

Unit Theme: Non-Davidic Psalms

August 11, 2024 (Lesson 11)

THE BLESSING OF GOD'S PRESENCE

- 1. Longing for God's House** (Psalm 84:1-4)
- 2. Blessed in God's House** (Psalm 84:5-8)
- 3. Good Comes to the Righteous** (Psalm 84:9-12)

Central Truth: The presence of God brings blessing to His children.

Focus: Affirm the joy of being in God's house and commit to faithful church attendance.

Evangelism Emphasis: Christians should invite unbelievers to church to experience God's presence.

Golden Text: "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah" (Psalm 84:4).

Psalm 84 is a pilgrimage song written by a Korahite. The sons of Korah were from the priestly tribe of Levi and were primarily Temple singers (cf. 2 Chron. 20:19). A modern equivalent would be a member of a church choir or praise team. The Korahites lived in various locations throughout Judah. Holy days were observed at appointed times of the year and Korahites, along with other travelers, would make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. As they traveled together, they would meditate on the significance of the Temple and on the salvation of God and burst out in song. Think of a church choir traveling throughout the city singing Christmas carols. This psalm is one of the songs pilgrims sang as they journeyed toward Jerusalem to worship God in the Temple.

1. LONGING FOR GOD'S HOUSE

A. Crying Out for God (Psalm 84:1-2)

1 How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! 2 My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.

Altars and holy places were erected as memorials of encounters with God throughout the land of Israel (Gen. 8:20; 12:7-8; 26:25; 33:20; Ex. 17:15; et al.). Holy days, or convocations, were established to remember God's saving acts (Lev. 23:1). These memorials preserved sacred memory, and celebrated and relived God's work among His people. So, sacred places and sacred days are memorials reminding us of a sacred past and guiding us into a sacred future. The Temple—the house of God—was the most sacred place in Israel.

Even as the pilgrims longed to see the Temple, they were seeking the presence of God. The Israelites knew God was omnipresent (cf. Ps. 139:7-10; Jer. 23:24; 1 Kings 8:27), but the Temple represented the center of God's presence, and the Holy of Holies in the Temple represented the throne room of God. To be on the Temple grounds, to see the grandeur of the Temple architecture, and to worship in the Temple was somewhat like being in the heavenly presence of God. It was as if the heavens had come down upon the earth. The dwelling place of God was “amiable” (Ps. 84:1), or “lovely” (NIV). The Hebrew word *yadid* speaks of that which is “beautiful and beloved” (*New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries*, 1998, hereafter NASD).

This was more than a spiritual encounter. The psalmist speaks of the longing, or yearning, of the soul (v. 2). The Hebrew word *nephesh* (“soul”) speaks to living being, life, self, person. The Hebrew understanding of human nature is that humans are body and spirit, which comprise a soul. So, to speak of *the longing of the soul* is to suggest desires and emotions that are both spiritual and physical. The psalmist declared “my heart and my flesh crieth out.” The “heart” (Hebrew, *lēb*) denotes the seat of emotion, desire, thought, and decision. The “flesh” (Hebrew, *bāsār*) speaks to the human body (*Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 2006).

The soul “fainteth” (Hebrew, *kalah*) speaks of being consumed with passion, intense desire, or being emotionally and physically overwhelmed (NASD). This may refer to a spiritual encounter so overwhelming that the physical body becomes weak. Pentecostals have sometimes experienced being “slain in the Spirit,” or “falling under the power.” An early Pentecostal described this as communing “with the Father, unconscious of their immediate surroundings, some are all broken up and cry to God with intense earnestness, many receiving the blessing they need at His hands and rising full of the joy of His presence” (*The Apostolic Faith*, April 1907).

The Temple was the place of encounter, but the pilgrims’ earnest desire was to encounter “the living God” (v. 2). Unlike the temples of the Egyptians or Canaanites, the Jerusalem Temple did not house an image, or idol, of God. The Hebrews knew God could not be adequately represented by “a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal . . . ,” or any heavenly body (Deut. 4:16-19 NKJV). They were expressly forbidden to create or worship such images. A carved image is not alive; it is the creation of human hands. The living God is Creator and giver of all life.

