



Sunday School Lesson
Psalm 84
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The Longing to Worship



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This lesson focuses on one of the Psalms in the Old Testament, [Psalm 84](#). We will first explore some background issues and then examine the content of the psalm itself.

I. Context

Issues relating to context are more involved with a study of the psalms than with most other books of the Bible. As modern biblical analysis has demonstrated, the Bible student needs to deal with at least two levels of context: the original compositional context, and the later setting for the use of the psalm as a means of worship mainly in the temple but also in the synagogue. (See the chart to the right.) The original poems were often written hundreds of years before becoming a part of the sacred collection of psalms as a part of Hebrew scripture. Frequently the original historical setting for the composition is very different than the later historical use of the psalm in the Hebrew worship tradition. Sometimes this shift of setting between composition and later usage led to shifts in meaning of elements of a psalm. Frequently, these distinctions etc. are extremely difficult to discern with high levels of certainty, although at times these distinctions are rather clearly defined by the content of the psalm. Also fascinating, but beyond the scope of our study, is the later history of the use of individual psalms in the various streams of Christian tradition, particularly those traditions with more liturgical orientation in worship.



Modern study since the work of Professor Hermann Gunkel in the early 1900s has focused on the second tier, the worship use, with a preoccupation on the shape and use of the book of psalms as a tool of worship primarily in the second temple period of Judaism (post-exile to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD).

a. Historical

The beginning historical setting has to do with the composition of the psalm. With many of the 150 psalms, the challenge to identify the original compositional history is so great as to be impossible, because the content of the individual psalm provides few, if any, clues to such historical identification. A lot of the

interpretative history of the psalms both in Jewish and in Christian understanding have attributed most, and sometimes, all of the psalms to David. Yet, such is not accurate with the data from within the psalms themselves. The superscriptions found on many of the psalms contain the names of not only David (73 pss), but also Jeduthun (Pss. 39, 62, 77 [cf. 1 Chr. 16:41-42, 25:1-8 for background]), Heman (Ps. 88 [cf. 1 Kgs 4:31; 1 Chr. 2:6; 6:17; 16:41-42; 25:1-8 for background]), Solomon (Pss. 72, 127), Moses (Ps. 90), the Korahites (Pss 42; 44-49; 84-85; 87-88), and the Asaphites (Pss. 50; 73-83). Note that the presence of a superscription sometimes causes a variation in the verse numbering of a psalm. Typically it will add an additional verse number, when it is counted as a separate verse.

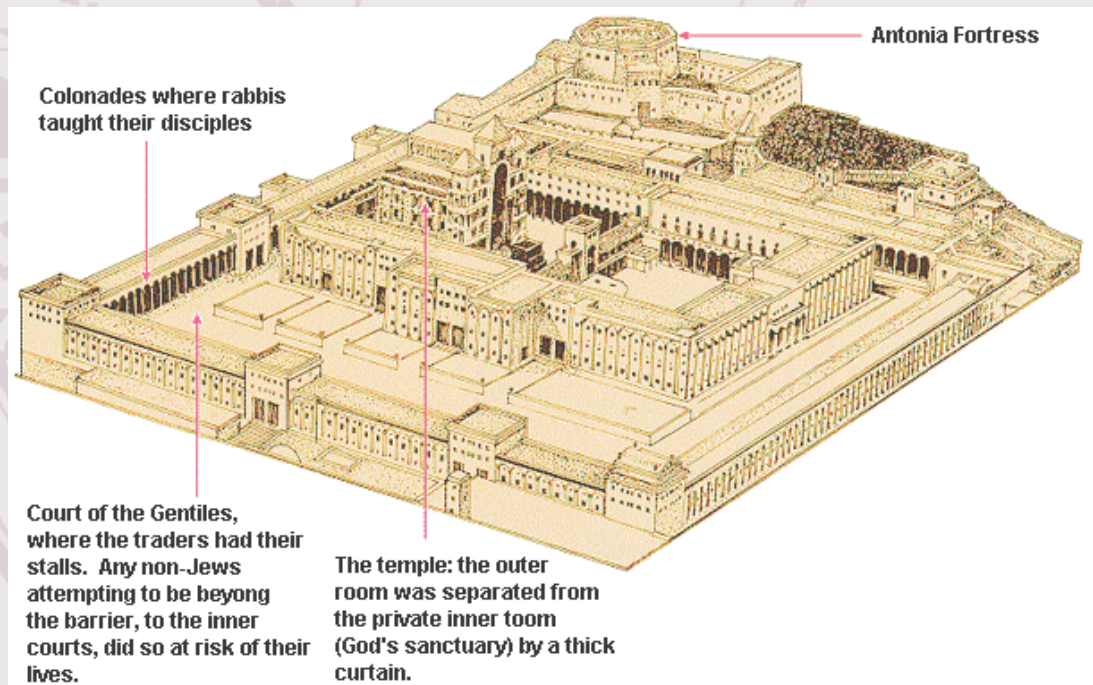
In the older interpretative tradition, [Psalm 84](#) was assumed to have come originally from David in spite of the superscription at the beginning indicating its origin from the Korahites. With this older view, speculation then centered on what experience in David's life led to the writing of this poem, as is reflected in the analysis by [John Brown](#) over a century ago:

