psalm. True happiness in this regard is part of the reward of those who fear God--those who have an appropriate sense of awe and respect for Him and His ways, fearing the consequences of disobeying Him (verses 1, 4).

The previous psalm spoke of laboring in vain without God and eating bread of anguish as a result (Psalm 127:1-2). Here the labor of those who obey and rely on God results in eating (experiencing the fruit of one's labors) in happiness and well-being (Psalm 128:2).

As part of this blessing, the godly man's wife is described as "a fruitful vine" (verse 3). This refers in part to her being the mother of his children, as the lines that follow and the mention of children as "the fruit of the womb" in the previous psalm imply (see Psalm 127:3). Yet it probably also more generally means that she is a source of great joy and happiness for him, as noted below. Likewise their children are likened to promising "olive shoots" (NIV). "Ever green and with the promises of both long life and productivity (of staples: wood, fruit, oil). The vine and olive tree are frequently paired in the O[ld] T[estament] (as, e.g., in Exodus 23:11). Both were especially long-lived, and they produced the wine and the oil that played such a central role in the lives of the people" (Zondervan NIV Study Bible, note on Psalm 128:3).

The Expositor's Bible Commentary states: "The imagery of vine and olive tree are reminiscent of the eras of David and Solomon (1 Kings 4:25) and the blessings associated with the messianic era (Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10) [--a period symbolized by the Feast of Tabernacles]. To sit under one's vine and fig tree was an expression of a state of tranquility, peace, and prosperity. Even when the country faces adversity, the man who fears the Lord is insulated against adversity by wife and children as the blessings of the Lord are found under the roof of his house. The metaphor of the fruitfulness of the vine extends, not only to the bearing of children, but also to everything the wife contributes to the welfare of family (cf. Proverbs 31:10-31).

"The children, who are likened to olive shoots, are strong and in due time will continue the work that their father has begun (cf. 52:8; Jeremiah 11:16; Hosea 14:6). Though the olive tree may not bear after it has been planted for forty years, it is a symbol of longevity and productivity. So are children within the household of faith! They are not like grass, which is here today but is gone tomorrow. Rather, they are olive trees that in due time bear their fruit. The blessedness of the godly man will extend to other generations. What a privilege God bestows on his children in this life that we may already taste the firstfruits of our heritage!" (note on Psalm 128:3-4).

It is noteworthy that the wife is "in the very heart of your house" (verse 3), showing that she is faithful--not like the unfaithful wife whose "feet would not stay at home" (Proverbs 7:11)--and that she is in a protected position and central to the successful functioning of the family. The children are "all

around your table" for meals, implying that the family eats together in fellowship and that the children are pleased to be responsible members of the family (Psalm 128:3).

Verse 5 then remarkably states that these blessings are to come out of Zion--in connection with seeing the good of Jerusalem over the course of life. So we see that godly and truly blessed families are not just automatic with an initial commitment to follow God. Rather, this is speaking of the whole family coming together to Jerusalem to learn and grow in God's ways, clearly relating this psalm and its great blessings to the annual pilgrimages to keep God's feasts. Today, we can understand Zion in a spiritual sense as representative of God's Church--as well as looking forward to life in God's Kingdom.

The blessing of verse 6 concerns both the longevity of the righteous and the desire for their posterity to continue to experience the blessings of the psalm--implying their continuance in God's ways, especially family worship and learning at His festivals. This is the key to the concluding call for peace on God's people in the same verse--repeated from the end of Psalm 125.

Psalm 129

Endurance and survival through past oppression.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-129

As the first song of ascents in the fourth set of three (of the five sets of three), Psalm 129 is set in the context of distress, recalling those who have hated and abused God's people and pronouncing consequences on them.

The afflicted "me" in verses 1-2, as this is to be declared by all Israel--per the formula "Let Israel now say" (verse 1; compare Psalm 118:2; Psalm 124:1)--refers to the nation collectively and to all its citizens individually. As for their enemies here, the people of Israel throughout their history often suffered under the brutality of foreign oppressors--and even from other Israelites who were not classed with them here as part of Israel, these being disobedient to God's covenant. (Consider that faithful Israelites often suffered at the hands of their own countrymen.)

The striking imagery of plowers having plowed on Israel's back in long furrows in verse 3 probably combines different metaphors. The obvious meaning here is that of the lash cutting into the people's backs, creating bleeding furrows or stripes--as, for example, the Messiah was prophesied to experience (see Isaiah 50:6; Isaiah 53:5). Yet it should be noted that God foretold Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians in terms of plowing: "Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruin" (Jeremiah 26:18). The furrows in this case would be paths of destruction through the land. And this was on the back of the people in the sense of their bearing it as a burden.

