

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

PSALMS 129-136

There is a genre of music known as “[Traveling Music](#).” It captures the rhythm of the road. The tempo of the song is set to the passing of dotted white lines as your vehicle racks up miles - cruising down the freeway.

As a teenager one of my favorite songs was “[Roll on Down the Highway](#)” – by the legendary band, *Bachman Turner Overdrive*.

The song is about a guy speeding down the highway in a tractor-trailer. He’s trying to dodge the police. It’s a theme song for all us led-foots.

Well, Psalms 120-134 are also an example of “[Traveling Music](#).” These 15 psalms are the Jewish version of “[Roll on Down the Highway](#).” Here’re tunes for the traveler – jingles for the journey... a song for the road.

Every year, three times a year, Jews all over Israel were supposed to load up the donkey and head to Jerusalem. Three Feasts – Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles were to be celebrated at the Temple.

And compliance required a pilgrimage.

Psalms 120-134 describe the pilgrim’s journey to Jerusalem – his ascent to the Temple – and the difficulties such a trip would involve.

The 15 psalms break down into 5 groups of three – five triads. The first psalm in each triad speaks of **trouble** along the highway. The next psalm answers that trouble with **trust**

in the Lord. The third psalm in each triad highlights God's **triumph** over whatever trouble the psalmist faced.

Last week we studied the first three triads...

Psalms 120-123 God **rekindles** desire – 124-126 He **restores** confidence - and 127-129 He **rebuilds** nations and families.

Tonight we'll look at the last two triads – the emphasis in chapters 129-131 is on how God **redeems** – and in 132-134, how God **refreshes**.

Don't forget these psalms also apply to us. We too are on a spiritual pilgrimage – we're rolling on down the highway to heaven. As Paul puts it, we've answered "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Worshipping and serving God is always an ascending and uplifting experience. There's much we can learn from these psalms.

PSALM ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-NINE begins, "Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth, "Let Israel now say - "many a time they have afflicted me from my youth; yet they have not prevailed against me." Obviously, the Jewish race is not the only persecuted people group in the history of the world, but they're probably the most viciously persecuted.

I'm not diminishing the horrors fostered on African-Americans, or the Sudanese, or South African blacks – but there's something particularly sinister and diabolical about Antisemitism. I believe its origin is satanic.

Jews have not only been opposed by bigoted men, but the devil himself targets them for harassment. If you want to hurt a parent go after their kids. And this is exactly what Satan has done through the centuries.

In the OT, when the devil got wind that Messiah would be born a Jew, he did all he could to snuff out the messianic lineage...

Cain killed Abel... Pharaoh fed Jewish sons to the crocs in the Nile... Queen Athaliah tried to assassinate Judah's rightful heirs... Haman built his gallows... King Herod slaughtered the baby boys of Bethlehem...

And now that Satan has been defeated and Messiah has come, the devil knows Jesus' second coming will also revolve around Israel. When Jesus returns He'll sit on a Jewish throne and rule the world from Israel.

This is why Satan is still working tirelessly to annihilate the Jews.

Here's a short lesson in what Jews have endured through the ages...

In 70 AD the Romans killed a million Jews, took a 97,000 as prisoners, and glutted the slave markets all over the world with Jewish slaves.

In 135 AD the Romans banished all Jews from their homeland.

In 399 AD the Roman Emperor issued edicts against the Jews.

In 439 AD Theodosius III issued further orders opposing them.

In 630 AD the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius, allowed priests and monks to massacre the Jews that had migrated back to Palestine.

In 722 AD Pope Leo II ordered all Jews to become Christians or else...

In 1066 AD Muslims in Spain killed 4000 Jews in a single day.

In 1096 AD Pope Urban II proclaimed the first crusade, and knights all over Europe make it a side-show to slaughter Jews as "*Christ-killers.*"

In 1290 AD King Edward I ordered all Jews out of England.

In 1306 AD King Philip IV banished the Jews from France.

In 1371 AD the entire Jewish population of Seville, France was exterminated. It happened again in 1475 in Trent, Italy.

In 1483 AD the infamous Torquemada launched the Inquisition against the Jews. Nine years later, in 1492, all Jews were driven out of Spain.

In 1506 AD Spanish Jews who took refuge in Portugal were massacred.

On and on history repeated itself until the 1930s when the genocidal Adolf Hitler launched his *Final Solution* and killed 6 million Jews.

