



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 84

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- The title of this Psalm is *To the Chief Musician. On an instrument of Gath. A Psalm of the sons of Korah*
- *To the Chief Musician*, is thought by some to be the Lord God Himself, and others suppose him to be a leader of choirs or musicians in David's time, such as Heman the singer or Asaph (1 Chronicles 6:33, 16:5-7, and 25:6)
- *On an instrument of Gath*, The scholars were not sure of the meaning of the word *Gath*
- Some think it may refer to a tune commonly sung in the Palestinian city of Gath



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- Or, an instrument of music that was invented in Gath
- Others, tracing the Hebrew to its root, perceive it to mean a song for the winepress, a joyful hymn for those who tread the grapes
- The word Gath is applied to two other Psalms, (8 and 81) both of which, being of a joyous character, it may be concluded, that where we find that word in the title, we may look for a hymn of joy and gladness
- *A Psalm of the sons of Korah*, These *sons of Korah* were Levites, from the family of Kohath
- By David's time it seems they served in the musical aspect of the temple worship (2 Chronicles 20:19)



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- They served as temple gatekeepers (1 Chronicles 9:19,26:1,19), as well as bakers (1 Chronicles 9:31), the temple was their life
- Korah led a rebellion of 250 community leaders against Moses during the wilderness days of the Exodus (Numbers 16)
- God judged Korah and his leaders and they all died, *“the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up together.”* (Numbers 16:32)
- But the sons of Korah remained, *“Nevertheless the children of Korah did not die.”* (Numbers 26:11)
- Perhaps they were so grateful for this mercy that they became notable in Israel for praising God



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- Their name came as the sons of Korah in ten Psalms: 44-48 and 84-88; all of which are Psalms of joy, without any reference to grief
- Some think that this Psalm might have been sent to them to be sung, or one of them might have been its author
- Others believe that David is the author
- The language in which it is written, show it to be his and it was written when he fled from his son Absalom
- The singer, whether he speaks in his own name or that of Israel generally, is undoubtedly at present unable (Psalm 84:2) to share in the Temple services which he so joyfully describes



Introduction

- Psalm 84 is classified as a pilgrimage Psalm, sung as praise by those who traveled to Jerusalem to worship
- Some believe that the psalmist wrote this Psalm to be sung by those who are unable to go to the house of the Lord because of something beyond their ability, as illness for example
- This Psalm has so many points of resemblance to Psalms 42 and 43
- It has the same spirit of fervent devotion to the service of God and love for the worship of the Temple
- The Psalm is divided into three equal sections ends by Selah after verses 4 and 8, marking a musical pause
- It is one of the Sixth Hour Prayers' Psalms



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Psalm Outline

- The Psalmist's Eager Longing for the House of God 84:1-2
- The Blessedness of Those Who Dwell There 84:3-4
- Strength for Those Who are Away from the House of God 84:5-8
- The Greatness of God and His House 84:9-12



The Psalmist's Eager Longing for the House of God 84:1-2

- Verses 1 and 2 express the psalmist's delight in the house of God
- He begins by desiring to be where God dwells and longs to be in God's presence always
- The affection is clear; he *loved* the house of God, whether it was in a tent or a permanent building
- For wherever God was worshipped, there He was supposed to dwell
- He considered it beautiful, *lovely*
- His expressions show us that his feelings were overwhelming



The Psalmist's Eager Longing for the House of God 84:1-2

- *How lovely* to the memory, to the mind, to the heart, to the eye, to the whole soul, is the *tabernacle*
- In some translations like the Arabic it says, *Your tabernacles* in plural
- Some think that the plural is used either to express the dignity of the house of God or, it may be used with reference to the various buildings of which the Temple was composed
- We read of a first and second parts of the tabernacle, Hebrews 9, there was the holy place, and the holy of holies, besides the court of the people



The Psalmist's Eager Longing for the House of God 84:1-2

- Some think that he here calls God the *Lord of hosts* because of the presence of the angels in God's sanctuary
- The titles of God scattered throughout this love song in greater variety than one would expect
- Sixteen names and titles in only 12 verses
- Clearly, the psalmist delights in the exalted titles of the Lord he loves
- God's name is always on his lips
- The psalmist's appreciation for God's house was not simply because it was beautiful



