

**LONGING FOR THE COURTS OF THE COVENANT LORD  
PSALM 84**

**Copyright © 2013 Wabash Bible Ministries. All rights reserved.**

**TRANSLATION**

For the choir director. On the Gittith. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

1 How beloved *is* Your dwelling place, O Covenant LORD of hosts!

2 My soul longs and even faints for the courts of the Covenant LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

3 Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young—*even* Your altars, O Covenant LORD of hosts, my King and my God.

4 Blessed *are* those who dwell in Your house; they will ever be praising You. Selah.

5 Blessed *is* the man whose strength *is* in You, in whose heart are the highways *to Zion*.

6 *As they* pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the early [autumn] rain also covers it with blessings.

7 They go from strength to strength; *every one of them* appears before God in Zion.

8 O Covenant LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; listen, O God of Jacob! Selah.

9 Look upon our shield, O God, and look *with favor* upon the face of Your anointed.

10 For better *is one* day in Your courts than a thousand *elsewhere*; I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

11 For the Covenant LORD God *is* a sun and shield; the Covenant LORD will give grace and glory; no good *thing* will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

12 O Covenant LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!

## COMMENTARY

### Introduction

Psalm 84 is attributed to “the sons of Korah” (לְבָנֵי־קֹרַח) and is one of four Korahite psalms found in Book III of the Psalter (Ps. 84, 85, 87, 88), which supplement the eight found in Book II (Ps. 42-49). The psalmist is probably one of the Korahite temple singers, and his psalms bears a similar mood to Psalms 42 and 43.<sup>1</sup>

The title, which is the first verse in the Hebrew text, includes the phrase “on the Gittith” (עַל־הַגִּיטִית). This term is of unknown significance<sup>2</sup>.

Some older commentators attribute Psalm 84 to David and argue that he wrote the psalm on the occasion of fleeing during Absalom’s rebellion. According to this view, David is lamenting his absence from the holy city, Jerusalem, the place of God’s earthly sanctuary.<sup>3</sup> But lacking Biblical evidence to substantiate this conjecture, it is better to view the Psalm more generically as a pilgrimage song, although it also exhibits some elements of the Zion song (cf. Ps. 87, 122)<sup>4</sup>.

From early in Israel’s history, pilgrimages to the holy site in Jerusalem were among the worship obligations for the Israelite (Exod. 23:17; 34:23; Deut. 16:16). Every male Israelite was commanded to make the pilgrimage to Zion three times a year—at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 16:16). Yet, such travel was not always possible. Therefore, in Shilo, one pilgrimage a year sufficed (1 Sam. 1:3, 21; 2:19). After Jerusalem became the only sanctuary of the Covenant LORD, it was impossible for many to make the long trek to His dwelling place even yearly.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Derek Kidner, *A Commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), pp. 302-303.

<sup>2</sup> Mitchell S. J. Dahood, *Psalms II* (51-100) (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), p. 279.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 4, CD-ROM edition, in *The Master Christian Library* (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1999), p. 1333. Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. Francis Bolton, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 7. Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Psalms: Translated and Explained* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), p. 355.

<sup>4</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1998), p. 235. Cf. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 170.

<sup>5</sup> Gunkel, p. 235.

The Korahite singer of Psalm 84 longs for the courts of the Covenant LORD. In his pilgrimage song, he may be singing about “a pilgrim who has arrived in Jerusalem” and is “standing before the gates of the holy city or is just in the act of entering them.”<sup>6</sup> Alternatively, he may be contemplating his own pilgrimage to Jerusalem, either literally or only in spirit.<sup>7</sup>

### Verse-by-verse Exposition

Psalm 84 is divided into three stanzas, consisting of four verses each. The repetition of the key word “blessed” (אַשְׁרֵי) (vv. 4, 5, 12) provides the break in stanzas.

