

Stepping Up

*a journey through the
Psalms of Ascent*

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viewer guide

Introductory Session

Welcome to a study of the Psalms of Ascent. Hopefully you will find this study of the Word of God completely unique from others we may have shared. Today we'll stand together at the starting line of the path God has paved for us and catch the vision for what's ahead. This entire session is dedicated to answering two questions: What are the Psalms of Ascent, and what do they have to do with us?

1. The Psalms of Ascent are a compilation of _____ psalms extending from Psalm _____ to _____.

2. The Hebrew transliteration for *ascent* is *ma'aloth* meaning _____.

3. Through the centuries the Psalms of Ascent have shared the following three associations:

- Read Deuteronomy 16:16-17. These songs were sung on the pilgrimage to the Three _____ (compare Ex. 23:14). Because of these commands the Three Great Feasts were also called the _____ Feasts. Cross-reference Psalm 84:5-7 and Hebrews 12:18-19,22-24.

- According to the Talmud¹, the 15 psalms somehow developed a connection to 15 steps of the temple. (See the temple diagram.) So strong is the association with steps of some kind that the Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, and Jerome labeled each psalm "a _____ of the _____." Consider the following proposal of a daily practice as we seek to "go up" to the next level with God: Those of us who desire to participate will take our _____ on our _____.

- These songs were sung by _____ returning to Jerusalem after Babylonian _____.

1. The collection of ancient Rabbinic writings relegating much of orthodox Judaism. Reference to 15 steps: b. Sukk. 51b; b. Mid. 2:5.

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SESSION ONE

Where Will My Help Come From?

If you are participating in the homework and were able to complete week 1, by this time you have placed both feet on the first two psalms and one foot on the third. You also know by now that Psalm 121 will comprise our memory work for this six-week series. In today's session you and I will focus on the psalms as songs. To grasp more of the significance, we will view the element of song beyond the psalms.

1. Song originated with God and accompanied _____ (Job 38:7).

In Scripture singing is attributed to both _____ the _____

and _____ the _____

(Zeph. 3:17, NIV; Matt. 26:30, HCSB; Heb. 2:10-12).

2. _____ and _____ can be expressed through

song in ways _____ words can never _____

(Jas. 5:13; Ps. 13; Hos. 2:14-15).

3. A song greatly enhances the _____ of the human mind to

_____ (Deut. 31:19-22).

4. See Ezekiel 33:30-32. We can think a song is _____ and

memorize its words yet remain completely _____

by what it says. Consider the relevance of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14:15 in

our present context: "I will sing with my _____, but I will also sing

with my _____."

5. A song can _____ our entire perspective (Acts 16:24-26).

A song can also greatly _____ the heart of _____.

6. See Revelation 5:13. In the *New International Commentary of the New Testament*,

Robert Mounce describes this scene as "the adoration of the entire

_____." In ways beyond our comprehension,

the gift of song is not limited to _____ and _____.

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SESSION TWO

Our Eyes Look to the Lord

In our introduction we talked about the strong association between the Psalms of Ascent and the Three Great Feasts or Pilgrim Feasts. Today we will consider the first of those feasts; in sessions 3 and 4 we'll consider the next two. We will consider each of the feasts and the parallels they pose to us as New Testament sojourners on our way to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Part One

The Old Testament Emphasis on the Feast (Read Lev. 23:4-11,14 and Deut. 16:1-4.)

- The first of the Pilgrim Feasts was the Feast of _____.
- This feast began at sundown at the conclusion of Passover and lasted for the next _____ days.
- They ate unleavened bread on the first Passover because they were to eat in _____, ready at any moment to _____.

Part Two

The New Testament Emphasis on the Feast

- See Luke 2:41 for the first mention of Jesus' own participation.
- See Matthew 16:5-9. Leaven became symbolic of _____. *The Feasts of the Lord* explains "In Hebrew, leaven is known as *chametz*, which literally means '_____.' Leaven (usually yeast or baking powder) is used to

produce _____." *The Feasts of the Lord* goes on to say that "ancient rabbis also believed that leaven represents the _____ of the heart."¹ This fermentation implied a process of _____.

- *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* adds an interesting picture of the process: The "leaven" consisted, so far as the evidence goes, of a piece of fermented dough _____ from a _____... The lump of dough thus preserved was either dissolved in water in the kneading trough before the flour was added, or was "_____ " in the flour ... and kneaded along _____ it. Compare 1 Corinthians 5:7-8.

Part Three

The Symbolism Fulfilled in Christ

- Read Matthew 26:17,26; then consider Acts 2:29-33.
- Recall Leviticus 23:4-11.

According to *The Feasts of the Lord* ...

- (1) Passover pictures the _____ of the Messiah.
- (2) The Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures the _____ of the Messiah.
- (3) Firstfruits pictures the _____ of the Messiah.
(See 1 Cor. 15:20-24.)