Yet because the Lord is righteous, the enemies of Israel have never ultimately prevailed (Psalm 129:2). God has always at some point delivered His people, intervening to "cut in pieces the cords of the wicked" (verse 4)--that is, the figurative cords they have used to bind God's people and to scourge them. God's past deliverance is the basis of faith in His future intervention.

Verses 5-8, the second stanza of the psalm, then declare an imprecation or curse on the wicked oppressors, expressing God's judgment. The psalmist asks that all who hate Zion and what it represents--God, His laws, His covenant nation, His Church, His Kingdom--"be turned back in shame" (verse 5, NIV). And "consistent with the agricultural language of the psalm, the people pray that the wicked may wither like 'grass on the roof' (v. 6 [NIV]; 2 Kings 19:26; Isaiah 37:27). Roofs were flat; and during periods of moisture or precipitation, grassy weeds might sprout and grow in the shallow dirt. However, the plants soon withered when deprived of moisture (cf. Matthew 13:5-6). The grass may grow, but it is so useless that a reaper need not cut it down with a scythe nor bind it into sheaves ([Psalm 129] v. 7). It is a wasted growth. So it will be with the wicked" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on verses 5-8).

In verse 8, the righteous are reminded to not inadvertently pronounce a blessing on those who are cursed through a typical greeting or bidding of farewell using God's name (compare 2 John 9-11).

In an ultimate sense, this song of ascents looks forward to the fulfillment of the fall festivals in the return of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, when Israel--meaning both God's physical nation and His spiritual

people, the Church--are delivered from their bondage in this world, their oppressors being both human and, primarily, demonic. The cords of Satan and sin will be broken, God's people will at last be set free, and Satan and his followers will be brought to shame.

Psalm 130

Waiting expectantly and hopefully for divine redemption.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-130

Though Psalm 130 begins in the depths of despair, it rises, as the second song of ascents in the fourth set of three, to a primary focus of confident hope and trust in God--in His faithfulness to forgive and redeem. In its acknowledgment of sin and need for forgiveness, the song is classed as a penitential psalm. "Its placement following a psalm of imprecation (Psalm 129) is fitting. After all, a person might take such joy [or comfort] in the destruction of the wicked that he or she no longer would consider his or her own heart before the Lord" (Nelson Study Bible, note on Psalm 130). The pilgrims may have sung this psalm in the manner of a group confessional, seeking God's forgiveness in preparation for keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. In this sense, it would seem related to the Day of Atonement, concerned with humbling oneself and seeking reconciliation with God just before the joyful celebration of Tabernacles.

The psalm opens with the picture of one who is drowning in sorrow over his sins, calling to God for help, referring to Him throughout as both "Lord" (Yhwh, Eternal One) and "Lord" (Master). The psalmist knows that he, representative of all God's people, has failed in obedience to the Master. Yet he also knows that God has made provision for this failure.

Verse 3 rhetorically asks who could stand if God were to mark iniquities--that is, if a running tally of our sins was His means of judging us. The answer is none of us--for all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and the ultimate penalty of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Ezra expressed wonder at God's people standing in His presence despite their sins: "O Lord God of Israel, you are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day [though deserving of complete destruction]. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before you because of this!" (Ezra 9:15). This is possible because God, in His love for humanity, instituted an alternate means of satisfying justice, whereby mercy could be granted instead. This alternate means was the sacrifice of Jesus Christ--who bore the penalty of our sins in His suffering and crucifixion--foreshadowed in the sacrificial system of ancient Israel.

The psalmist looks to God for forgiveness (Psalm 130:4), knowing that God is willing to forgive (see Exodus 34:7). It is instructive to note that God offers forgiveness that He "may be feared" (Psalm 130:4). This does not mean that God's forgiveness is something to be feared. Solomon similarly prayed in his prayer at the dedication of the temple for God to forgive His people when they repented "so they will fear you all the time they live in the land you gave our fathers" (1 Kings 8:40). The point is that God's willingness to forgive is what encourages people to enter into a relationship with Him--to committing their lives to obeying Him from then on in proper fear. We should especially consider that forgiveness is not intended to lead to careless abandon but to careful obedience. God does not offer a cheap grace where He continually forgives us without real repentance. He requires a change of life, though this too is possible only through Him.

Confident in God's forgiveness, the psalmist waits in assured hope of God's promises (Psalm 130:5)--hopes and watches even more than "watchmen wait for the morning" (verse 6, NIV). The

psalmist may refer here to guards who watched over the city at night--who looked forward to their shift ending and getting some rest. Others suggest that the watchers were Levite priests observing the first signs of dawn to begin preparation for the morning sacrifices. Perhaps the figure concerns longing for the darkness of night to end with the dawning of day--as representative of longing for some present trial brought on by sin to end or of Israel's national history of trials to end with the dawning of the coming day of God.