The atrocities mankind has leveled against the Jews are disgraceful and horrific – yet their survival is a testimony to God's faithfulness.

A trip to Israel reveals the Jews have not only survived, but thrived.

Indeed, the Jews are perhaps God's greatest miracle. As we

read in Psalm 129:1, "Let Israel now say - "many a time they have afflicted me from my youth; yet they have not prevailed against me."

"The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long."

After the Romans captured Jerusalem in 70 AD, a Roman commander named *Terentius Rufus* drug a plough through the city. He demolished buildings so that not one stone remained upon another. This is what Jesus' predicted in Matthew 24:2, "Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

The same happened in 135 AD, by order of the Emperor Hadrian.

It's also appropriate to see verse 3 as prophetic. Recall how Jesus was scourged before His crucifixion. "The plowers plowed my back; they made their furrows long..." Jesus experienced the ultimate persecution.

"The LORD is righteous; He has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked." The torture instrument used on Jesus was cut up and never used again!

"Let all those who hate Zion be put to shame and turned back. Let them be as the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up, with which the reaper does not fill his hand, nor he who binds sheaves, his arms." Don't let the enemy sink his roots or get established.

"Neither let those who pass by them say, "The blessing of the LORD be upon you; we bless you in the name of the

LORD!" In Genesis 12:3 God promised Abraham's family, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you..." Thus, the psalmist says of those who hate Zion, don't even bless them. God refuses to bless those who curse Israel.

PSALM ONE HUNDRED AND THRITY, "Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications. If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." Hey, if God is keeping score then we can all forget His favor.

If we're in the ledger – good deeds on one side and sins on the other – we're in big trouble. Sadly, what we sing of Santa we assume about God.

"You better watch out, you better not cry, better not pout, I'm telling you why - Satan Claus is coming to town! He's making a list and checking it twice, gonna find out who's naughty and nice - Santa Claus is coming to town! He sees you when your sleeping, He knows when your awake. He knows if you've been bad or good - so be good for goodness sake!"

If God spends his day tallying up our sins - and weighing them against our righteous acts - we're all headed for hell. None of us measure up.

Here's the Gospel – trust Jesus and God ceases to make note of your sin. He sees you in Christ. He doesn't run random drug tests to check you for steroids, or wipe a white glove over the top of your fridge. Rather than judge, He credits you with Jesus' righteousness. You inherit His

goodness.

Verse 5, “I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning - yes, more than those who watch for the morning.” He’s thinking of a Temple priest whose duty it was to offer the morning sacrifice.

There were thousands of priests - divided into 24 orders – 100 priests in each grouping. Each priestly order offered the sacrifice once every two years. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a priest to be chosen.

The night before he was so excited he couldn’t sleep. The next day every eye would be on him. Both heaven and earth – men and angels – God Himself would be watching and inspecting his morning sacrifice.

Imagine this priest, he’s spends the whole night rehearsing how he’ll make the cut, and catch the blood, and dress the meat, and light the fire. This priest has trained his whole life-long for this one moment.

And this is how we should wait on the Lord. One day we’re going to see Jesus and behold His glory. Today, we’re preparing for that moment.

The Christian spends a lifetime preparing for that one moment. Our desire is to hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Verse 7 “O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” There’s hope with

the Lord. Anyone else and we could throw up our hands and quit. But Jesus is not judgmental - or quick to condemn.

One day Israel will be redeemed. Zechariah 12:10 tells us that at the second coming of Jesus, Israel will look on Him who they have pierced.

They'll believe in Jesus. In the end all Israel will be saved.

PSALM ONE HUNDRED AND THRITY-ONE is one of the shortest psalms to read, but it takes a very, very long time to learn. It is a song of humility. The writer of Psalm 131 delights in the simple things...

“LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me.”

The psalmist is saying, *“I’ve given up trying to know it all. I’ve accepted the limits to my own logic.”* It’s a turning point in everyone’s faith when we reach a point where we can *trust God* even when we can’t *trace Him*... when God doesn’t have to answer all our questions for us to follow.

There’s nothing wrong with embarking on a quest for truth. In fact, the Sermon on the Mount encourages us to ask, and seek, and knock. But a mortal man has to learn his limitations. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, **“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever...”**

Too often the motive behind our Bible study is to inflate our ego more than get to know God. The psalmist has learned to tame His curiosity.