The living God is the “Lord of hosts” (Ps. 84:1); that is, *Yahweh Sabaoth*. This divine title is used four times in this psalm and describes God as the divine King who is surrounded by angelic hosts and denotes God’s incomparable power (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*). *Yahweh Sabaoth* can also be translated as “Lord Almighty” (NIV) or “Lord of Heaven’s Armies” (NLT). The title “Lord of hosts” is a military title which denotes God as a divine warrior who wages war against all the earthly and heavenly powers who oppose His rule (Ex. 15:3-4; Josh. 5:14; Ps. 76:3-6). King David declared, “Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. . . . The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory” (24:8-10). *Yahweh*

Sabaoth is the living God “enthroned between the cherubim” and is beyond compare in power, splendor, and glory to all the gods (idols) of the nations (Isa. 37:16 NIV).

§ *What do Psalms 55:17; 57:2; and 88:1 say about those who “cry out” to God?*

B. Praising God in His House (Psalm 84:3-4)

3 Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God. 4 Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.

An encounter with the living God in the Temple provoked joyful singing, shouting, and dancing. Israel at worship was not docile, passive, or silent. Worship was deeply engaged in hope and thanksgiving as a bodily, verbal, and public declaration that life is a gift from God (W. Brueggemann, *Worship in Ancient Israel*). The psalmist so desired to be in the house of God that he envied the sparrow who had made a home for herself among the altars. The Temple provided a safe place for the sparrow to lay her eggs and nurture her young. This anticipated the words of Psalm 91: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust” (vv. 1-2).

The sparrow, and all those who entered the Temple, found “sanctuary” (Hebrew, *qodesh*), which is a common term used for the Temple throughout the Psalms. The sanctuary was consecrated as a holy place—a place set apart within a fallen world where God’s presence could be experienced. In a world which had abandoned the living God, God could be found and encountered in the sanctuary. The imagery of the sparrow nesting in the Temple might have inspired Jesus to compare the sparrow’s insignificance with the significance of humanity (Matt.

10:29-31). If the house of the Lord was a safe and sacred place for the sparrow, how much more was it a safe and sacred home for humans who are created in the image of God?

Furthermore, the imagery of the Temple as a home for sparrow and humans alike signifies all creatures are to sing the Creator's praises ("always singing your praises," v. 4 NLT). King David declared, "And in His temple everything says, 'Glory!'" (Ps. 29:9 NASB). Centuries later, returning Jewish exiles proclaimed, "You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you" (Neh. 9:6 NIV).

Not Enough

It is not enough for us to be at the place where God is worshiped if we do not ourselves worship Him.—Matthew Henry

2. BLESSED IN GOD'S HOUSE

A. A Heart Set on Pilgrimage (Psalm 84:5-6)

5 Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. 6

Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.

Here the psalm moves from giving attention to the Temple to the situation of the pilgrims as they travel toward Jerusalem. Verses 4 and 5 are a pair of beatitudes. The word "blessed" (Hebrew, *esher*) speaks to a state of happiness and joy, of enjoying the favor of God (NASD). The first beatitude declares those who are in the Temple are happy. The second declares those who are on the way to the Temple are happy. Those who are in the Temple are singing and rejoicing. Those who are on the way to the Temple—"in whose heart are the highways to Zion!" (v. 5 NASB)—are singing along the way. The point is God can be encountered and worshiped in the Temple and on the way to the Temple. God is present in the Temple, and outside the Temple.

The journey to Zion could be difficult and dangerous. Strength for the journey came from the presence of God (v. 7). As the pilgrims sang and worshiped along the way, they gained the strength necessary to continue the journey. “Sing for joy to God our strength; shout joyfully to the God of Jacob” (81:1 NASB). As they journeyed toward Zion, they had to pass through the “valley of Baca” (84:6). *Baca* means “weeping.” This may have been a geographical location, but it has been lost to history. It is likely the “valley of weeping” is a metaphor that speaks to the difficulty of the journey to Zion. The singing of the pilgrims gave way to tears of lament. Even as they encountered difficulties in their journey, they continued to hope and worship. God’s faithful presence was transformative. As they journeyed through the barren wilderness toward Zion, God sent refreshing rains. This is reminiscent of Psalm 23:4: “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” Just as God was present in the splendor of the Temple, He was present in the barrenness of the wilderness. Just as rain refreshed the dry grounds, the presence of God refreshed the weary travelers.