This psalm is much like the 27th, 42nd, 43rd, and 63rd, and may have been composed on the same occasion with the former, when David was banished from Jerusalem by Absalom his son, 2 Sam. 15-16. We have here, (1.) David's ardent affection towards the public ordinances of God, and sense of their happiness who enjoyed them, ver. 1-7, 10. (2.) His heart-burning desire to the God of ordinances, ver. 8-9. (3.) His assured faith of God's kindness, and persuasion of the happiness of such as trust in him, ver. 11-12.

But the inscription clearly indicates that this psalm came not from David, but from the group of Levites who had charge of the music in the temple and were called the [Korahites](#). Four of these who descended from Korah (cf. [Exod. 6:24](#); [Num. 26:11](#)) and played a central role in the temple music are named and are Heman, Asaph, Jeduthun, and Ethan, but the descendants of Korah presided over the temple music for several centuries.

Thus to assume a historical situation in the life of David as the originating point for this psalm would be wrong.

The Worship Use setting (see [diagram on page 1](#)) provides the better source of historical understanding for Psalm 84. As a part of the Pilgrim Songs (see below for details), the psalm is set in the context of one journeying from some distance to



Jerusalem in order to worship God in the temple as a part of one of the great festival celebrations that marked the annual religious calendar. This psalm helped to capture the anticipation and longing to worship in the Jerusalem temple. The originating time frame for this psalm can't be determined, but probably dates from the exile or postexilic period at the close of the Old Testament era, as Marvin Tate suggests in volume 20 of the *Word Biblical Commentary* (p. 356-357). In such a situation the temple here mentioned is not [Solomon's temple](#), but the small version of it rebuilt by Ezra and Nehemiah after the exile. By the beginning of the Christian era, this rebuilt temple had undergone massive remodeling and expansion (above chart) by [Herod the Great](#) with the result of its becoming much larger and more beautiful than the original temple built by Solomon. Jewish pilgrims returning to Jerusalem in Jesus' day would have sang this psalm with greater meaning, because of the temple's splendor. The psalm at least in the form known to us has a

timeless quality and appropriately was used by festival pilgrims over several centuries prior to the destruction of the temple by the Romans in the first Christian century.

The particular festival that the psalmist may have had in mind is difficult to determine. Suggestions by modern scholars tend toward a fall festival, perhaps the [Feast of Tabernacles](#). But the language of the text is too general to be able to identify one festival to the exclusion of the others. And this may very well be intentional.

It is against this historical backdrop that we will attempt to understand this psalm.

b. Literary

The Book of Psalms in the Old Testament is the first document in the third section of the Hebrew Bible. In the Jewish tradition tracing itself back before the beginning of Christianity what we Christians called the Old Testament and what Jews for the past several centuries have called the [Tanak](#), which was divided up into three sections: [the Law](#) (Torah), [the Prophets](#) (Nevi'im), and [the Writings](#) (Ketuvim). [Jesus and the apostles](#) referred to the Old Testament in this threefold division, mostly using the first two sections. Although the content between the Christian Old Testament and the Jewish Tanak or Hebrew Bible is identical, the arrangement and division of the various 'books' is very different.