#### - Stanza One (vv. 1-4) -

#### **1 How beloved is Your dwelling place, O Covenant LORD of hosts!**

כִּמֹּה (“How”) here indicates the exclamation of amazed glorification (cf. Ps. 8:1).<sup>8</sup> The context requires יְרֵירוֹת to be translated as “beloved” or “dear”; it is the language of love poetry.<sup>9</sup> The Covenant LORD of hosts (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת) is “the God of the armies of Israel,” of the covenant, and of the dynasty of David<sup>10</sup>; He is the God of the heavenly hosts, the angels. The singer glories in the dwelling place (מִשְׁכְּנֹתַיִךְ)<sup>11</sup> of the Covenant LORD of hosts (cf. Ps. 27:4; 46:4). Depending on the date of composition, this term may refer to the tabernacle or the temple.

New covenant believers also confess that the Lord’s dwelling place is beloved. For God’s temple is Jesus the Christ, the beloved Son of the Father (Matt. 3:17; John 2:19-21), and it is also His beloved bride, the Church (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

<sup>6</sup> Kraus, p. 167.

<sup>7</sup> See “in whose heart,” Ps. 84:5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>9</sup> Kidner, p. 303; Alexander, p. 355.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Sam. 17:45-46a; cf. Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), p. 226.

<sup>11</sup> Though plural in form, מִשְׁכְּנֹתַיִךְ is singular in meaning (Dahood, p. 279).

**2 My soul longs and even<sup>12</sup> faints for the courts of the Covenant LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.**

The psalmist describes his intense longing for the courts of the Covenant LORD, the sanctuary, the place where God’s people assemble. “Soul” (נַפְשִׁי), “heart” (לִבִּי), and “flesh” (וּבִשְׂרָרִי) denote the human being in its totality, the whole man (cf. Ps. 27:4; 42:1ff; 63:1ff).<sup>13</sup> The verb “longs” (נִכְסָפָה) is an emphatic present, expressive of intense, vehement desire.<sup>14</sup> The verb “faints” (כָּלָתָהּ) identifies “the languishing, debilitating tension” of one “under the influence of extreme mental emotion” and “consumed with strong desire.”<sup>15</sup> The two verbs *longs* and *faints* “chiastically balance” the two nouns *heart* and *flesh*.<sup>16</sup>

The psalmist longs and faints for the “courts of the Covenant LORD” (יְהוָה), which likely refers to the courts of the tent-temple on Zion (cf. Isa. 1:12; Zech. 3:7; Ps. 65:4; 92:13; 96:8; 100:4). Although the tabernacle only had one court, the Davidic tent-temple likely had multiple courts. Not being a priest, it was unlawful for him to go beyond the outer court and enter into the inner sanctuary.<sup>17</sup>

The verb יִרְנְנֵי is best translated “sing for joy” in this context, although it might also be translated “cry out” (cf. Ps. 17:1; Lam. 2:19; Prov. 1:20; 8:3), in which case it would indicate a loud or “shrill” crying-out.<sup>18</sup> The psalmist says that his heart and his flesh sing for joy “to the living God” (אֱלֹהֵי חַיִּים), for He, not merely His courts, is the true object of his longing (cf. Ps. 42:2). The visible sanctuary served as a copy and

<sup>12</sup> Kraus questions the Masoretic text’s “and even” (וְגַם), arguing that it “disturbs the otherwise smooth meter of the psalm. He sides with the LXX and Jerome in reading only “?” (p. 166). However, I have not found this argument based on meter sufficient to justify the exclusion of the MT’s “וְגַם”.

<sup>13</sup> Kraus, p. 168; Alexander, p. 355; cf. Henry, p. 1334; cf. O. Palmer Robertson, *Psalms in Congregational Celebration* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1995), p. 208.

<sup>14</sup> Briggs, p. 226; Alexander, p. 355; Kraus, p. 168; cf. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. James Anderson, vol. 2, CD-ROM edition, in *The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection* (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998), p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> Kraus, p. 168; Calvin, p. 62; Alexander, p. 355.

<sup>16</sup> Dahood, p. 279.