He realizes there are times to probe, and dig, and ponder –

and there are times to be content with a blissful ignorance. Here's a favorite quote, "Where God puts a period let no man change it to a question mark."

I have a friend. He was the best Bible teacher I ever sat under. He had a brilliant mind. He was always probing, searching, questioning. My friend got more out of the Bible than anyone else I had ever met.

But he never curtailed his curiosity. Where the Bible remained silent he looked for answers elsewhere, and developed some "off the wall" ideas.

He couldn't take "NO" for answer, and ended up losing His way.

Corrie Ten Boom spent time in a Nazi Concentration Camp. She had her share of questions for God, yet here's how she expressed her faith, "When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer."

The last time I talked to my friend, I reminded him the profoundest truth I've ever heard - is also the simplest truth - "Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so." To follow Jesus we need to have a childlike faith.

One author writes, "The greatest truths are the simplest, and so are the greatest men." Instead of stroking my ego, true knowledge of God brings me to my knees. The deepest truths are sealed in a wrapper of simplicity.

He adds in verse 2, "Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child

is my soul within me.”

A child weaned from his mother’s milk is still young enough that he doesn’t know an awful lot – but he’s learned that mom is faithful.

A weaned child knows that mom will feed him what he needs when he needs it. And this is the conclusion the psalmist has drawn about God.

He doesn’t know all there is to know. The psalmist doesn’t even know all he’d like to know. But He knows God. He’s sure of His faithfulness. It’s been said, “You can always trust an unknown future to a known God.”

Psalm 131 is a short in length, but obviously deep in meaning. It ends, “O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forever.”

PSALM ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-TWO is the song the pilgrims sang to celebrate the covenant God made with David. The same covenant that promises the coming of the Messiah.

Verse 1 “LORD, remember David and all his afflictions; how he swore to the LORD, and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob: "Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, or go up to the comfort of my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."

David’s desire was to build a Temple for the worship of God.

Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of the woods. Let us go into His tabernacle; let us worship at

His footstool.

Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength. Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let Your saints shout for joy. For Your servant David's sake, do not turn away the face of Your Anointed." David's desire was to build a house for God, but that wasn't God's desire. David was a man of war. It was not appropriate for him to build a sanctuary of peace. Yet God would build David a house.

A dynasty of kings would rise from the lineage of David which would climax with an eternal king, the "Anointed" - or "Messiah" in Hebrew.

Jesus was that son of David who would reign forever and ever.

"The LORD has sworn in truth to David; he will not turn from it: "I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body. If your sons will keep My covenant And My testimony which I shall teach them, their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore." David became the father of a royal dynasty.

"For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: "This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread."

David was God's king - and Zion, or Jerusalem, will be His capitol city. Jerusalem is still God's holy City. It's the city on earth that He "desires."

I hope some of you will be able to go there with us this December.

“I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There I will make the horn of David grow; I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.” The “horn” was the animal’s strength.

God will make David’s heirs a dynasty of strong and wise rulers. Psalm 132 closes, “His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon Himself His crown shall flourish.” Surely, the horn of David will grow. When Jesus returns He’ll rule all creation. “His crown shall flourish.”

In **PSALM ONE HUNDRED AND THRITY-THREE** the pilgrims are nearing Jerusalem, and the excitement is reaching a crescendo.

Not only are the pilgrims looking forward to the worship of God, but they’re also eager to renew friendships with people they may not have seen since last year, or at least their last trip to the Temple.

The psalmist recalls the good times of pilgrimages past, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

And this is still the case... How pleasant it is to gather with people united in the supreme desire to love God and share His love for us.

It’s a pleasant feeling to sing together, and laugh together, and share our lives together. The world we live in tends to dwell on disagreements. They get together to prove their point and win their argument.

There’s too much warring and too little worship in this world. But what a sweet alternative... when believers bind together

around the grace of our Lord Jesus... there's nothing in the world quite like unity.

There's comfort and joy and strength when God's people stand as one.

I'm reminded of a dad who handed his son a bundle of sticks. He asked his son to break the bundle. He smashed it on his knee. He slammed them against a tree. He put the bundle on the ground and stomp the sticks.