The following quote from the [Free Encyclopedia](#) on the internet provides a accurate, helpful summation:

Ketuvim is the third and final section of the Tanakh books. The Christian Old Testament (excluding the deuterocanonical books/apocrypha) counts them as thirty-nine books. This is because Jews often count as a single book what Christians count as several.

As such, one may draw a technical distinction between the text used within Judaism, the Tanakh, and the similar, but non-identical, text used within Christianity, the Old Testament. Thus, some scholars prefer Hebrew Bible as a term that covers the commonality of the Tanakh and the Old Testament while avoiding sectarian bias.

Hebrew Bible

Hebrew Bible refers to the textual canon of the Jewish Tanakh, which contains books that were originally written mainly in Hebrew. (There are two books, Daniel and Ezra, that have parts in Aramaic, but even they are written in the same Hebrew script.) Nearly all Hebrew Bibles since the middle ages reflect the Masoretic Text.

The Hebrew Bible includes the same books as the Protestant Old Testament, but not the deuterocanonical portions of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Old Testament. The term Hebrew Bible does not impose a particular ordering of its books (as opposed to Tanakh and the Old Testament, each of which orders the books in different ways).

Psalms stands as the first and perhaps most important book of this third section, the Writings. Additionally, it served as [the hymn book](#) of ancient Israel by the time of the temple. Comprised of Hebrew poems [set to music for singing](#) first in the temple then later additionally in the synagogues, the book itself is divided into five sections modeled after the five 'Books of Moses,' that is, the first section called the Law. Most English translations will preserve [the markers](#): Book 1, Pss. 1-41; Book 2, Pss. 42-72; Book 3, Pss. 73-80; Book 4, Pss. 90-106; Book 5, Pss. 107-150. This is explained in a helpful summary in the [Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia](#):

The Psalter is divided, after the analogy of the Pentateuch, into five books, each closing with a doxology or benediction:

1. The first book comprises the first 41 Psalms, all of which are ascribed to David except 1, 2, 10, and 33, which, though anonymous, were also traditionally ascribed to him. While Davidic authorship cannot be relied on this probably is the oldest section of the Psalms

2. Book second consists of the next 31 Psalms (42-72), 18 of which are ascribed to David and 1 to Solomon (the 72nd). The rest are anonymous.

3. The third book contains 17 Psalms (73-89), of which the 86th is ascribed to David, the 88th to Heman the Ezrahite, and the 89th to Ethan the Ezrahite.

4. The fourth book also contains 17 Psalms (90-106), of which the 90th is ascribed to Moses, and the 101st and 103rd to David.

5. The fifth book contains the remaining Psalms, 44 in number. Of these, 15 are ascribed to David, and the 127th to Solomon.

Psalm 136 is generally called "the great hallel." But the Talmud includes also Psalms 120-135. Psalms 113-118, inclusive, constitute the "hallel" recited at the three great feasts, at the new moon, and on the eight days of the

feast of dedication.

Psalms 120-134 are referred to as Songs of Degrees, and are thought to have been used as hymns of approach by pilgrims.

Our passage, [Psalm 84](#), is toward the end of Book Three and is a 'pilgrim psalm.' This has to do with the perceived use of the psalm by the close of the Old Testament era. Psalms 84 and 122 are distinctive psalms of this type, and as Lawrence Toombs in the *Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible* (from iPreach online) explains:

The pilgrims who gathered for the great annual festivals came singing. Most of their hymns are included in other ps. categories, but Pss. 84:1; 122 belong so distinctively to the pilgrims as to form a separate group. The keynote of these pss. is joy. Pss. 84:1 expresses the pilgrim's delight at his safe arrival among the splendors of the Holy City and his gratitude to God for guidance and protection during the dangerous journey. Pss. 122:1 is a song of the departing pilgrims, radiant with their love for Zion, God's earthly dwelling place.

