

Psalm 120-122. Glasgow. 1 March 2009.

I have been set the task this evening of introducing that collection of psalms distinguished by the title 'A song of degrees' – or 'A song of ascents'¹ – and of focusing in particular on the first three of those psalms.

[Read Psalms 120-122]

There are fifteen consecutive psalms which carry the title, 'A Song of Ascents' (rendered 'A Song of Degrees' in the KJV) – stretching from Psalm 120 through to Psalm 134.

Some have linked these psalms with the homeward journey of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity, and pleaded that the actual word translated 'degrees' or 'ascents' occurs in Ezra 7 verse 9 – translated 'go up' – in direct connection with that return.² And certainly *some* of the sentiments expressed in several of the psalms would be appropriate for such an occasion.

But, personally, I take the view – shared by many commentators – that the title 'A Song of Ascents' points rather to these psalms having been sung during the three annual Jewish pilgrimages, when the pilgrims 'ascended' in procession to Jerusalem, nestling among the high mountains of Judea.³ That is, these psalms they comprise a kind of "Pilgrims' Praise" for travelling companies on their way to celebrate the three great feasts – of Passover/Unleavened Bread in the spring (March/April), Pentecost in the early summer (May/June), and of Tabernacles in the autumn (September/October).⁴

This collection of fifteen psalms gives every appearance of being carefully compiled. That written by Solomon (Psalm 127) – one of only two psalms linked with Solomon in the whole of the Book of Psalms⁵ – stands central, flanked on each side by seven psalms, two of which in each case are titled 'of David' (namely, Psalms 122 and 124, and Psalms 131 and 133) – with the remaining five on either said remaining anonymous.⁶ It has been pointed out that the personal name of God ('Jehovah' or 'Yahweh') occurs the same number of times (24) in both sets of seven psalms. And I note that both sets begin and end with similar expressions ... the first set more or less opening with a reference to 'lying lips' and a 'deceitful tongue', Psa. 120. 2, and closing with a psalm which says 'our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing', Psa. 126. 2 ... and the second set both opening and closing with a psalm containing the benediction, 'The Lord bless you out of Zion', Psa. 128. 5; 134. 3.

And it may be that the three psalms for consideration this evening have been structured so as to convey the idea of movement and progression – tracing the journeying of the pilgrim from his distant home and hostile circumstances right through to his arrival at the city of Jerusalem.

Our first psalm, Psalm 120, that is, could be viewed as picturing the point of the pilgrim's departure, expressing both (i) his prayer for deliverance from those among whom he dwells, and (ii) his sad lament, 'Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar! My soul has dwelt too long with him who hates peace', Psa. 120. 5-6. This is followed in Psalm 121 by the acknowledgment and assurance of the Lord's watchful and protective care as the pilgrim pursues his arduous and at-times perilous journey ... 'He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber ... The Lord shall keep you from all evil', Psa. 121. 3, 7. With all coming to a climax in Psalm 122 when the pilgrim finally arrives at Jerusalem, rejoicing at the invitation to approach the house of God; 'I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord". Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!', Psa. 122. 1-2.

Not, I suggest, that these particular psalms – or indeed any of the Songs of Ascents – were *originally* composed with a view to forming part of a collection. I remind you, for example, that although four of these Songs were written by David, one was written by Solomon ... and that we have no information about who wrote the remaining ten psalms – or when. I suspect that, initially, each of the individual psalms had its own unique and unconnected background, but that the Holy Spirit saw fit to bring these psalms together to serve as a suitable hymnbook for the use of pilgrims on their regular journeys to Jerusalem.

But I have no doubt that some at least of these psalms held special significance for other saints who faced very different situations. So that Psalm 121, for instance, may well have been precious, not only to the pilgrim who, with a sense of unease, lifted his eyes to the mountains which encircled Jerusalem, but also to good king Hezekiah when the Assyrian monarch Sennacherib mounted a siege of Jerusalem around the turn of the seventh century B.C.