1. Adapted from Kevin Howard and Marvin Rosenthal, *The Feasts of the Lord* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 65-72.

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SESSION THREE

He Surrounds His People

We are devoting three sessions to the Pilgrim Feasts because they hold such important associations with the Psalms of Ascent. In session 2 we talked about the first Pilgrim Feast on Israel's biblical calendar: the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Today we'll turn our attentions to the second Pilgrim Feast: the Feast of _____, which occurred in the early summer.

Read Deuteronomy 16:9-12 and consider the following explorations of Israel's Feast of Weeks.

1. The Feast of Weeks (Hebrew *Shavuot*) derives its name from the _____, separating it from the Feast of Firstfruits. Its commemoration on the fiftieth day earned it the Greek name of _____.
2. The Feast of Weeks much later became associated with the _____ at Sinai (Ex. 19:1).
3. The Feast of Weeks was a time for _____ their _____.

4. The Feast of Weeks was a time for _____.

- Generous _____
- Generous _____ —A Bible commentary describes the freewill offering of the Israelites at the Feast of Weeks as “a freewill, _____ tribute of gratitude to God for His temporal _____ (see Deut. 16:9-12).

5. The Feast of Weeks was also called the _____.

- _____ (Ex. 23:16).
- Corporate significance: Acts 2:41. The specific timing of this event on Pentecost offers little doubt that God intended a highly significant feast of harvest.
- Personal significance: Galatians 6:9-10. In *The Feasts of the Lord* we are told that “because of the commandment to count, the time period from Firstfruits to Shavuot is known as *Sefirah*,”¹ a Hebrew word meaning *counting*.

1. Ken Howard and Marvin Rosenthal, *The Feasts of the Lord*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 90.

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SESSION FOUR

A Fruitful Vine

Read Deuteronomy 16:13-17.

Consider the following distinctive elements of the Feast of Tabernacles and their significance during the time Christ traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate.

1. The great invitation to _____ (Deut. 16:15)

2. The strong emphasis on _____ (Ps. 118:24-26)

- Compare Leviticus 23:40 and Matthew 21:1-9.

- See Matthew 17:4.

3. The beauty of the _____ (2 Chron. 5:3). See John 8:12.

4. The celebration of _____ . See Isaiah 12:3; then John 7:37-39.

Not coincidentally, Christ made the offer of “ _____
of _____ .”

5. The coinciding name: the Feast of _____
(John 14:2-3; Rev. 7:9-10)

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SESSION FIVE

My Hope Is in the Lord

As we continue our pilgrimage through the Psalms of Ascent, we will focus on one of the most vital elements of the journey: our fellow pilgrims. Today we're going to talk about how to be the best possible traveling partners.

Jeremiah 41:1-10 will set our stage today. The seventh month indicates with near certainty that the 80 pilgrims were coming to Jerusalem for the Feast of

_____.

Because Ishmael was so sly in his wickedness, the following casualties resulted:

- _____ pilgrims were slaughtered.
- _____ paid heavy tribute to their enemy.
- _____ the remaining people in Mizpah were taken _____, including the _____.

We too face huge opposition as we journey toward Mount Zion to celebrate the ultimate Feast of Tabernacles with God.

How can we be effective fellow sojourners on the way?

1. _____ concerning the Enemy's schemes.

Second Corinthians 2:10-11 tells us to _____ people "in the sight of Christ ... in order that Satan might not _____ us.

For we are not unaware of his schemes."

2. Read Hebrews 10:24-25. _____ one another.

3. Read 1 Peter 4:7-8. _____ each other _____.*

4. Fill in the following blanks according to Nehemiah 4:16-18. This segment describes how the exiles who returned in pilgrimage to Jerusalem responded to vicious opposition as they sought to rebuild the temple: "From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, _____, bows and _____. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with _____ and held a _____ in the _____, and each of the builders wore his _____ at his side as he worked."

If we don't want to be counted among countless Christian casualties in our pilgrimage, we too have to learn to _____ each other instead of _____ each other.

*Excerpts are from Randy Frazee's *Making Room for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003) and John Ortberg's *Everybody's Normal 'Til You Get to Know Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

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SESSION SIX

Blessings from Zion

Today we conclude our journey together through the Psalms of Ascent. Our concluding thoughts will center on four ways to have the most satisfying pilgrimage possible.

Lamentations 1:4, The Message

1. See Jeremiah 31:21. _____ the _____ you are on.

Philippians 1:9-10; Psalm 19:11

2. See Hebrews 12:1-2. _____ of the _____

God wants to _____.

3. See Psalm 84:1-7. Take the _____ with the next strength.

Compare Isaiah 40:28-31.

4. Conclude with Isaiah 35:3-10. Know with certainty that the

_____ is _____.

Psalm 134:3