Thus the theme is celebrating the opportunity for worshipping God in the temple in Jerusalem. A tone of jubilant joy permeates these psalms and sets the model for the worship of God across the ages. Additionally, [Psalm 84](#) is one of the "Songs of Zion" psalms, which also includes Psalms [46](#), [48](#), [76](#), [87](#), [122](#). This label basically designates the same idea as the label "Pilgrim Psalms." These psalms celebrate the greatness of God and the opportunity to worship God in the temple at Jerusalem.

Additionally, the literary context for [Psalm 84](#) in the book is as the first psalm of the second series of Korahite psalms (Pss. 84-85 and 87-88). The first series is found in Pss. 42-43 and 44-49. Just previous to Psalm 84 is a series of Asaphite psalms (Pss. 73-83). The common theme of longing to worship in the temple runs through both sets of Korahite psalms.

II. Message

According to Tate in the *Word Biblical Commentary* (p.357), the internal literary structure of [Psalm 84](#) divides itself out as follows: (1) a longing for the dwelling place of Yahweh (vv. 2-5); (2) the well-being of the pilgrim (vv. 6-8); (3) intercessory prayer for Yahweh's anointed (vv. 9-10); (4) a meditation on the joy of participation in the worship of Yahweh (vv. 11-13). The threefold repetition of "How blessed..." in verses five, six and thirteen helps bind the psalm together, as well as set the overall tone of the psalm.

The verse numbering below follows some of the English translations (based on the LXX) that count the superscription as verse one, while other English translations (based on the Hebrew text) begin verse one with the text following the superscription.

First, we will give some attention to the Superscription (NRSV): "[To the leader: according to The Gittith. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.](#)" The **first** segment, "To the leader," is variously translated from the Hebrew as "To the chief musician" (KJV), "To the choirmaster" (RSV); "For the choirmaster" (JB); "For the leader" (NAB, JNV, REB); "For the director of music" (NIV). Although this introductory Hebrew word is not real clear in its meaning, it most likely designated this psalm as to be used by the Levitical worship leader who selected the psalms to be sung during worship.

The **second** segment, "[according to The Gittith](#)," is even less clear in its meaning. Suggestions range from designating (1) a musical tune to be used in the singing of the psalm, (2) designating a musical instrument to be played while singing the psalm, to (3) some sort of festival or ceremony in which the psalm was to be used. See Tate, WBC, p. 351, for more details.

The **third** segment, "[Of the Korahites. A Psalm](#)," is easier to identify. "The Korahites were a guild of temple singers according to 2 Chr 20:19; they also appear as temple gatekeepers in 1 Chr 9:19; 26:1, 19, and as bakers in 1 Chr. 9:31 (Tate, WBC, p. 351). Tate, WBC, p. 352, has a helpful summation of the identity of this group: (1) The Levitical Korahites probably belonged to Judah and to sanctuaries in the south. (2) The Korahites were active in both pre-exilic and post-exilic times; they may have been a Levitical priesthood which functioned in Palestine during the exile... (3) The Korahites probably drew on multiple traditions for poetic motifs and content, possibly including some material from Northern sanctuaries and festivals. The present Korahite psalms, however, emerged primarily from the Jerusalem cult tradition. (4) The Zion psalms continued to be important for post-exilic Jewish communities because of the continuing focus on Jerusalem and Zion as the center of Israel's life and as the center of the world, and the eschatological orientation given to the psalms in these communities.

a. Devotion to the House of the Lord, vv. 1-4

Hebrew Text:

לִמְנַצֵּחַ עַל־הַתְּנִיחַ לְבַנְיָקְרַח מִזְמוֹר¹
 מִהַיְדִירוֹת מִשְׁפְּנוֹתֶיךָ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת²
 נִפְשִׁי לַחַצְרוֹת יְהוָה לִבִּי וּבִשְׂרֵי יְרֵנֵנוּ
 נִכְסְפָה וְנִסְפָּה וְנִסְפָּה לָהּ³
 אֵל אֱלֹהֵי
 בַּיִת וְדָרוֹר כֵּן לֵה אֲשֶׁר־שָׁתָה אֶפְרָתָיִה
 נִסְפָּה צְפוֹר מְצָאָה⁴