I note that Hezekiah began his recorded prayer at the time by addressing the 'Lord God of Israel' as the One who 'made heaven and earth', 2 Kings 19. 15, using the words of verse 2 of Psalm 121, and that, when God answered Hezekiah's prayer through the prophet Isaiah, He – the Lord – spoke of knowing Sennacherib's 'going out and coming in', v. 27 – echoing the very words of the last verse of the Psalm. What a comforting re-assurance for Hezekiah – to be told that the Lord knew, not only *his* going out and coming in, but that of the so-called 'great king, the king of Assyria' also, 2 Kings 18. 28. I imagine that, as Hezekiah surveyed the mountains around Jerusalem during the Assyrian blockade, he could see in every direction saw on display the awesome power of the Assyrian

army with its great siege towers, battering rams and catapults, and then found the opening words of the Psalm particularly meaningful ... 'I will lift up my eyes to the hills— From whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth'.

But enough by way of introduction. Let us look briefly at the three psalms allocated for this evening.

By way of headings, I think we could say that Psalm 120 focuses mainly on ***the Cries of the Author*** – both to the Lord and about his present predicament', Psalm 121 mainly on ***the Care of the Lord***, and Psalm 122 mainly on ***the City of Jerusalem***.

First then, **Psalm 120.**

The outline of the psalm is simple enough. The first two verses are concerned with the psalmist's ***prayer***, verses 3 and 4 with the deceiver's ***punishment***, and verses 5 to 7 with the psalmist's ***predicament***.

It is worth noting that, whereas most of the psalm (from verse 2 to the end) sets out the writer's present petition to God – together with the unhappy circumstances which occasion his plea – he first, in the opening verse, encourages himself with the memory of help received from the Lord in previous times of trouble. He had, the tense in verse 1 suggests, repeatedly gone to God in the past, and his cries had always brought a ready response.

Clearly, for the psalmist (as for me), earlier experiences of answered prayer provided a spur and encouragement to bring his fresh problems to the Lord. Much along the lines, I suppose, of Paul's declaration in 2 Corinthians 1 when he spoke of the God 'who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will deliver us again', vv. 9-10.

And I note that, literally translated, the order of the words in verse 1 reads, 'To the Lord in my distress I cried, and He heard me'. By emphasising the words 'To the Lord' in this way the psalmist expressed his dependence on God alone in his times of need. I guess he would have gladly signed up to the sentiment voiced well over 2,000 years later by the great American President, Abraham Lincoln, 'I've been driven to my knees many times by the overwhelming conviction that I had no place else to go'.

The writer then prays that the Lord would deliver him now from 'lying lips (from lips which speak falsehood) and ... a deceitful tongue (from a tongue which speaks treacherously)'. I have sometimes heard it said that 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me'. Well, I for one could never say that – and neither could the man who poured out his heart in our psalm. The fact is that words *can* hurt and words *do* hurt. And here the false accusations and slander of the psalmist's enemies ate into his very soul.

The previous psalm closed with the writer seeing himself as a wandering sheep.⁸ In our psalm, in effect, the writer sees himself very much as a sheep among wolves.

Verse 3 is the psalmist's indirect appeal for God to visit judgement on his deceitful oppressor. And the psalmist looks for the punishment to fit the crime. His foe was clearly to be ranked with those of whom Jeremiah spoke in chapter 9 of his prophecy; 'They bend their tongue like a bow ... their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceitfully',⁹ and with the worthless and ungodly man of whom Solomon wrote in Proverbs 16, whose 'speech is like a scorching fire'.¹⁰

And the psalmist desires a judgement to match the offence. Has his foe shot arrows of slander and false accusation at one who is innocent? Then let one mightier than his oppressor pierce him with arrows of judgement. Has he kindled the fire of strife by his lies? Then let glowing coals of God's wrath consume him – the 'juniper' tree of the KJV in verse 4 being the broom tree,¹¹ the hard wood of which was used to produce charcoal which long retained its heat. Let the retribution be as swift as an arrow and as enduring as the glowing coals of the broom tree.

I take the references to Meshech and Kedar in verse 5 to be figurative and not literal. Meshech was a place named after a son of Japheth and was probably located by the Black Sea to the far north of Palestine¹² – whereas the tents of Kedar refer to the descendants of one of the sons of Ishmael who lived in the Arabian Desert, to the east of Palestine.¹³ Clearly the psalmist couldn't live among peoples so distant from one another. He is saying that those who lived around him were so antagonistic – whereas, he says, 'I am for peace',¹⁴ 'they are for war' – they were so aggressive that he feels as if he lived among remote barbarians.