In verse 7 the psalm exhorts the nation to the same confident hope: "O Israel, hope in the Lord" --words also found in the conclusion of the next psalm (Psalm 131:3), serving to link these songs. For with God, Psalm 130:7 continues, there is hesed--steadfast, loyal love and mercy. He had done so much to redeem them already--delivering them from Egypt, giving them a land, rescuing them from enemies time and again. God would redeem them in an ultimate sense in time to come--from their sins and its consequences through the Messiah, who would die for their sins and rescue them from all foes, physical and spiritual (see verses 7-8). This redemption was on the minds of pilgrims as they made their way to God's feasts--just as it should be on our minds today.

Psalm 131

Quieting the soul like a weaned child with its mother.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-131

Psalm 131 is the third of four psalms of David among the songs of ascents. As the third song of ascents in the fourth set of three, we would expect its theme to be blessing and peace in Zion--and this does fit with the mention of David, the king in Jerusalem, having a calmed and quieted soul and of Israel living in the hope of God forever (verses 2-3). The same exhortation for Israel to hope in God in Psalms 130:7 and Psalm 131:3 serves to link these two psalms thematically--as does proximity and the continued mood of humility before God.

In light of his accomplishments, David could have been proud. Yet he presents himself to the Lord as a humble man. At heart he is not arrogant or filled with self-importance, nor does he have aspirations for personal greatness (verse 1). He does not deem himself more capable than he is, recognizing his limitations (same verse).

He is at peace and content in God's presence, like a weaned child who no longer frets and cries for milk from his mother's breast (verse 2). A breastfeeding baby can be satisfied--but only temporarily. Note furthermore that this does not mean David views himself as independent of God and no longer in need of His provision. Indeed, a weaned child must still be taken care of and fed by his or her mother. Certainly God will continue to provide and care for all His people--and they should look to Him in confident hope for the present and for eternity to come (verse 3).

Thus, humility, maturity to a point of settled and ongoing contentment, and faith in God's promises are important focuses to maintain in observing God's festivals and in living godly lives generally in the lifelong march to His Kingdom.

Psalm 132

Remembering God's covenant promises to King David.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-132

Psalm 132 is a royal psalm touching on God's covenant with David and His royal successors. As the first song of ascents in the fifth and final set of three, the expected setting would be one of distress. Though there is dispute about the time this psalm was composed, we should note the prayer in verse 10 that, for David's sake, God not reject His anointed one--that is, an anointed king of David's dynasty. While Solomon originally spoke these words as a general plea for himself and his successors--as verses 8-10 are adapted from his dedicatory prayer for the temple (compare 2 Chronicles 6:41-42)--it may be that the words are recalled in the psalm because a later Davidic king, and perhaps the continuance of the dynasty, were now seemingly in jeopardy.

In this light, consider that some identify the author of the unattributed songs of ascent or songs of the degrees as King Hezekiah. That would fit a time of seeming peril for David's royal dynasty, as he faced the Assyrian invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem. However, the reigns of a few other kings of Judah would also fit such a time, and the author could be someone other than the king referred to in the psalm.

The song begins by asking God to remember David and all his afflictions (verse 1)--all that he suffered as a servant of God, as detailed in so many other psalms--along with his deep devotion to a dwelling place for God (verses 3-5). This began with David bringing the Ark of the Covenant, representing God's presence, to a tabernacle he raised up for it in Jerusalem and, beyond that, his commitment to a fixed temple for God (see 2 Samuel 6-7). Though God did not permit David to actually build the temple, as it was to be built during Solomon's reign of peace (1 Chronicles 22:9-10), David nevertheless invested great wealth and energy into the temple plans before turning the project over to his son. David purchased the property for the temple (2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21:28-22:1) and "made abundant preparations [for it] before his death" (1 Chronicles 22:5; see 22:1-29:20).