NRSV

1 How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! 2 My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. 3 Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. 4 Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise. (Selah)

Comments:

Hopefully the Hebrew and Greek texts won't intimidate you; I included them, along with the transliteration of the Hebrew words into the English alphabet, to enable you to see the shape of the original language text. The Septuagint is also included because it represents an ancient translation into Greek about 175 B.C. that became the widely used scripture text among Greek speaking Jews by the beginning of the Christian era. Also with the two English translations you can notice the different approaches to verse numbering that either includes (NLT) or excludes (NRSV) the superscription in verse one.

The first segment of text, as Tate (p. 357) and other commentators note, is in the poetical structure of a [chiasm](#) with the following structure:

- A** How beautiful are your... (v. 1a)
- B** Yahweh Sabaoth (v. 1b)
- B'** Yahweh Sabaoth (v. 3d)
- A'** How blest is.... (v. 4a)

The passionate longing for God's temple expressed here echoes that found the Psalm 42. Pilgrims using this song on their way to Jerusalem would heighten their anticipation of reaching Jerusalem and joining with other worshippers in the praise of God through the services in the temple. The offering of sacrifices on the altars in the temple, the reciting of psalms, listening to the great Levitical choirs sing various psalms, interacting with fellow Jews from various parts of the Mediterranean world -- this was the experience of worship for the pilgrims. The physical beauty of the temple was not that great until the time of Herod's temple, especially in comparison to many of the great temples for worshipping various deities in other places in the Mediterranean world. But to a religious Jew to be in the place where God made His residence on earth for worship was an experience pretty much beyond words. It meant connection to not only fellow Jews present for worship but connection to all those who had worshipped God all the way back

Septuagint (LXX)

εἰς τὸ τέλος ὑπὲρ τῶν ληγῶν τοῖς
 υἱοῖς Κορε ψαλμὸς ὡς ἀγαπητὰ
 τὰ σκηνώματά σου κύριε τῶν
 δυνάμεων ἔπιποθεὶ καὶ ἐκλείπει
 ἡ ψυχὴ μου εἰς τὰς αὐλὰς τοῦ κυρίου
 ἡ καρδία μου καὶ ἡ σάρξ μου
 ἠγαλλιάσαντο ἐπὶ θεὸν ζῶντα καὶ
 γὰρ στρουθίου εὗρεν ἑαυτῷ οἰκίαν
 καὶ τρυγῶν νοσσιᾶν ἑαυτῇ οὐ
 θήσει τὰ νοσσία αὐτῆς τὰ
 θυσιαστήρια σου κύριε τῶν
 δυνάμεων ὁ βασιλεὺς μου καὶ ὁ
 θεός μου μακάριοι οἱ κατοικοῦντες
 ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ σου εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας
 τῶν αἰῶνων αἰνέσουσιν σε
 διάψαλμα

young – at a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God! 4 How happy are those who can live in your house, always singing your praises. Interlude

NLT

1 For the choir director: A psalm of the descendants of Korah, to be accompanied by a stringed instrument. How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty. 2 I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the LORD. With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God. 3 Even the sparrow finds a home there, and the swallow builds her nest and raises her

to Abraham. The psalmist is a bit envious of the birds who have nested in the crevasses of the temple. The temple of the Almighty is their home and they sing their joyous songs continuously before the Lord.