The Psalmist's Eager Longing for the House of God 84:1-2

- His *soul* longed for God's house, and *even faints* when denied the privilege of meeting with God among His people
- This was deep feeling, everything within him – *heart* and *flesh* – longed for God and His house
- Now he reveals his deep feelings as he thinks about the temple
- His spirit desires to be in the courts of the Lord
- In fact, his desire is so powerful that he says that he *faints* for the chance to be in the courts of the Lord
- His *heart* and his *flesh* sing for joy to the living God when thinking about being in God's presence



The Psalmist's Eager Longing for the House of God 84:1-2

- *Faints*, That is being consumed, wasting away with longing to be in *the courts of the LORD*
- The soul and the body partake together of the longing for the kingdom of heaven
- This speaks to those who are servants in God's house today
- They must make places and meetings in which people meet *the living God*
- And this speaks also to all who come to the house of God today
- They must come with the primary focus and expectation of meeting with *the living God*

The Blessedness of Those Who Dwell There 84:3-4



- The psalmist painted the image of *the sparrow* and of *the swallow* and left to the reader to interpret
- Some say that the birds actually nest on the altars
- And the meaning in this case might be that if even birds love to build their nests, as they do, in the sacred area, how much more reason has the believing heart to find its home in the house of God
- The creation of God is portrayed as enjoying being in God's presence
- The birds can come freely to the place where God was worshipped - to the very altars - and make their home there undisturbed

The Blessedness of Those Who Dwell There 84:3-4



- How strongly in contrast with this was the condition of the wandering - the exiled - author of the Psalm!
- The birds never have to leave, while the psalmist longs to spend this amount of time in God's presence
- But others say that they were found in and about the Temple
- And some think that it is very unlikely that *sparrows* and *swallows*, or birds of any kind, should be permitted to build their nests, and hatch their young, in or about altars
- These altars were kept in a state of purity; and where continuous fires were kept up for the purpose of sacrifice and burning incense

The Blessedness of Those Who Dwell There 84:3-4



- However, he might want to express how the sparrows and the swallows seemed to have a happy destiny to be in a condition to be envied
- The psalmist envies the privilege of the birds
- As if he is saying: “as these birds rejoice, when they have found a nest for themselves and their young birds; so I desire a place in Your Temple and courts, and near Your altars.”
- In the house, and at the altar of God, a faithful soul finds freedom from care and sorrow, finds peace and joy; like a bird that has secured a nest to care for her young

The Blessedness of Those Who Dwell There 84:3-4



- Some contemplated and said that the sparrow is an example of a bird of small significance and the swallow is a picture of restlessness
- Likewise, the insignificant can find his place in the house of God, and the restless man can find his rest there – near God’s altar
- St. Augustine comments on *My King and my God* and says, “What is, ‘My King and my God?’ You who rule me, who have created me.”
- Here in verse 4 the metaphor is dropped, and the former feeling and emotion expressed in plain language

The Blessedness of Those Who Dwell There 84:3-4



- Some think that by saying, *Blessed are those who dwell in Your house* the Psalmist meant the priests
- Because they are constantly praising and serving God
- So, the psalmist went from envying the birds to envying the priests who had rooms at the *house* of God
- He felt they could live a life of constant praise *They will still be praising You*
- Blessed are, not the mighty and wealthy of the earth, but they that dwell in God's house
- Those who can always be in God's presence have a great blessing and a great advantage

The Blessedness of Those Who Dwell There 84:3-4



- But *Your house*, may mean Your Church where believers find it good to draw near God, as He always pours out His Spirit on His sincere worshippers
- St. Augustine says, “If you have your own house, you are poor; if God’s, you are rich. In your own house you will fear robbers; of the house of God, He is Himself the wall. Therefore, ‘*Blessed are those who dwell in Your house*’ They possess the heavenly Jerusalem, without constraint, without pressure, without difference and division of boundaries; all have it, and each have all. Great are those riches.”
- *Selah*, It is worth while to pause and meditate upon the hope of dwelling with God and praising Him



