

# RETURN TO JOY

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Incorporated non-profit in New Jersey, USA

## Introduction – Psalm 120-134

By Peter Eng



### Introduction

*"This day is holy to our Lord.  
Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*  
(Nehemiah 8:10 NIV)

Nehemiah comforts the people of God when they return from exile in Babylon. It is an emotional time. There is regret as the people of God understand that they have sinned against God blatantly. There is gladness that God once more shows them favor and they rebuild Jerusalem.

Rebuilding Jerusalem is hard work. There is sorrow in life. There is pain that we inflict on ourselves. There is pain that others inflict on us. There are hard times even when we are doing God's will. But we are to return to joy every time we are discouraged, in sorrow, or in pain. Joy is something we possess, lose, and repossess. It is our spiritual heritage as worshippers of the One True God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

As the people sorrow and weep, Nehemiah speaks these words of comfort to strengthen them: *"Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have*

*nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."* (Neh 8:10)

God makes us a complete unit with both the spiritual and the material. Both are good, and each affects the other. So Nehemiah tells God's people to eat something they love and drink something sweet. Nehemiah is surprisingly modern! He knows that when our blood sugar is too low, it is hard to be joyful.

Joy is not an uninterrupted emotion. But it is a necessary blessing. Where there is so much going on in our life and they crowd out or shout out our joy in the LORD, but we must return to it. When we return to the joy of the LORD, we re-center our life, find hope, and renew our strength.

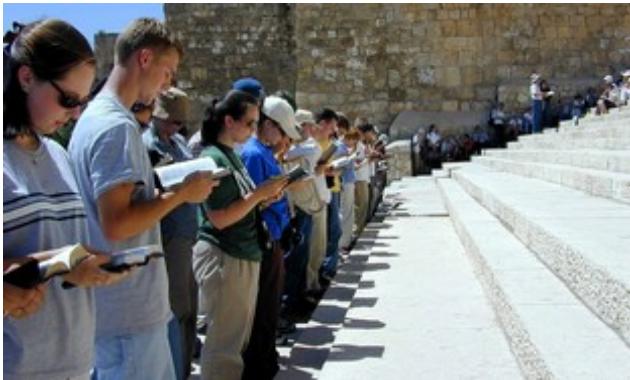
Around Nehemiah's time, fifteen psalms were collected and placed together for the people to use. They are called the Songs of Ascents (Psalm 120-134).

These are songs about God's people returning home. They are songs of joy that give them strength. They are songs that help them look to the LORD rather than focus on the complications in their life.

Joy in God's Word is real. It is not a call to look at our world through tinted glass. It is a joy that arises from adversity. It is a joy that comes in spite of trouble or pain. It is not a joy that comes through escape; it is a joy that comes through triumph.

The songs were used by returnees as they journeyed from pagan lands to return to the Promised Land. They were used by returnees who have arrived in the Promised Land and are rebuilding their ancestral homes. They were songs used by God's people who were starting life over. They were also used three times a year as by Jews we return to Jerusalem to worship God.

There were fifteen steps leading up to the temple on the south side. Many tourists today would recite each psalm as they ascend the steps.



Reconstruction of Nicanor Gate

There were also fifteen steps leading from the Court of Women through the Nicanor Gate into the Temple. Some suggest the priests would read each psalm as they ascended these steps.

This is one time we don't have to choose how the psalms should be used. It is as useless to argue when we sing certain hymns or songs. We sing them when we feel like it! There is no restriction to songs. The more we sing them, the more we enjoy them, and the more we enjoy them, the more we sing them. It is unimaginable that people are told, "You cannot sing this song unless you are doing this or that."

These songs are always connected in some way to Jerusalem and to the Temple. To this day, an inscription of the "Song of Ascents" stands at the entrance of the City of David.



In a very real way, our life is a pilgrimage towards Jerusalem. To be sure, God himself will bring Jerusalem to us, but we also journey to it. We are all pilgrims looking for the joy of our Promised Land. Revelation 21 tells us:

*<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

*<sup>3</sup> I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." (NLT)*

The Songs of Ascents is not about the past. They are for us to use today as we await the new Jerusalem where God will wipe every tear from our eyes.

Let's enjoy these songs together!



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**Rev. Peter Eng** is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.