'Woe is me', he laments.¹⁵

But how different is the atmosphere we breathe in ...

Psalm 121.

And I begin by noting the change of speaker between verses 1–2 and verses 3–8 ... the change from 'I' and 'my', to 'you' and 'your'. I conclude that, when this psalm was sung by the pilgrims, one would start by asking the anxious question of verse 1 and answer it in verse 2 with his confession of faith in the Creator who is his helper. At which point another pilgrim would take up the song, assuring the first singer that the Lord who watches over Israel would watch over and protect him on his onward journey – indeed would keep him from that moment on even for ever.

You will gather that, as I understand it, the second part of verse 1 should be translated as a question.¹⁶

I suspect that as the pilgrim approached Jerusalem from afar, he would view the climb ahead with a measure of apprehension. For the mountains and hills around the holy city¹⁷ not only provided a wall of defence for the city but a dwelling-place for bandits and wild beasts. Well might the pilgrim ask, with trepidation, 'From whence comes my help?' But he knows the answer. His help certainly does not come from the hills! His only source of help was the omnipotent Lord – the Maker of all there is¹⁸ – able to meet his every need.

And so, for his help, he looks, not to the hills around Jerusalem, but to the One who founded both Jerusalem and the mountains around it. Well did Jeremiah say in chapter 3 of his prophecy, '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'.¹⁹ Quite right, Jeremiah, but, as we will see from verses 3 to 8 of our psalm, the One who keeps Israel also keeps every individual saint.

Lift your eyes by all means for your help – but *not* to the hills ... lift them far above the hills to the One of whom Psalm 123 speaks – to the One who dwells enthroned in heaven.²⁰

And the Lord who made heaven and earth will not let even one foot of one of His people 'be moved' – He will not let it stumble, nor them stagger and fall on the way.

Godly Hannah sang concerning the same Lord way back in 1 Samuel 2, 'He will keep the feet of his saints'.²¹ And, as you good people know well, one of the last doxologies in your Bible – that in Jude 24 and 25 – begins, 'Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy ... '.

And it is to this image – that of God as the 'Keeper' of His people – that the psalmist now turns his attention.

And we should note that the word which occurs three times in verses 3 to 5 (translated 'keeps' and 'keeper') is the same as that rendered 'preserve' three times by the KJV in verses 7 and 8.²²

The root meaning of the word is 'to pay careful attention to' and it is used in the Old Testament²³ with a wide range of meanings.²⁴ Here, as in many places, it means 'to take care of' ... 'to guard'. And I note that the word is used in another of the Songs of Ascents – in Psalm 127 – to describe the responsibility of a watchman to mount 'guard' of a city, which is seen as a picture of the Lord's own 'watchfulness'.²⁵ It is the watchman's responsibility, of course, to stay awake! And the Lord, affirms Psalm 121, is the heavenly Watchman – who ever remains alert – who never, as a human sentry or lookout might, falls asleep at His post.

Israel's God was certainly not as the heathen around supposed *their* gods to be. You will remember that Elijah 'mocked' the prophets of Ba'al in 1 Kings 18 – taunting them to cry louder ... 'for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened', 1 Kings 18. 27.

'What', you might say, sleeping at noon?' – for noon it was. But I suspect that there was something very pointed to Elijah's proposal. For it seems that, according to their pagan myths, high and mighty Ba'al was thought to die in the autumn, when the dry season began, then lie dead all through the winter, before rising again in the spring when the rain returned.²⁶ Elijah may well have been suggesting that Ba'al might still be enjoying his *dry-season* nap²⁷ – and things *were certainly pretty dry!* – and that he needed a wake-up call!

But the author of Psalm 121 makes it clear that Israel's God never needs any wake-up call!

'Behold', he says (drawing attention to what follows), 'He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep' – where the word translated 'sleep' normally indicates a deeper sleep than that rendered 'slumber', which word denotes, as one scholar says, the 'loss of conscious thought as one slips towards' that deeper sleep – when someone is, as we say, 'half-asleep'.²⁸

And then, as verse 3 stresses, the One who maintains His sleepless vigil over Israel, does so over each of His people individually.