Strength for Those Who are Away from the House of God 84:5-8

- Verses 5-8 express that not only those, who dwell within the wall of the Temple are *Blessed*, but those who in the strength of God defeating every obstacle appear in His Presence and offer their prayers
- The man who finds his *strength* in God is also the one *whose heart is set on pilgrimage*
- He does not rely on self or the world for strength, but considers himself a visitor, a traveler, a pilgrim in this world
- His true strength and treasure are in the world to come
- This strength and heart of a pilgrim are displayed by the love for the house of God



Strength for Those Who are Away from the House of God 84:5-8

- There he meets with God, along with other pilgrims, and they gain strength in God together as they meet
- The love and longing for the house of God are not meant as an escape from the world, but as a preparation for life *in* the world
- God is the *Strength* of all who trust in Him
- The psalmist seems to mean that mere dwelling in the house of God is not enough for blessedness
- Trust in God - having God for one's Strength - is also essential, required, and necessary
- All *strength* must come from God
- This strength is to be obtained by waiting on Him



Strength for Those Who are Away from the House of God 84:5-8

- The word *Baca* is derived from the root which means to weep
- The sense or meaning of *the Valley of Baca* is not totally certain
- Many commentators suggest that *Baca* speaks of tears and weeping, or of drought and dryness where one face difficulty and trouble
- But many believe that *the Valley of Baca* was some waterless and barren valley through which pilgrims passed on their way to Jerusalem
- Though they pass through this barren and desert place, they would not fear evil, knowing that God would supply all their needs



Strength for Those Who are Away from the House of God 84:5-8

- And even in the sandy desert they will find pools of water, in consequence of which they shall advance with renewed strength
- A difficult place, such as *the Valley of Baca*, was transformed into *a spring*, complete with *rain* and *pools* of water
- Faith turns it into a place of springs, finding refreshment under the most unpleasant circumstances, while God refreshes them with showers of blessing from above, as the rains clothe the dry plains with grass and flowers
- While the followers of God are passing through the wilderness of this world, God opens for them fountains in the wilderness, and springs in the dry places



Strength for Those Who are Away from the House of God 84:5-8

- The psalmist is picturing the ups and downs of life
- We go through the valley of weeping between the times of strength
- There are times when life is smooth and easier
- But in between those times we move through the valley of weeping
- When the righteous pass through a time of suffering or calamity, they turn it into a time of refreshment
- The blessing of God rests on those who trust in Him and causes them ever to increase in righteousness and true holiness



Strength for Those Who are Away from the House of God 84:5-8

- With the blessedness expressed by plenty of water in an otherwise dry place, the pilgrim lives in *strength* and goes to more *strength*
- The rich relationship with God is a never-ending supply of strength for the journey, even in difficult seasons
- On a normal journey, especially a difficult one, the usual pattern is to go from strength to weakness or fatigue
- Not so with those whose strength is in God
- Instead of fainting on their hard journey they gain fresh strength as they advance



Strength for Those Who are Away from the House of God 84:5-8

- The journey has a destination – *Zion*, the city of God
- The love and longing for the house of God will bring *each one* to his destination, appearing *before God in Zion*
- *O LORD God of hosts*, God is appealed to here as a God of power; as a God who is able to accomplish all His purposes
- It was a plea for the plenty spoken of and was a supplication for the strength that continues and builds
- The psalmist grounded his plea in the long history of God's dealing with His covenant people
- Jacob wrestled in prayer with God and prevailed, Genesis 32:24-30



Strength for Those Who are Away from the House of God 84:5-8

- That same God who blessed and was faithful to *Jacob* will also be faithful to His people today
- St. Augustine comments on *God of Jacob* and says, “For God appeared unto him, and he was called Israel, seeing God. Hear me therefore, O God of Jacob, and make me Israel.”
- This is worthy of meditation – thus the insertion of the Psalm’s second *Selah*

The Greatness of God and His House 84:9-12



- The word *shield* here can be taken as a reference to a literal *shield*, which was the main means of defense for Israel
- God was David's shield, and the shield of His people, to protect and defend them from their enemies, and is the shield of all the believers
- The psalmist asked God to *behold* what Israel wisely did to defend itself
- Though the psalmist had first in mind David, it also points toward the Messiah, the ultimate *Anointed One*