Nothing worked... That's when his dad untied the bundle and snapped each stick one by one. Here's the moral of the story... When believers stay in bundles they remain strong and invincible. But when the bond is broken the enemy can break them one at a time. There's strength in our unity.

It was John Wesley who wrote, "The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion." The Bible is clear, "When God became your Father, I became your brother." Scripture never allows Christians to go it alone.

We are called by God to do life in bundles. It's called Church!

And verse 2 comments on our harmony. "It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments." A common purpose and a mutual love among believers are like soothing oil rolling down Aaron's beard.

The olive oil used to anoint the High Priest was made from a special mixture and there were rules that regulated its use.

Exodus 30:31, “This shall be a holy anointing oil to me throughout your generations. It shall not be poured on man's flesh; nor shall you make any other like it, according to its composition. It is holy, and it shall be holy to you. Whoever compounds any like it, or whoever puts any of it on an outsider, shall be cut off from his people.”

Notice the three restrictions on the use of this oil...

First, it's not to be poured on a man's flesh only his beard and garment. Second, it's not to be imitated or duplicated. And third, it's not to be poured on an outsider. *And this is also what hinders harmony among Christians...*

When we try to create unity around a fleshly or selfish motive – or a compromised activity – or a purely political cause - it taints our unity.

When we try to duplicate or imitate the Spirit's work it also hinders our unity. True spiritual harmony can't be faked. It's the work of the Spirit.

And unity is never shared with unbelievers. It's reserved for Christians.

Here's another description of true unity... “It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing - life forevermore.” Real unity is like mountain dew.

It's true. Harmony in the church is like soothing oil. But unity is also like a glistening mountain dew. Love for one another makes everything fresh.

Often we opt not to attend church because we're burned out, or run down – yet that's when we need it most. Unity

freshens and soothes.

A few of you remember Wayne. He was the little red-headed boy who rode his bike around the streets of Stone Mountain. Wayne was from a terribly neglected at home. He was practically left to raise himself.

We let Wayne hang out at the church. Often he help us clean up.

One day a visitor walked in. He saw Wayne, and asked him, “*Young man, how do you like the fellowship?*” I cringed. We finally had a person interested in our church, and he was talking to Wayne of all people.

There was no telling what might come out of Wayne’s mouth.

But I’ll never forget Wayne’s reply. He looked at the man and said, “*Fellowship? What’s a fellowship? This is my family.*” I couldn’t have said it better myself. God wants us His Church to be a family.

PSALM ONE HUNDRED AND THRITY-FOUR is a song for the night shift. Imagine your journey to Jerusalem arrives after sunset.

And rather than wait until the morning to visit the Temple - you’re so thrilled to be in Jerusalem, and you’re so excited about spending time in God’s presence - you decide to visit the Temple courts in the moonlight...

You come singing verse 1, “**Behold, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who by night stand in the house of the LORD!**” And I know the feeling. If you’ve ever been with me

on a trip to Jerusalem you know how much I like to visit the Wailing Wall at night. It's majestic under the lights.

Blessed is everyone who **“by night stands in the house of the LORD!”**

The psalmist shouts, **“Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.”** Perhaps he noticed one of the sentinels dozing off at his post.

He shouts at him, *“Just because it's late at night is no reason not to raise your hands and praise the LORD.”* Of course, the psalmist has just arrived. The sleepy sentinels are at the end of a long day.

Yet beware! Familiarity can breed contempt. Some of us who spend a lot of time around worship, and Bible Study, and fellowship can take it for granted. If we're not careful we can fall into a spiritual slumber at church.

And it's often the new believers – the new arrivals on the scene – that wake us up and remind us to lift up our hands and bless the Lord!

The Psalms of Ascents end with 134:3 **“The LORD who made heaven and earth bless you from Zion!”** ...a wonderful section of Scripture.

Let's take two more psalms... **PSALM ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FIVE** is a medley of songs. It's a mosaic of various passages that appear first in other psalms. Yet Psalm 134 weaves them together in a new way.

“Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD; praise Him, O you servants of the LORD! You who stand in the

house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God, praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant.” Indeed, praise is pleasant!

It pleases the ears of God, and encourages my faith at the same time.

“For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure.” It’s interesting, the psalmist chooses to refer to the nation Israel by the name “Jacob.” The word means “heel-catcher.”