Verses 6-9 of Psalm 132 appear to follow the progression of the ark to David's tabernacle and then to Solomon's temple. Note in verse 6 the hearing and discovery of "it" in Ephrathah and the "fields of the woods" or "fields of Jaar" (NIV). "Ephrathah by itself could refer to the vicinity around Bethlehem (Ruth 4:11; Micah 5:2) or to Kiriath Jearim [meaning 'City of Woods'] (cf. 1 Chronicles 2:19, 1 Chronicles 2:24, 1 Chronicles 2:50); but with the further description of 'the fields of Jaar'--a reference to Kiriath Jearim (Jearim is a plural of 'Jaar')--the identity of Ephrathah is further delimited in favor of Kiriath Jearim, where the ark was located [when David and his men sought it out] (cf. 1 Samuel 6:21-7:2)" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on Psalm 132:6). Yet the "it" heard there probably refers not to the ark itself, but to the call in verse 7 to take it into the Jerusalem tabernacle and worship there, for "in Hebrew the pronoun is feminine, but the Hebrew for 'ark' is masculine" (Zondervan NIV Study Bible, note on verse 6). The word footstool in the call in verse 7 refers to God's sanctuary as the place of His feet, set down on the earth among His people (compare Psalm 99:5; Isaiah 60:13; Isaiah 66:1).

Verses 8-10 of Psalm 132 are, as noted earlier, evidently adapted from Solomon's prayer in the dedication of the temple (2 Chronicles 6:41-42)--when the ark was moved from the tabernacle to the new structure intended to be its permanent dwelling. And here in the same prayer linking God with Jerusalem as His perpetual holy dwelling place, Solomon also asked that God, for David's sake, would not reject His anointed (Hebrew mashiach or messiah). Solomon was no doubt referring to himself, but by extension this included all of David's dynastic successors--prophetically culminating in the ultimate Messiah or Anointed One, Jesus Christ.

"If, as some have proposed, the petitions in vv. 1, 10 form a frame around the first half of the psalm, the second half offers assurance that the prayer will be heard…. In any event, David's vow to provide the Lord a dwelling place, which would be for his royal sons and for Israel a house of prayer (see 1 Kings 8:27-53; 1 Kings 9:3; 2 Chronicles 7:15-16; Isaiah 59:7), is made the basis for the appeal that God will hear his anointed's prayer" (Zondervan, note on Psalm 132:10).

It is interesting to note a few parallel statements between the first and second halves of the psalm. The words adapted from Solomon's prayer in verses 8-10 call on God to occupy His resting place, for His priests to be clothed with righteousness, for His saints to shout for joy and for God to not turn away His anointed. In verses 14-15, God answers that Zion is the resting place He has chosen to permanently dwell in and that He will bless accordingly. In verse 16, God responds that He will clothe Zion's priests with not just righteousness but even salvation (compare Isaiah 61:10)--and further answers that the saints will shout for joy. And rather than rejecting His anointed, God will make the "horn" of David--symbolizing power and authority--grow. Further, God would prepare a "lamp" for David--the metaphor here of a light that wouldn't go out, symbolizing his perpetual dynasty (Psalm 132:17; compare 1 Kings 11:36; 1 Kings 15:4). The enemies of God's anointed would be put to shame while his own crown or rule would flourish (Psalm 132:18).

Of course, salvation and the everlasting perpetuity of Jerusalem and David's dynasty will only come through the ultimate Anointed--Jesus Christ. Indeed, whatever the original circumstances that prompted the composition of Psalm 132, we should recognize that as one of the songs of ascent, it became part of festival worship focusing on Zion as God's perpetual city, the place of His temple--His dwelling place--and the throne of David to one day be occupied by the coming Messiah, who would redeem Israel and make Jerusalem the capital of the world. We should further understand Zion as also symbolic of God's Church--to be glorified at Jesus' return to reign with Him on the throne of David over all nations from physical Zion. Indeed, all truly converted Christians are anointed of God through the Holy Spirit--and will serve as the royalty and priesthood of the world tomorrow under Christ.

To better understand God's promises to David about an enduring dynasty and how these have been and ultimately will be fulfilled, see the UCG online publication, "The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future."

Psalm 133

Celebrating the deep beauty of community and unity.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-133

Psalm 133, the fourth of four psalms of David among the songs of ascent, concerns the joy of brotherly unity among God's people. As the second song of ascents in the fifth set of three, it looks in trust to God to provide His commanded blessing of eternal life. The key word in the psalm, missed in English because it is translated different ways, is the thrice--repeated yarad--rendered "running down" twice (verse 2) and "descending" once (verse 3). The idea is that goodness and blessing comes down from above--from God.

David may have composed the psalm when the tribes, after many years of conflict, agreed to unite under his leadership (2 Samuel 5:1-5). As well, the psalm speaks to the pleasure of traveling together in harmony to keep the feasts in Jerusalem--and participating there in the great throngs of unified worship. Furthermore, the song applies to the blessing of unity within and among the congregations of God's people--even today.