And not only so. For, according to verse 5, as well as the Lord being 'your keeper', the Lord is also 'your shade at your right hand' – the word translated 'shade' being the same as we find in the opening verse of Psalm 91 of the person who 'shall abide under the *shadow* of the Almighty'. And the Lord stands as your 'shade' or 'shadow', the

writer says, at 'your right hand' – in this context the place taken by one's champion and defender. It is said of the Lord at the end of Psalm 109, 'He stands at the right hand of the needy, to save him ...'.²⁹ Here, He stands at the believer's right hand to shelter him – as his shade and shadow – from both the sun³⁰ and the moon – from any harm, that is, whether by day or by night.

And so, if according to verses 2-3, because God is my *helper* my foot is not moved, in verses 5-6, because God is my *shelter* my head is not smitten.

Here then is the promise of unailing, around-the-clock, 24/7 protection for God's people.

The psalm closes, verses 7 and 8, with three further references to the Lord as the one who 'keeps'. First, as the One who keeps 'you' ('from all evil'³¹), then keeps 'your soul' (perhaps in the sense of 'keep your life'), and finally keeps you through all your daily routines ('your going out and coming in').

And the pilgrim had the assurance that God's unailing care extended, not only to all places and circumstances of life, but to all time ... 'from this time forth, and even for evermore'.³²

'Kept by the power of God', 1 Pet. 1. 5 – now *that* is something!

And so to ...

Psalm 122 for a few moments.

This is, as we noted at the outset, one of the five 'Songs of Ascents' where we are told who wrote it. And, for me, David's personal and intimate connection with Jerusalem, dating back to its conquest, his extensive building programme, and his bringing up the ark of the covenant there,³³ add to the force of some of the expressions we find here.

And for the pilgrim on his way up to Jerusalem – for the man who in Psalm 120 bemoaned the fact that he dwelt in a place where he *didn't really want to be*, the words of this Psalm were wonderfully fitted to express his joy that he has at last, weary and foot-sore, actually reached the place where he very much *does* want to be ... standing³⁴ spellbound within the gates of Jerusalem – of Jerusalem, not only a compact and well-ordered city, but the spiritual and political centre of the nation – to be greeted again with the familiar but fresh summons, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'. Why, I can almost hear him singing with Isaac Watts, 'How pleased and blest was I, to hear the people cry, "Come, let us seek our God today!"'³⁵

And the man who was himself 'for peace', but who dwelt with men who were 'for war' and who 'hated peace',³⁶ is now able to speak, in David's words, of having 'brethren and companions' of kindred mind, for whose sakes he happily indulges in a word-play, pronouncing 'peace' (shalôm [SHAH-LOHM]) on the city, the name of which (*Yerusalem*) suggested to many the meaning 'the foundation (or 'possession') of peace'.³⁷

And so important was 'the house of the Lord' both to David and to our singing pilgrim – whether this was, in David's case, the tabernacle/tent (which he had pitched for the ark in the city of David),³⁸ or, in the pilgrim's case, the Temple – so important to them was 'the house of the Lord' that, for its sake, they both long for the continued 'peace' (well-being) and 'prosperity' (probably in the sense of security) of the city where it was situated.

I hardly need to tell you that, ironically, through its chequered history, Jerusalem has probably been fought over more than any other city in the world, and that it knows anything but peace even today. Ah yes ... but one day! One day, when the Prince of Peace returns in glory, then everything will be changed.

For, as Isaiah says in chapter 2 of his book, 'in the latter days ... the mountain of the Lord's house shall be ... exalted above the hills ... Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob ... For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem', vv. 2-3. Concerning which time, Zechariah adds in the closing chapter of his prophecy, 'the Lord shall be King over all the earth ... Jerusalem shall dwell safely'.³⁹

And, in closing, we will let our three Psalms speak to us of Him – the Prince of Peace – our Lord Jesus.

With our eyes on **Psalm 120**, we recall Peter's statement that there was no deceit in His – our Saviour's – mouth.⁴⁰ But we know that, nevertheless, He endured much from the 'lying lips' and 'deceitful tongue' of others. We have only to think of those who bore 'false witness' against Him before the Council, maintaining that He had threatened to destroy 'this temple that is made with hands, and 'in three days' to 'build another made without hands'.⁴¹ And it was men of the same Council who falsely accused Him before Pilate ... not only of perverting the nation, but of 'forbidding to give tribute to Caesar'⁴² – which He certainly had not.