<sup>17</sup> Delitzsch, p. 3; Calvin, p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, CD-ROM edition, in *Bibleworks for Windows*, ver. 4.0 (Big Fork, MT: Hermeneutika, 1998). Cf. Alexander, pp. 303, 355; Kraus, p. 168.

shadow of the heavenly reality; it pointed to the living God Himself—the true temple made without hands (Heb. 8:5; Mark 14:58).<sup>19</sup>

New covenant believers share a longing to be in the presence of God and His people. They long for the private and public exercises of God’s worship.

**3 Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young—even Your altars, O Covenant LORD of hosts, my King and my God.**

צַפּוֹרִי is a general name for “whistling, twittering birds” like the sparrow.<sup>20</sup> In the Bible sparrows are a symbol for worthlessness. Referring to a sparrow’s value, Jesus said: “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:29, 31; cf. Luke 12:6-7; Matt. 6:26). The sparrow has found a home (בֵּית) at God’s altars; she knows the blessing of dwelling in the courts of the Covenant LORD of hosts, in God’s house (בְּיִתְיָהּ, Ps. 84:4). If the sparrow has found a home at God’s altars, then surely the longing pilgrim will also.<sup>21</sup>

דְּרוֹרִי denotes a “swallow” or a wild pigeon, not a turtle-dove.<sup>22</sup> The swallow is symbolic of restlessness. James Montgomery Boice comments:

[The swallow] is a bird that is always in the air, winging its way from point to point from the earliest glimmer of dawn to after sunset. It wearies the watcher who is trying to keep it in view. But then the time comes for it to mate and raise young, and the swallow builds a nest and settles down upon it to rest peacefully. This is a picture of the soul apart from God and then in God, when at last it comes to rest in him.<sup>23</sup>

Just as the swallow wanders about before she reaches her nest, so also the pilgrim must wander through a wilderness before he reaches God’s house, Zion, which is his place of rest. Sounding the language of love, the psalmist envies these two birds, each of which has found a home, a resting place in the courts of the Covenant LORD, in the presence of

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kidner, p. 303; Henry, p. 1334; Calvin, p. 62.

<sup>20</sup> Delitzsch, p. 4; Kraus, p. 168.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), p. 690; Kidner, p. 304.

<sup>22</sup> “Turtle-dove” is found in the LXX, Targum, and Syriac translations. Cf. Kraus, p. 168; Delitzsch, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Boice, p. 691.

the Beloved. From a new covenant perspective, this is the plight of all pilgrims wandering through the wilderness of this earthly pilgrimage, journeying toward the heavenly city that awaits.

The sparrow and the swallow nesting in the sanctuary should not be interpreted allegorically; rather they serve as figures for the singer of the blessing of dwelling in God's house—"of the protection and the permanent safety in the area of closeness to God."<sup>24</sup> Breaking off mid-sentence, the psalmist exclaims that nothing could be more wonderful than to behold God's altar.<sup>25</sup>

The Hebrew particle **אֵת** indicates that the direct object, "even your altars," follows, as in 1 Kings 19:10, 14. The "altars" (**מִזְבְּחֹתַיִךְ**) are those of burnt-offering and of incense (cf. Num. 3:31).<sup>26</sup> The birds find rest at the brazen altar of God—the place of sacrifice, the place of reconciliation and peace between man and God. So the psalmist looks to this altar, the altar of the Covenant LORD of hosts, who is his King and his God.

Through "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" upon a Roman cross, as a once-and-for-all sacrifice for sins, we have been justified by faith alone and sanctified (Heb. 10:10, 12). As a result of His vicarious sacrifice upon the altar at Calvary and His resurrection from the dead, we can believe Jesus, the Prince of Peace, when he promises rest to those who rest in Him: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29).

#### **4 Blessed *are* those who dwell in Your house; they will ever be praising You. Selah.**

The first stanza concludes with the first of three beatitudes (**אַשְׁרֵי**). Contemplating the blessedness of the birds who make God's altars their resting place, the psalmist expresses holy envy toward the priests and Levites, who are privileged to dwell

---

<sup>24</sup> Kraus, p. 168.

