HOLYLAND PILGRIMAGE TOURS

Since 1975

Psalms of Ascent Study

A Spiritual Preparation Guide for Southern Hills Church
Israel Pilgrimage 2027

INTRODUCTION

Soon, we will have the experience of a lifetime.

As we prepare together, We invite you to set aside time each week to read these devotionals, pray for our group, and ask God what He desires to teach you during our time in the Holy Land. Our hope is that by the time we board our flight to Israel, your pilgrimage will already be underway. May the Lord prepare our hearts, deepen our fellowship, strengthen our faith, and fill us with anticipation as we prepare to go up to Zion together.

We look forward to leading and walking this journey together with you.

In Christ,

Pastor Josh and Heather Teis & Ezer Kalmovitcz (Director of HP-TOURS)

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Psalms of Ascent: Going Up to Zion

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD."

Psalm 122:1

The Journey Begins

Welcome to the beginning of our pilgrimage. While our flights to Israel are still ahead of us, our journey has already begun. For thousands of years, God's people made pilgrimage to Jerusalem. They came from villages, farms, fishing towns, deserts, and distant lands. No matter where they started, they shared a common destination: Zion, the city of God.

As they traveled, they ascended toward Jerusalem.

The roads climbed.

The terrain rose.

Their anticipation grew.

And with every step, pilgrims lifted their hearts toward the Lord.

We are joining a tradition that links back thousands of years. Like many pilgrims before us, we too are preparing to go Up to Zion.

Why "Up" to Jerusalem?

One of the unique features of the Bible is that people always went "up" to Jerusalem.

Whether traveling from Galilee in the north, Jericho in the east, or the coastal plain in the west, Scripture consistently describes pilgrims as going up to Jerusalem.

This is partly geographical. Jerusalem stands among the mountains of Judea, elevated above its surroundings. But it is also spiritual. Jerusalem was the place God chose for His Name. It was the location of the Temple. It was the center of worship. It was the destination of the pilgrim. Ascending toward Jerusalem became a symbol of drawing nearer to God. As we prepare for our own pilgrimage, we too are ascending—not only geographically, but spiritually. We are preparing our hearts to encounter the places where God unfolded His plan of redemption.

The Pilgrimage Fellowship

Ancient pilgrims rarely traveled all alone. Families journeyed together. Neighbors and even entire communities journeyed together.

The road to Jerusalem was filled with conversation, prayer, encouragement, laughter, teaching, and worship. Children walked beside grandparents. Friends shared meals together. Travelers encouraged one another through difficult stretches of the journey. The destination mattered. But so did the fellowship.

In many ways, our pilgrimage will be the same.

We will travel together as a church family. We will worship together. We will learn together. We will pray together. We will share meals together. We will create memories together.

Some of the most meaningful moments of this pilgrimage may not be found in an archaeological site, a church building, or a biblical location. They may be found in conversations on the bus. A prayer shared between friends. A worship song sung together overlooking Jerusalem. A meal shared beside the Sea of Galilee. A testimony that encourages another believer.

Pilgrimage has always been about both destination and fellowship. As we prepare for Israel, let us begin cultivating that pilgrimage fellowship now.

The Songs of Ascent

As ancient pilgrims made their way toward Jerusalem, they sang. These special songs became known as the Songs of Ascents. They are preserved for us today in Psalms 120–134.

Generation after generation of pilgrims sang these same words as they approached the Holy City.

These psalms express:

- anticipation for meeting God in Jerusalem
- worship and praise
- trust in God's protection
- gratitude for His faithfulness
- dependence upon His provision
- the joy of journeying together as God's people

Over the coming weeks, we invite you to read these psalms repeatedly. Read them slowly, prayerfully, and aloud. Allow them to become the soundtrack of your journey to the land of the Bible.

The Rhythm of Pilgrimage

Imagine the rhythm of footsteps on the ancient biblical roads. Step after step. Hill after hill. Song after song. Prayer after prayer…Pilgrimage has a rhythm.

It can slow us down, invite reflection, and create space for worship.

It reminds us that the journey itself has value. The ancient pilgrims walked together while singing the Songs of Ascent. Today we too are invited into that same rhythm of preparation and expectation. As you read these psalms, pause and listen. Allow the words to settle into your heart. Allow the rhythm of Scripture to prepare you for what lies ahead. May the beating of our hearts echo the rhythm of the psalms.

A Journey Through the Senses

Pilgrimage engages the whole person. Throughout Scripture, experience involves seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, remembering, and responding.

Imagine the ancient pilgrims: The eyes beheld the hills of Judea and the distant sight of Jerusalem. The ears heard songs of worship and musical instruments. The hands touched the stones of sacred places and felt the warm helping touch of fellow pilgrims. The nose sensed the fragrances of the countryside and the city, and of the offerings raising an aroma pleasing to the Lord. The tongue tasted the Seven Good Species, the fresh foods of the land, and the blessings of the Land of Milk and Honey. The heart was opened and drawn toward God.

Our pilgrimage will follow this same pattern.

We will not merely study the Bible. We will experience the Land of the Bible in its fullest. We will see Jerusalem with our own eyes. We will hear the sounds of worship beside the Sea of Galilee. We will walk ancient roads. We will touch stones that have witnessed thousands of years of history. Our history. We will taste the foods of the land. The food that nourished our fathers. We will pray where generations of believers have prayed before us. The Bible will come alive in ways that cannot be experienced from a map or a classroom alone.

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Read Together

The Songs of Ascents were originally sung by groups of pilgrims journeying together.

We invite you to read the 15 Psalms: **Psalms 120-134**

Psalm 121 "I lift up my eyes unto the hills..."

Psalm 122 "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."

Psalm 125 "Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion..."

Reflection Questions

As you read each Psalm:

1. **What does this Psalm reveal about what is happening in the heart of the person praying?**Where do I see something similar in my own heart?

2. **What does this Psalm teach me about God?** What truth about His character do I need to remember right now?

3. **What am I carrying with me on this "journey"?** Is there a burden, fear, disappointment, desire, or struggle that I need to bring honestly before God?

4. **Where do I see evidence of spiritual growth in this Psalm?** What seems to change between the beginning and the end?

5. **What am I tempted to trust instead of God?**

6. **Is there a command, truth, or example in this Psalm that I need to respond to?** What would obedience look like for me?

7. **What does this Psalm teach me about waiting on God?** Am I currently waiting for something? How am I waiting?

8. **Where do I see the importance of community or other people in this Psalm?** Am I trying to walk the Christian life alone in some area?

9. **What words or phrases stand out to me?** Why might those words be catching my attention?

10. **If this Psalm were describing my current spiritual journey, which verse would best describe where I am today? Why?**

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for calling us to this journey. Prepare our hearts for what You desire to teach us. Help us to grow in faith, in fellowship, and in love for Your Word. Bless every member of our pilgrimage family. Anoint us as Your disciples, that we may see with our own eyes the places where Your Word came to life and deepen our understanding of Your truth.

As we return home, help us to faithfully share what we have experienced with our families, our congregation, and all those You place in our path, so that others may be encouraged and strengthened in their faith. Give us joyful anticipation as we prepare to go Up to Zion together.

May the beating of our hearts echo the rhythm of these psalms. May they fill our hearts with anticipation, deepen our fellowship, and draw us ever closer to You as we prepare for this pilgrimage.

In Jesus' name, **Amen.**