§ *Why are God’s children able to rejoice and weep at the same time?*

B. From Strength to Strength (Psalm 84:7-8)

7 They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God. 8 O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.

The pilgrims went from “strength to strength”; that is, they discovered ever-increasing strength from the presence of God (v. 7). As God’s Word promises, “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:31). When the psalmist’s ancestors made their pilgrimage out of Egypt and toward the Promised Land, they sang, “The Lord is my

strength and song, and he is become my salvation” (Ex. 15:2). As the pilgrims in Psalm 84 made their way to Zion, they too relied on God for their strength. Verse 7 is a confession of human weakness and dependence on God. The word “strength” (Hebrew, *chayil*) has the connotation of “mighty warrior, protector, and defender” (NASD). Ancient pilgrims were often attacked by marauders. The psalmist declared God defends His people from their enemies.

As the pilgrims drew closer to Zion, their anticipation would build, and the reward of their journey was to appear before God in the Temple. With verse 8, the pilgrims have reached their destination and offer a prayer to God in the Temple. The prayer is addressed to the “Lord God of hosts,” which acknowledges God’s power and authority to rule over all creation. The psalmist also refers to the Lord as the “God of Jacob.” This may be a short form for “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” or “God of the patriarchs,” which would remind the worshipers of God’s longstanding covenant with the people of Israel. More likely, the specific reference to the “God of Jacob” reminded them that Jacob was the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. The twelve tribes represented twelve geographical territories and twelve political entities, but they were a single people united by their common confession that “the Lord is our God” (2 Chron. 13:10).

God had delivered their ancestors from Egyptian bondage and, as they left Egypt, they carried with them the bones of Joseph to be buried in the Promised Land. Like their ancestors who traveled through the wilderness to the Promised Land, the Korahites were traveling to Zion. The Korahites’ pilgrimage affirmed God is trustworthy to keep His promises. “Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Deut. 7:9 NASB).

Visiting Jerusalem Today

Every year more than four million travelers from around the world make the journey to the ancient land of Israel. Because of Israel's antiquity and religious significance, the country has the most museums per capita in the world. The most visited city is Jerusalem—the holy city for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The most visited sight is the Western Wall, and the most visited Christian churches are the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Church of the Nativity. A favorite activity is to be baptized in the Jordan River. Religious tourism contributes more than \$6 billion annually to the Israeli economy. Many people who have traveled to Israel have testified it was a life-changing experience.

3. GOOD COMES TO THE RIGHTEOUS

A. God's Anointed One (Psalm 84:9-10)

9 Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. 10 For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

The Korahite pilgrim continued his prayer in the Temple by asking God, "Look upon the face of Your anointed" (v. 9 NKJV). This is likely a reference to the Aaronic blessing: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee" (Num. 6:24-25). For God to turn His face toward someone is a metaphor that speaks to God's glory. A shining face is one glowing with a smile. This is reflected in Eugene Peterson's paraphrase: "God bless you and keep you, God smile on you and gift you, God look you full in the face and make you prosper" (vv. 24-26 MSG). The psalmist was asking God to look the anointed one full in the face and prosper him.

Who is the anointed one? There are three possibilities. First, it might refer to the king of Israel, who was anointed to lead the nation as God's adopted son (Ps. 2:6-7). Second, the

anointed one might be the high priest who represented the people before God and led the nation in worship. However, it is more likely “thine anointed” was the Korahite worshiper himself. Throughout the Psalms and Prophets, the “anointed” was not limited to leaders, but often referred to the people of God (Ps. 28:8-9; Hab. 3:13). The psalmist envisioned himself as an anointed worshiper, one who preferred service in the Temple over a life of wickedness (84:10; cf. Heb. 11:24-26). He had traveled a great distance to worship God in Jerusalem, and now he desired to see the face of God.

The psalmist’s reference to “tents of wickedness” could be a metaphor for those who live in rebellion against God. However, it more likely referred to places throughout the land where altars to idols had been erected. So, the psalmist was saying he would rather be a doorkeeper in the Temple of Yahweh than a priest of false gods.