What can we learn from these verses? The first thing that comes to mind is our experience of worship in God’s house. We Protestant Christians have coined a strange phrase over the past decades: “Are you staying for church?” Somehow, for a few folks, Sunday School provides all the religious experience they can tolerate. Attending the worship service is viewed as optional and not all that necessary. How different is such thinking from that of the psalmist! Over the past six decades of my life I have increasingly realized how essential public worship of God is for the nourishing of one’s spiritual life. To participate in worship both as a listener and as a contributor through singing, praying etc. is crucial. Just as the psalmist we also need connections. The affirmation and inspiration of joining with fellow worshippers; the sense of being connected to past generations who have worshiped in this place -- these are important encouragements to our spiritual life and are critical to our spiritual health. Ultimately, it doesn’t make so much difference regarding the beauty of the physical facilities. I have experienced profound worship in storefront churches as well as in some of the most beautiful cathedrals in Europe. For us, as for the psalmist, the place of worship is the place for meeting God with fellow worshippers. The prayers, the singing, the preaching -- all that takes place during worship is but a channel to both receive God’s blessing and to express our love back to our God.

b. Excitement for Worship, vv. 5-7

Hebrew Text:

אֶת־מִזְבְּחוֹתֶיךָ יְהוָה נִבְאָוֹת מְלִפְיָ וְאֱלֹהֵי
 אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁבְּנוּ בֵיתְךָ עוֹד יִהְיֶלְלוּךָ פְּלֵאָה⁵
 אֲשֶׁר־נָאֲדָם עוֹדֵלוּ בְךָ מְסֻלוֹת בְּלִבָּבָם⁶
 הַבִּכָּא מַעֲיָן וְשִׁיתְהוּ גַם־בְּרִכּוֹת יַעֲטֶה מוֹרָה⁷
 עֲבָרֵי בְעַמְּךָ⁷
 יִלְכּוּ מִחֵיל אֱלֹהֵי־לְרֵאָא אֱלֹהֵי־בְצִיּוֹן⁸

Transliteration of Hebrew Text:

⁵ʾašrê yôšbê bêtékā ôd
 yəḥaləlūkā sselāh⁶ʾašrê
 ʾādām ôz-lô bāk məsillôt
 bilbābām⁷ ôbrê bə ʿemeq
 habbākā⁷ ma yān yəšîṭūhū
 gam-bərākōṭi ya ʿe^h mōre^h⁸
 yēlkū mēḥayil ʿel-hāyil
 yērā^eʿel-ʿēlōhîm bəṣiyyôn

Septuagint (LXX)

ἡμακάριος ἀνὴρ οὐ ἔστιν ἡ
 ἀντίληψις αὐτοῦ παρὰ σοῦ κύριε
 ἀναβάσεις ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ
 διέθετο ἔν τῇ κοιλάδι τοῦ κλαυθμῶ
 νος εἰς τόπον ὃν ἔθετο καὶ γὰρ
 εὐλογίας δώσει ὁ νομοθετῶν⁸
 πορεύσονται ἐκ δυνάμεως εἰς
 δύναμιν ὀφθήσεται ὁ θεὸς τῶν
 θεῶν ἐν Σιων

NRSV

5 Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.^{F176}
 6 As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.
 7 They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

FOOTNOTES:
 F176: Heb lacks [to Zion]

NLT

5 Happy are those who are strong in the LORD, who set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
 6 When they walk through the Valley of Weeping,^{F68} it will become a place of refreshing springs, where pools of blessing collect after the rains!
 7 They will continue to grow stronger, and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem.^{F69}

Footnotes:
 F68: Hebrew valley of Baca.
 F69: Hebrew Zion.

Comments:

In verse five the psalmist reflects on the heart of the experience: drawing strength from God. Worship strengthened him and thus made him yearn to be present in God’s house as often as possible. The spiritual strength also grew out of his commitment to the Lord and his determination to worship his God.

The excitement of the pilgrim at the thought of worshipping in the temple was hardly containable. The picture here is of a group of pilgrims going through a fearsome “valley of Baca” but their excitement turned the barren, dry place into a lush pasture land with plenty of rain and water. Some scholars have tried to identify this place geographically as a clue to the historical setting for the psalm. Certainly, finding water for drinking purposes would be a concern in traveling, especially in the very arid region of southern Palestine. But the psalmist is speaking poetically here, not literally. “Blessings are transmitted wherever the pilgrims

go, because they are looking to God whose presence is at home in Zion” (Tate, WBC, p. 360). The goal will be reached in Jerusalem, the city of God that is called Zion. For there the God above all gods will show himself to His people in worship. To focus on the very uncertain historical identification issue of Baca is to miss the main point.