And yet our Lord did not, as the Psalmist, yearn for sharp arrows of judgement and glowing coals of wrath on those who spoke ill of Him, but, as Peter continued, 'when He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not ...'.⁴³ What wondrous forbearance!

Turning to **Psalm 121**, we remember that it was customary for our Lord to lift His eyes – not to the hills, of course, but far above the hills – in prayer. As He did, for example, when giving thanks for food (as in the case of the so-called 'Feeding of the 5,000'⁴⁴), when performing miracles (as in the case, not only of the raising of Lazarus⁴⁵ but of the healing of the deaf man with a speech impediment at the end of Mark chapter 7⁴⁶), and when simply praying – as at the close of His so-called 'Upper Room Ministry'.⁴⁷

And we find that, in parallel with the Psalmist's 'the Lord, who made heaven and earth', the Saviour addressed His Father as 'Lord of heaven and earth'.⁴⁸

And yet again, if the Psalmist could speak of Jehovah as his shade on his right hand, and of Jehovah not letting his (the psalmist's) foot be moved, so, according to Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, our Lord Himself said of Jehovah, 'He is at *my* right hand, that *I* should not be moved', v. 25.⁴⁹ What unwavering trust!

Turning to **Psalm 122**, I note that, in the Greek Old Testament, verse 6 reads 'Pray now for *the things which belong to the peace of Jerusalem*'. I see no reason to doubt that our Lord recited these Songs of Ascent on those occasions when He journeyed towards Jerusalem. And so I don't find it at all difficult to hear an echo of the Psalmist's words when, as recorded by Luke, the Lord 'beheld the city, and wept loudly over it', saying, 'If you had known, ... in this your day, *the things which belong to your peace!* But now they are hidden from your eyes'. Luke 19. 42. What boundless compassion!

And was the Psalmist glad when invited to go to the 'house of God'?⁵⁰ How much greater Him who, according to Luke 4 verse 16, 'came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, *as His custom was*, He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day' – for we are told that many synagogues were – and are – known as Beth El, the house of God.⁵¹

May God cause to kindle in us a love for that which the apostle Paul described as 'the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth'⁵² And may He use our meditation this evening to put a spring in our step as we pursue *our* pilgrim journey upwards towards the *New Jerusalem*.

Footnotes

¹ There is every reason to believe that the titles of the Psalms are inspired. The Massorettes regarded them as part of the original text. The fact that the LXX has them shows that they antedate the third century B.C. In 2 Samuel 22. 1ff we find a Psalm quoted (Psa. 18), together with its heading, in the narrative of a historical book. There is also the testimony of our Saviour Himself; for He said that David wrote Psalm 110, as the superscription states, Matt. 22. 43.

‘Robert Dick Wilson points to the analogy of the Sumerian and Babylonian psalms:

Since many of these originated before the time of Abraham, they are of especial interest in their bearing on the subject of the heading of the psalms, because they show that long before the time of David it was natural and common to have such headings. To be sure, the Sumerian psalms have in subscription what the Hebrew psalms and Horace’s odes have in superscription; but, we find that the purpose was the same in both. For the Sumerian hymns sometimes mention the name of the author, the musical instrument employed as accompaniment, the tune to which it was to be sung, or the collection to which it belonged, the kind of musical composition, the god in whose worship the psalm was sung, and the purpose of the psalm (“The Headings of the Psalms” in *The Princeton Theological Review*, XXIV,1, Jan. 1926, p 33).

Wilson also points out, “That headings were customary in Hebrew poetry outside the psalter is evident all through the Old Testament” (*ibid.*). He cites the following examples: Ex 15:1,20; Dt 31:30; 33:1; Jdg 5:1; 1 Sm 2:1; 2 Sm 1:17; 22:1; Jon 2:2; Hab 3:1; Pr 1:1; 10:1; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1; Sol 1:1. He draws attention to the fact that such information as the occasion and authorship are plainly given for the poems or psalms in Gn 49; Is 5; 12:38, and elsewhere’. [Quoted from ‘*Introduction to the Psalms*’ by Wilbert R. Gawrisch.]