The delightful unity described is between "brethren"--brothers--emphasizing family kinship. This goes far beyond immediate family. For people in Old Testament times this was understood in the sense of national brotherhood. And of course we in God's Church understand it to refer, on an even higher level, to spiritual brotherhood through the Holy Spirit of God. God's children getting along and happily working together is truly a delightful experience--and a blessing that comes down from Him.

The "precious oil" (verse 2) was the anointing oil specially prepared for use in the tabernacle (see Exodus 30:22-33). "When the high priest was anointed, the oil ran down his beard to the front of his body and over his collar. This suggests that the oil 'bathed' the twelve precious stones that he wore on the breastplate over his heart, and this 'bathing' is a picture of spiritual unity" (Wiersbe, Be Exultant, note on verse 2).

In verse 3, Mount Hermon, a high, snowy peak on the border between Israel and Lebanon, was a significant source of water for Israel. One avenue for this was evaporation--carrying water from Hermon to settle in the south as dew and rain. Also, snowmelt sank into the Hermon region and emerged in many streams in northern Israel, even forming the headwaters of the Jordan River--the word Jordan also being derived from the word yarad. (Yaraden apparently meaning "coming down from Dan"--which was in the Hermon area). As water was carried this way from Hermon down through the land of Israel to the mountains of Zion, so was further evaporation and precipitation. Yet note that precipitation in general is not in mind here, but specifically dew. From around May to October, encompassing Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles, virtually no rain fell on Jerusalem, so that refreshment came only through the blessing of daily morning dew--and, the comparison is made, through the unity of God's people at His pilgrim feasts.

"The two similes (vv. 2-3) are well chosen; God's blessings flowed to Israel through the priestly ministrations at the sanctuary (Exodus 29:44-46; Leviticus 9:22-24; Numbers 6:24-26)--epitomizing God's redemptive mercies--and through heaven's dew that sustained life in the fields--epitomizing

God's providential mercies in the creation order" (Zondervan NIV Study Bible, note on verse 3). Moreover, anointing oil and water precipitation are both representative in Scripture of the Holy Spirit--sent down from God to transform and spiritually sustain His people.

This blessing from above is the source of the unity of God's people--as well as the closing blessing of this joyous life continuing through all eternity.

Psalm 134

A final call to bless the Lord in the sanctuary.

Full article:
https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-psalms/psalm-134

Psalm 134 is the last of the song of ascents. As the third song in the fifth and final set of three, the psalm returns to the concluding theme of blessing and peace in Zion. Indeed, the key word here is bless, used three times in three verses.

Verses 1-2 contain a call to God's servants to bless God, while verse 3 is a declaration of blessing from God on His people. In the first case, as noted in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on Psalm 103, a "blessing" from a human being directed to God is a word of heartfelt praise or thanksgiving or an expressed wish to see all of God's purposes fulfilled, implying cheerful and committed cooperation with Him--submitting fully to His will.

There is some question regarding the identity and circumstances of the "servants of the Lord , who by night stand in the house of the Lord " (Psalm 134:1). This is widely believed to refer to Levites on watch each night, after the temple was closed and secure--or to their continuing to sing after this closing (compare 1 Chronicles 9:33; Psalm 42:8; Psalm 77:6). Yet it may refer, or may have come to refer, to a tradition that developed during the Feast of Tabernacles of Levites and worshippers of the nation participating in night festivities in the temple court that ran late into the night on every night of the feast except the first. Tradition states that there was singing, dancing, juggling and the Levitical performance of the 15 songs of ascent on 15 steps ascending from the court of the women, as noted in the UCG commentary's introduction to the songs of ascents. This may be related to Isaiah 30:29: "You shall have a song as in the night when a holy festival is kept, and gladness of heart as when one goes with a flute, to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Mighty One of Israel."

So the "servants" in Psalm 134 could be Levites or priests who are called on to bless God on behalf of the people--or they could be all the people collectively calling on each other to bless Him. Either way, this is with lifting up hands in the sanctuary--this being one of the standard postures of prayer (compare 1 Timothy 2:8).

The last verse of Psalm 134 is a form of benediction, asking God's favor on the pilgrims who were traveling from Jerusalem following the festivals (verse 3). Here either the priests declare a blessing from God on the departing worshippers or all the worshippers collectively pronounce a blessing on one another. This blessing is from "the Lord who made heaven and earth," repeating an earlier formula in the songs of ascents (compare Psalm 121:2; Psalm 124:8). And remarkably, the God of all creation blesses through His chosen dwelling of Zion--which signifies ancient Jerusalem and the instruction provided through its worship system, the faithful of God, the Church, the millennial Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God and the heavenly Jerusalem that will one day descend to earth. May our own pilgrim journey bring us there--to the wonderful eternal blessings God has in store.