The lessons of these verses are relatively clear. When we walk into our church worship center, do we expect to encounter God? The anticipation of experiencing God’s presence in worship provided strength and renewal to the pilgrim. Our experience of public worship should be similar. The inspiration found in worship is renewing and revitalizing. But more than this is the presence of the Living God who meets us and renews us. As with the psalmist, may we come to church with this excitement of meeting our God.

c. Prayer for God’s Anointed, vv. 8-9

Hebrew Text:

שְׁמָעָה תְּפִלְתִּי הַאֲזִינָה אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת
 סֵלָה
 מִנְּנֹנֵי רָאָה אֱלֹהִים יְהִבֵּט פָּנָי מִשִּׁיחָךְ

Transliteration of Hebrew Text:

⁸ yhw^h(ʿādōnāy) ʿēlōhīm
 šəḇāʾōt šim ā^h təpīllātī
 haʾāzīnā^h ʿēlōhē ya ʾāqōḇ sēlā^h ⁹
 māginnēnū rəʿē^h ʿēlōhīm
 wəhabbēt pənē məšīḥēkā

Septuagint (LXX)

ἰκὺριε ὁ θεὸς τῶν δυνάμεων
 εἰσάκουσον τῆς προσευχῆς μου
 ἐνώτισαι ὁ θεὸς Ἰακωβ διαψαλμα
¹⁰ὑπερασπιστὰ ἡμῶν ἰδέ ὁ θεός
 καὶ ἐπίβλεψον ἐπὶ τὸ πρόσωπον
 τοῦ χριστοῦ σου

NRSV

8 O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! (Selah) 9 Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed.

NLT

8 O LORD God Almighty, hear my prayer. Listen, O God of Israel.^{F70} Interlude 9 O God, look with favor upon the king, our protector! Have mercy on the one you have anointed.

Footnote:
 F70: Hebrew of Jacob.

Comments:

The terms “our shield” and “your anointed” can point to the king as God’s protector of his people. If so, then the original composition of the psalm would be much earlier to a time when Israel had kings. But during post-exilic times these terms would most likely have applied to the High Priest in the temple. In either case the individual who is the object of the prayer for God’s blessing is the proper leader of God’s people. The psalmist invokes God’s blessing upon the appointed leader of his people. As one seeking to worship in the temple, his concern was for the necessary stability and leadership so that the ministry of the temple could continue as it was supposed to. Such would be crucial for a successful pilgrimage to Jerusalem. God is described in terms of “Lord God of hosts,” “God of Jacob,” and “God.” [Lord God of hosts](#) emphasizes God’s awesome power over all creation. [God of Jacob](#) stresses the connection of God with his people reaching all the way back to the patriarchs. God from [Elohiym](#) underscores God as judge and sovereign.

Lessons for us? Do we give much thought to the role the church staff plays in leading worship? How often do we pray for them through the week? Our prayer should be that God will lead them carefully as they plan and prepare for worship week by week. Such is a mammoth task and requires careful, prayerful planning and extensive preparation. I remember my first pastorate with a laymen as music leader. He would come in on Sunday mornings and pick out some familiar hymns at the last moment during Sunday School and also would decide what hymn the choir would sing as “special music” that morning. Once in a while someone would be asked a day or two early to sing a song as the “special” that Sunday. That was about all the planning that was done. I learned quickly after coming to the church that this was the set pattern and that I was not to change it. The sequence of hymns, prayers etc. was always the same every Sunday. Obviously little or no planning was given to worship. A church is very fortunate when the staff takes planning out the order of worship very carefully and prayerfully. Usually the Minister of Music in Baptist

churches in the US takes the primary responsibility for this. Such is not the case among Baptists elsewhere in the world, however. This is the basic responsibility of the pastor. Whoever leads our public worship both needs and deserves our prayers all through the week as they plan and prepare for Sunday.