Jacob was a twin, and he came out of his mother’s womb holding on to his brother’s heel. He was trying to grab first place from Esau even from the womb. “Heel-catcher” came to mean “a conniver, or a thief...”

Later the Lord Himself changes Jacob's name to "Israel" or "prince of God" - but when God chose this man he was no prince. In the words of my friend, Gayle Erwin, “Jacob was a dirty, sneaky, thief.”

In other words, God's choice – like all His choices - was not based on Jacob's character, or merit, or good works – but solely on God's grace.

And this is God’s basis for choosing you. You also were a dirty, sneaky thief when God chose. It’s only since you’ve lived under His influence that you’ve cleaned up your act and started to live like a prince of God.

It’s wonderful to know that we’re God’s special treasure – not because we’ve earned that title, but because He’s chosen to love us regardless.

Verse 5 “For I know that the LORD is great, and our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places.” God is sovereign. He does as He pleases.

“He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasuries.” Here the psalmist describes God's superiority over *nature*. In the remainder of the psalm He highlights God's sovereignty over the *nation*, Israel.

“He destroyed the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast. He sent signs and wonders into the midst of you, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh and all his servants.” Moses was the mouthpiece, but God did all the work.

“He defeated many nations and slew mighty kings - Sihon king of the Amorites, Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan - and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to Israel His people.

Your name, O LORD, endures forever, Your fame, O LORD, throughout all generations. For the LORD will judge His people, and He will have compassion on His servants.

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.

They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; nor is there any breath in their mouths. Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them.” Here's the proof of man's insanity. He worships the creation of his own hands. Rather than understand that man was fashioned in

God's image. Man makes a god in his own image.

Humans end up worshipping themselves – or objects less than themselves – this way they don't have to give up authority.

When you're greater than your god you can still call the shots.

The psalmist has the opposite attitude. He praises God and encourages His people to follow suit... **“Bless the LORD, O house of Israel! Bless the LORD, O house of Aaron! Bless the LORD, O house of Levi!**

You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD! Blessed be the LORD out of Zion, Who dwells in Jerusalem! Praise the LORD!”

Throughout Israel's history, **PSALM ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SIX** was one of the nation's favorite psalms. It was sung at special occasions.

In 2Chronicles 7 Solomon sung this psalm at the Temple's dedication.

In 2Chronicles 20 the army of Jehoshaphat sung it when they went out to battle against the Midianites. In Ezra 3:11 when the Jewish exiles home from Babylon laid the foundation of the Temple they also sang Psalm 136.

Psalm 136 is in two parts... Verses 1-9 describe God's creation of nature. And verses 10-26 describe His creation of the nation, Israel.

The song was probably sung responsively. The priest read the first line; then the people chimed in on the chorus, **“For**

His mercy endures forever.”

In fact, why don't we try it that way? Let's close with a responsive reading. I'll read each line, and you guys come in on the chorus...

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!

For His mercy endures forever.

Oh, give thanks to the God of gods!

For His mercy endures forever.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords!

For His mercy endures forever:

To Him who alone does great wonders,

for His mercy endures forever;

To Him who by wisdom made the heavens,

for His mercy endures forever;

To Him who laid out the earth above the waters,

for His mercy endures forever;

To Him who made great lights,

for His mercy endures forever –

The sun to rule by day,

for His mercy endures forever;

The moon and stars to rule by night,

for His mercy endures forever.

Verse 10, “To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn,

for His mercy endures forever;

And brought out Israel from among them,

for His mercy endures forever;

With a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm,

for His mercy endures forever;

To Him who divided the Red Sea in two,
for His mercy endures forever;
And made Israel pass through the midst of it,
for His mercy endures forever;
But overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,
for His mercy endures forever;
To Him who led His people through the wilderness,
for His mercy endures forever;
To Him who struck down great kings,
for His mercy endures forever;
And slew famous kings,
for His mercy endures forever –
Sihon king of the Amorites,
for His mercy endures forever;
And Og king of Bashan,
for His mercy endures forever –
And gave their land as a heritage,
for His mercy endures forever;
A heritage to Israel His servant,
for His mercy endures forever.
Who remembered us in our lowly state,
for His mercy endures forever;
And rescued us from our enemies,
for His mercy endures forever;
Who gives food to all flesh,
for His mercy endures forever.

Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven!

For His mercy endures forever.

I hope we get the point... **God's mercy endures forever!**