<sup>25</sup> Calvin, pp. 62-63.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander, p. 356.

constantly in the Lord's presence, while he must content himself with only occasional visits to the house of the Covenant LORD (cf. Ps. 65:4).<sup>27</sup>

As believers under the new covenant, we all are priests, dwelling in God's house, the Church (Rev. 1:6; 1 Cor. 3:9-10; Eph. 2:19-20; 1 Tim. 3:15). We may confidently enter "the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh" (Heb. 10:19). In union with Christ, we also must bear our cross (Luke 9:23). We must "present [our] bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* [our] spiritual service of worship" (Rom. 12:1). Looking to the altar upon which the spotless Lamb of God shed his blood to atone for our sins, we "continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" (Heb. 13:15). As Matthew Henry states, "If there be a heaven upon earth, it is in praising God, in continually praising him."<sup>28</sup> The greatest blessing for dwelling in God's house is that we will ever be praising Him.

- Stanza Two (vv. 5-8) -

**5 Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.**

The second stanza commences with the second of three beatitudes (אֲשֶׁרִי). "Man" (אָדָם) is a collective term, as is shown by the sudden change of number in the last clause of the verse ("in whose heart," בְּלִבְכֶם). "Strength" (עֹז) emphasizes "the asylum function of the sanctuary."<sup>29</sup> The psalmist is saying, "Blessed are those who find refuge in the Covenant LORD," who have Him as their strength (cf. Exod. 15:2; Ps. 28:7; 118:14; Isa. 12:2; Hab. 3:19).

The second half of verse 5 מִסְלֹת בְּלִבְכֶם is literally "in whose heart *are* the highways." Contextually, it is appropriate to add "*to Zion.*" The highways (מִסְלֹת) are the "high ways" or "raised roads" that lead toward Zion; they are "the pilgrim-highroads."<sup>30</sup> In ancient times, the "highway" was an artificially-constructed road that

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Robertson, p. 212; Henry, p. 1336.

<sup>28</sup> Henry, p. 1336.

<sup>29</sup> Kraus, p. 168; cf. Ps. 27:5.

<sup>30</sup> Delitzsch, p. 5; Kidner, p. 304.

provided “a level, unhindered path to the destination.”<sup>31</sup> Pilgrims followed such roads during the three great pilgrim feasts.<sup>32</sup>

“In whose hearts are the highways to Zion” may either refer “to those who plan a literal pilgrimage or to those who must be content to make the journey in their hearts, treating the present hardships as counterparts of the arduous road to Zion.”<sup>33</sup> O. Palmer Robertson explains the former explanation:

[Three] times a year all males and very often whole families made the long trek to Jerusalem. A week or more they spent worshipping God morning and evening. Living out of a tent, they brought their families daily to the temple of the Lord—and the psalmist says they loved it! They found a special blessing even in anticipating the trip. . . . They loved even the prospect of travelling along the highway leading to worship.<sup>34</sup>

The latter explanation is that although he is removed from the temple, the psalmist is still blessed, for he finds his strength in the Covenant LORD, and, by faith and in spirit, he is on the path to Zion, God’s holy hill.

From a new covenant perspective, as Christians, we do not set our gaze on an earthly temple, but on a heavenly one. We “look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). We eagerly await “the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10); our hearts are set on pilgrimage to the New Jerusalem, Mount Zion, the city of God.

**6 As they pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the early [autumn] rain also covers it with blessings.**

The qal participle עֹבְרִי may be translated as “passing” or “as they pass.” The meaning of עֵמֶק הַבְּכָא is uncertain, so it is best to translate it as simply “the valley of Baca.” The valley of Baca was probably “a definite place, namely, a wild, waterless area.”<sup>35</sup> It was a dry, barren desert.<sup>36</sup> Many translators, following the Septuagint (τῆ

<sup>31</sup> Alexander, p. 356; Robertson, p. 213.