The Greatness of God and His House 84:9-12



- The psalmist request in regard to David is, that God would look upon his outward state and condition, which was a distressed and an afflicted one, with an eye of pity and compassion, he being deprived of sanctuary worship and service, and of the presence of God there
- And if he has a view to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ or Anointed, he entreats that God would look upon His Son the Messiah, and for His sake hear and answer him; look upon His person, and accept him in Him, the Beloved
- To look upon His sufferings, and death He was to endure, to save him from his sins

The Greatness of God and His House 84:9-12



- Some take it to be a prayer for the speedy coming of the Messiah
- *For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand*, The psalmist began with love and longing for the house of God, and now he returns to the same thought
- Time spent at God's house was better and more valuable than time spent elsewhere
- A day in God's presence worshiping is better than a thousand doing other things
- Our desire reflects our sinful condition

The Greatness of God and His House 84:9-12



- It is a reflection of the main thought of the Psalm, the incomparable blessedness of dwelling in God's house
- Some commentators connect this verse with verses 1-7, taking verses 84:8-9 as parenthetical, and regard it as giving the reason for the desire to enter the Temple which is the dominant idea of the Psalm
- *I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, This was another expression of the psalmist's love and longing regarding the house of God*
- Living a luxurious life in the lavish *tents of wickedness* meant nothing to him; he would rather humbly serve in God's house

The Greatness of God and His House 84:9-12



- The psalmist says that he would rather be troubled and burdened so as to be near the house of God rather than be in the comfort of tents but not near the Lord
- *Doorkeeper*, The verb used here is derived from a noun signifying sill or threshold, and it would seem to mean here to stand on the threshold; to be at the door or the entrance, even without the privilege of entering the house
- He would prefer that humble place to a house within the dwellings of the wicked
- *be a doorkeeper*, There may be a reference to the *sons of Korah's* function of door keepers

The Greatness of God and His House 84:9-12



- The psalmist explains the goodness and blessing that come to those pilgrims who love and long for the house of God
- They enjoy God as the source of blessing *sun* and defense *shield*
- Not only a *Shield* or protection, as He has been already called (verse 9), but also a *Sun*, the source of life and light, of joy and happiness
- They receive His generous *grace and glory*
- Inward grace, outward splendor and glory (Revelation 21:11-24)
- He that partakes of the grace of God on earth will partake of glory in heaven

The Greatness of God and His House 84:9-12



- The grace about which Paul says: *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain”* (1 Corinthians 15:10)?
- And the glory that about which he says: *“there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”* (2 Timothy 4:8)
- *No good thing will He withhold:* A promise is made to *those who walk uprightly* – they will receive every good thing God has for them

The Greatness of God and His House 84:9-12



- Verse 12 is the summary of the point of the Psalm
- *Blessed is the man who trusts in You*, God's greatness and goodness lead the Psalmist to experience and declare the blessedness of trusting in God
- He has perfectly described the true meaning of putting one's trust in the Lord
- One truly trusts in the Lord when his desire is to be in the presence of the Lord above all else (verse 2)
- Serving God and worshiping Him is better than enjoying the comforts of life

The Greatness of God and His House 84:9-12



- God is our shield who hears our prayers and helps us through our difficult times
- But we need to truly put our trust in the Lord
- If one's desire does not match the desire of the Psalmist, then one needs to know that he/she not in God's grace
- *Blessed is the man who trusts* in the Lord at all times, and not in men; but in *the Lord of hosts*, in whom is everlasting strength, and is the Sun and Shield of His people



Discussion

- The psalmist longed for “the courts of the Lord” (verse 2). If you had to be absent from church for an extended period, what would you miss the most? Why?
- What are some of the illustrations the psalmist uses to demonstrate his longing to be in the worship of God?
- Why does the psalmist describe the birds (verses 3-4)? How does the birds’ experience relate to that of the psalmist?
- What is the valley of Baca?



Discussion

- Why do those who are traveling through this valley gain strength as they go?
- Who is the Anointed One referred to in verse 9?
- God's people pass through painful places occasionally. How might that experience bless them? How might it make them a blessing to others?
- The psalmist valued a day in the house of God more highly than "a thousand elsewhere" Why?