d. Participating in Worship, vv. 10-12

Hebrew Text:	Transliteration of Hebrew Text:	Septuagint (LXX)
<p>מֵאלֶף בְּחֶרְתִּי הַסְּתוּפָה בְּבַיִת אֱלֹהִי כִּי טוֹב יוֹם בְּחֻצְיָיָךְ מִדֹּוֹר בְּאֶהְלֵי־רִשְׁעֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים חֵן וְכִבוֹד יִתֵּן יְהוָה לֹא כִּי שֶׁמֶשׁ וַיִּגְוֶן יִמְנַע־טוֹב לְהֵלְכִים בְּתַמִּים יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֲשֶׁר־י אֲדָם בְּטַח בְּךָ</p>	<p>¹⁰ māginnēnū rə^ʿē^h ʿēlōhīm wəhabbēt pənē məšīhēkā ¹¹ kī ṭôḇ-yôm baḥāšerē^ʿkā mē^ʿālep̄ bāḥartī histôpēp̄ bəḥēt ʿēlōhay middûr bəʾohōlê-reša ¹² kī šémeš ûmāgēn yhw(ʿādōnāy) ʿēlōhīm hēn wəkābôd̄ yittēn yhw(ʿādōnāy) lō^ʿ yimna -ṭôḇ lahōlkīm bəṭāmīm ¹³ yhw(ʿādōnāy) šəbāʾôṭ ʿaşrē ʿādām bōṭē^aḥ bāk</p>	<p>¹¹ ὅτι κρείσσων ἡμέρα μία ἐν ταῖς ἀύλαῖς σου ὑπὲρ χιλιάδας ἐξελεξάμην παραρριπτέσθαι ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ τοῦ θεοῦ μᾶλλον ἢ οἰκεῖν ἐν σκηνώμασιν ἀμαρτωλῶν ¹² ὅτι ἔλεον καὶ ἀλήθειαν ἀγαπᾷ κύριος ὁ θεός χάριν καὶ δόξαν δώσει κύριος οὐ στερήσει τὰ ἀγαθὰ τοὺς πορευομένους ἐν ἀκακίᾳ ¹³ κύριε τῶν δυνάμεων μακάριος ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἐλπίζων ἐπὶ σέ</p>

NRSV

10 For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness. 11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly. 12 O Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

NLT

10 A single day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else! I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God than live the good life in the homes of the wicked. 11 For the LORD God is our light and protector. He gives us grace and glory. No good thing will the LORD withhold from those who do what is right. 12 O LORD Almighty, happy are those who trust in you.

Comments:

The climax of the pilgrim’s worship experience is to declare that one day spent in God’s house is far superior to a thousand days spent somewhere else. Just to be a janitor (gate-keeper) is far superior to living as an honored guest with those who don’t obey God. Wow! What an experience of worship!

The cornerstone of all this is God who stands as the object of worship. He is both sun (source of life) and shield (protector). He blesses. For those who walk uprightly (both in pilgrimage and in daily obedience) God pours out blessing upon blessing. Thus blessed are those who trust in God.

Lessons? I think first about how often I check my watch close to 12:00 noon on Sunday morning. I notice folks leaving the worship service if it goes much beyond noon time. Our experience in God’s house is so different than that of the psalmist. Often we can’t wait until the worship service is over; the psalmist didn’t want it to ever end. We have trouble finding time to do things around the church; the psalmist wished to be a janitor in God’s house. Could it be that we don’t often meet the psalmist’s God when we worship? If we did, maybe our attitudes would become more like his. The key may be our ‘trust’ in God.

One final observation. This psalm would be memorized and repeated by the pilgrims not just while in Jerusalem at the temple. They would take it with them back home and repeat it often as a reminder of their experience of worship at the temple. It would bring back wonderful memories of a treasured experience in Jerusalem. Remembering past experiences of especially meaningful worship can possibly be our lesson here.

Gaining renewed strength spiritually was the psalmist’s experience in worship. May it be ours as well as we worship our God today!