² Compare Ezra 2. 1; 7. 6-7.

³ The verbal form of the word translated ‘ascents’ is used of pilgrimages for the annual feasts; e.g. Exod. 34. 24; 1 Sam. 1. 3, 7, 21, 22; 2. 19; cf. Jer. 31. 6; Mic. 4. 2. Compare Luke 2. 42 – the verb (*anabaino*) being the same as in the Septuagint of these passages. And see NIDOTTE, number 6590.

⁴ Exod. 23. 14-17; Deut. 16. 16. Note the reference to singing in Psalm 42. 4 and Isaiah 30. 29.

The word (correctly and literally) translated ‘ascents’ is used of ‘steps/stairs’ in Exod. 20. 26; 1 Kings 10. 19f; cf. 2 Kings 20. 9f; Amos 9. 6). The Vulgate renders the heading of the fifteen psalms, ‘Song of the Steps’. Indeed, the Jewish Mishnah links the collection of fifteen songs with the fifteen steps of the temple (*Middoth* 2.5), where the Levites may have sung these songs of ascents. But this interpretation is now more or less discounted by scholars. Again, some connect the 15 psalms with the 15 words of the priestly blessing in Numb 6. 24-26. The four key words used in the blessing occur throughout these psalms. And yet again, some suggest that these 15 psalms were compiled by Hezekiah as a memorial of his experience of verifying, through the reversal of the sundial, God’s promise of 15 additional years of life (2 Kin. 20:1–11). Such plead the use of the same Hebrew term for “ascent” or “degree” in the psalms and in the story of the “degrees” on the sundial in 2 Kings.

⁵ Psalm 72 is the other.

⁶ The so-called ‘orphan psalms’.

⁷ His cries (past and present) to the Lord, vv. 1-2, and his cry ‘Woe is me’, v. 5.

⁸ Psalm 119. 176.

⁹ Jer. 9. 3-8 ESV.

¹⁰ Prov. 16. 27 RSV. Compare : ‘The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell’, James 3. 6.

¹¹ See : <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/misctracts/juniper.html>

¹² Gen. 10. 2. See the article ‘Meshech’ in ISBE.

¹³ Gen. 25. 13; cf. Isa. 21. 16-17; Jer. 2. 10; 49. 28; Ezek. 27. 21).

¹⁴ ‘Blessed are peacemakers’ ... defibrillator, Mervyn Jones of Bob Gardner.

¹⁵ ‘Woe is me’ – the first of seven occurrences in the KJV :

Ps 120:5 Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!

Isa 6:5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Jer 4:31 For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, and the anguish as of her that bringeth forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, that bewaileth herself, that spreadeth her hands, saying, Woe is me now! for my soul is wearied because of murderers.

Jer 10:19 Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it.

Jer 15:10 Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me.

Jer 45:3 Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.

Mic 7:1 Woe is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat: my soul desired the firstripe fruit.

¹⁶ ‘Some have tried to interpret [ׁן] as a relative particle introducing the statement “from where my help comes” (as in the KJV), thus affirming that the mountains are a source of help. However, this is not an exegetical possibility.

The term is a compound of 'אָ, "where?" which clearly carries an interrogative idea', David G. Barker, 'The Lord watches over you: a pilgrimage reading of Psalm 121', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (April-June 1995): 163-81.

¹⁷ Neh. 11. 1; Isa. 48. 2; 52. 1.

¹⁸ The Lord is not to be ranked with the heathen gods 'that have not made the heavens and the earth', Jer. 10. 11.

¹⁹ Jer. 3. 23.

²⁰ Psalm 123. 1. It was the fault of the ten spies in Canaan that they did not lift their eyes high enough: they saw the giants and the towering walls but not the Lord far above them all, Num. 13. 28-33.

²¹ 1 Sam. 2. 9.

²² As made clear in, for example, Mr. Darby's translation, the RV and the ESV. The writer switches from the threefold occurrence of the participle in verses 3-5 to the threefold occurrence of the imperfect in verses 7-8

²³ Over 400 times in all.

²⁴ NIDOTTE, number 9068; TWOT, number 2414.