Never Too Much

When it comes to satisfying our spiritual appetites, there is no such thing as excess. There are no restraints placed on us by God. There are no rules of temperance or laws requiring moderation or boundaries beyond which we cannot go in seeking to enjoy Him. We need never pause to inquire whether we’ve crossed a line or become overindulgent. You need never fear feeling too good about God.—Sam Storms

B. Sun and Shield (Psalm 84:11)

11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

In his final confession of faith, the psalmist declares the “Lord God” (Hebrew, *Yahweh Elohim*) is a “sun and shield” who gives “grace and glory.” Associating Yahweh with the sun is rare in the Old Testament, probably due in large part that the Egyptians and Canaanites

worshiped a sun-god as their chief deity. Even so, in this context the sun represents the brilliance and illuminance of the glory of God. As the sun gives light to the earth, the glory of God fills the earth. The Aaronic blessing speaks of God's shining face. This is reflected throughout the Psalms: "Lift up the light of Your face upon us, Lord!" (4:6 NASB; cf. 80:3, 7, 19; 89:15). The "light" of God is the "salvation" of His people (27:1). "Light" and "salvation" pertain to the work of God in giving relief and victory, crowning His people with His blessings (W. A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*). Isaiah proclaimed, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" (60:1). God demonstrates His divine favor by drawing near and sharing the divine glory with His people.

Yahweh is a "shield." This is a common metaphor throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms (cf. Gen. 15:1; Deut. 33:29). The shield was the primary weapon of defense for the ancient soldier. This reminds us of the divine title "Lord of hosts" which signifies God is a warrior who will protect His people. As the Israelites camped at the shore of the Red Sea, *Yahweh* shielded them from the armies of Egypt with the pillar of cloud (Ex. 14:19-20). David declared God had equipped him with "the shield of . . . salvation" (2 Sam. 22:36). The imagery of *Yahweh* as a divine warrior was emphasized by David in Psalm 144:1-2: "The Lord my Rock . . . trains my hands for war" and is "my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me" (NIV).

By coupling the metaphors of *sun* and *shield*, Psalm 84:11 emphasizes *Yahweh* is the divine Warrior-King whose glory and power extends over all creation. "Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all" (1 Chron. 29:11 NIV).

§ *How has the Lord God been a "sun" and "shield" in your life?*

C. Triple Blessing (Psalm 84:12)

12 O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

This psalm contains three beatitudes: “Blessed are they that dwell in thy house” (v. 4); “Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee” (v. 5); and “Blessed is the man that trusteth in thee” (v. 12). The righteous man and woman enjoy a triple blessing of God’s favor. They encounter God’s glory in the Temple, they encounter God’s provision and protection as they travel, and their lives are blessed by many good things as they walk in righteousness. We are reminded of the words of David: “Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart’s desires. Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you” (Ps. 37:3-5 NLT).

COMING TOGETHER TO MEET WITH GOD

The author of Psalm 84 was a worshiper who loved the Temple of God and the God of the Temple. He knew God’s presence was not limited to the Temple precincts, but the Temple as a holy place remained dear to his heart. The Temple is where earth and Heaven met. As he journeyed toward the Temple, he anticipated God’s glory; and when he arrived at the Temple, he encountered the glory of God.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman a time would come when people would no longer worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, and “true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:21-23). That should not be interpreted to mean there is no longer a need for a sacred place to worship God. Jesus and His disciples worshiped together and observed the Last Supper in the upstairs room of a large house (Luke 22:12). Likely this was the same place the disciples gathered to anticipate and receive the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts

1:13; 2:1-4). Anywhere the people of God gather to worship is a sacred place, be it a small storefront or a massive cathedral. God's people gather to worship, pray, and encourage each other. "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:24-25 NIV). As we do so, we anticipate the Holy Spirit will fill the house where we gather!

Daily Devotions

- M. Abraham Hosts the Lord (Genesis 18:1-10)
- T. Joshua Lingers in God's Presence (Exodus 33:8-11)
- W. David Delights in God's House (Psalm 27:4-6)
- T. Jesus Teaches in the Synagogue (Luke 4:16-21)
- F. A Miracle at the Temple (Acts 4:1-10)
- S. Spiritual Gifts for the Church (1 Corinthians 12:27-31)