²⁵ Psa. 127. 1-2. And so God's 'beloved' could sleep in safety, v. 2. For the Lord could say, as Alexander the Great once told his soldiers, 'I wake that you may sleep'; see William Macdonald in BBC on Psalm 121.

²⁶ Menander of Ephesus, a historian of the second century B.C., reports that Hiram, the King of Tyre²⁶ had actually introduced a ritual ceremony specifically for 'the waking of (Ba'al)'. See Flavius Josephus, 'Antiquities of the Jews', book 8, chapter 5, paragraph 3 – 'he was the first to celebrate the awakening (*egersis*) of Heracles in the month Peritius' - Whiston's translation incorrectly has "first set up the temple of Heracles in ..". Heracles was almost certainly one and the same as Melkart, the Ba'al of Tyre. <http://www.economicexpert.com/a/Melqart.htm>

²⁷ Indeed, perhaps he had overslept!

²⁸ NIDOTTE, numbers 3822 and 5670 respectively.

²⁹ Psalm 109. 31.

³⁰ Jonah 4. 8; cf. 2 Kings 4. 18-19.

³¹ Probably, in context, covering physical evil – calamity and harm. But ... ! What we can say is that nothing can come into the life of a believer apart from God's permissive will. There are no random circumstances, no purposeless accidents. Though He is not the author of sickness, suffering, or death, He overrules and harnesses them for the accomplishment of His purposes. 'God often permits the things which He hates to accomplish the things which He loves', Joni.

³² I understand that pious Jews to this day, as they leave or enter their house, not only touch the mezuzah, a small metal cylinder on the right hand door post which contains a piece of parchment inscribed with words from Deuteronomy 6 and 11, but that they recite the last verse of our psalm. See Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, "Mezuzah" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 11:1474-75; Nathan Ausubel, "Mezuzah" in *The Book of Jewish Knowledge*, 290-91; and Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*.

³³ 2 Samuel 5. 6-11; 6. 1-19.

³⁴ 'Our feet have been and are standing', Psa. 122. 2 literally – suggesting that when the pilgrims reached the city gates, they paused, spellbound by the magnificence of the city.

³⁵ 'How pleased and blest was I

To hear the people cry,

"Come, let us seek our God today!"

Yes, with a cheerful zeal

We haste to Zion's hill,

And there our vows and honours pay'.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

³⁶ Psa. 120. 6-7.

³⁷ Psalm 122. 8. 'Most likely, the original name, that sounded something like Urusalim or Ursalimmu, meant "Foundation Of Shalem", the latter being a known Ugaritic god. Without a doubt the second and dominant part of the name reminded men (then and now) of the word שָׁלוֹם (*shalom*), peace. The root of the word, שָׁלַם (*shalem*), denotes completeness, wholeness and soundness'.

From ...<http://www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Jerusalem.html>. See also NIDOTTE, article 'Jerusalem' in volume 4, and NIDNTT, article 'Jerusalem' in volume 2. But compare BDB, number 3389.

³⁸ The tabernacle at Shiloh is called 'the house of God', Judg. 18. 31, and 'the house of the Lord', 1 Sam. 1. 7, 24; 3. 15. And our Lord referred to the tabernacle, when at Nob, as 'the house of God', Matt. 12. 4 with 1 Sam. 21. 1-6. Also the tent which David set up for the ark in Jerusalem, 2 Sam. 6. 17, is called 'the house of the Lord' in 2 Samuel 12. 20.

³⁹ Zech. 14. 9-11.

⁴⁰ 1 Pet. 2. 22.

⁴¹ Mark 14. 58.

⁴² Luke 23. 2

⁴³ 1 Pet. 2. 23.

⁴⁴ Matt. 14. 19.

⁴⁵ John 11. 41.

⁴⁶ Mark 7. 34.

⁴⁷ John 17. 1.

⁴⁸ Matt. 11. 25.

⁴⁹ Quoted from Psalm 16. 8.

⁵⁰ Psalm 122. 1.

⁵¹ 'House of God' is a common name for synagogues affiliated with Judaism's Reform movement.
<http://www.templebethel18.org/AboutTBE/News/News7-31-04.htm>

⁵² 1 Tim. 3. 15.