<sup>32</sup> Briggs, p. 227.

<sup>33</sup> Kidner, p. 304.

<sup>34</sup> Robertson, p. 213.

<sup>35</sup> Kraus, p. 169.

κοιλιάδι τοῦ κλαυθμῶνος), render **וַיִּמְקַח** **וַיִּבְכֶּה** as “the valley of weeping.” However, Delitzsch, Calvin, and others reject this translation, noting that, **בַּכָּה** (final letter **ה**) signifies “tears” or “weeping” (“wept,” Gen. 45:14), but **בַּכָּא** (final letter **א**) signifies “a mulberry tree.”<sup>37</sup> **בַּכָּא** is evidently the singular of the word translated “balsam trees” (NIV, NAS) or “mulberry trees” (NKJ) in 2 Sam. 5:23, which is thought “to indicate a tree or shrub which grows in arid places.”<sup>38</sup> Since **בַּכָּא** and **בַּכָּה** are homophones, Kidner hypothesizes that the name of the tree (**בַּכָּא**) may be connected with the verb (**בַּכָּה**), “perhaps as a tree which exudes or ‘weeps’ some substance.”<sup>39</sup> If this is the case, then there may be a play on words here, connecting the dry, barren desert and its trees with the weeping of the pilgrim as he endures adversity during his arduous journey.

The psalmist then states that the pilgrims make the valley of Baca become “a spring” (**מַעְיָן**); the desert valley becomes an oasis (cf. Ps. 23:4). Delitzsch helps elucidate the meaning of this verse:

. . . passing through even a terrible wilderness, they turn it into a place of springs, their joyous hope and the infinite beauty of the goal, which is worth any amount of toil and trouble, afford them enlivening comfort, refreshing strengthening in the midst of the arid steppe.<sup>40</sup>

And so it is for the Christian pilgrim who is in exile from his eternal homeland and who longs for the Jerusalem above. Despite the adversity and endless toil of our earthly pilgrimage, we can “make it a spring” as we consecrate ourselves to the service of God—as we love the LORD our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind and love our neighbor as ourself (Matt. 22:37, 39).<sup>41</sup>

Verse 6 concludes by saying that “the early rain also covers it with blessings.” “The early rain” (**מִזְרֵה**) refers to the rain which refreshes the sown fields in the

<sup>36</sup> Calvin, p. 65.

<sup>37</sup> Delitzsch, p. 5; Calvin, p. 65.

<sup>38</sup> Kidner, p. 305.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 305, n. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Delitzsch, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew Henry writes, ““Our way to heaven lies through a valley of Baca, but even that may be made a well if we make a due improvement of the comforts God has provided for the pilgrims to the heavenly city” (p. 1337).

autumn.<sup>42</sup> Expectations of the blessing of rain were associated with the Feast of Tabernacles (cf. Zech. 14:17).<sup>43</sup> בְּרָכוֹת means “blessings,” although the word translated “pools” has the same consonants.<sup>44</sup>

Although autumn rain or an oasis in the midst of a desert may provide temporal satisfaction to the pilgrim en route to Jerusalem, such water cannot satisfy man’s deepest thirst and longing (cf. John 4:13). Yet, those who drink of the living water that Jesus provides will find eternal satisfaction. The pilgrim to the New Jerusalem shall never thirst again, for the water that Christ will give him “will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life; from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water” (John 4:14; 7:38).

### **7 They go from strength to strength; every one of them appears before God in Zion.**

חַיִל most commonly means “strength,” not “battlement” or “village.”<sup>45</sup>

The pilgrims go “from strength to strength” (מִחַיִל אֶל-חַיִל). Kidner explains: “The nearer the goal, the stronger its pull; so that the pilgrims, so far from flagging, press on more eagerly than at the start.”<sup>46</sup> Rather than growing weary and weak from their journey, the pilgrims gain new strength the closer they get to Zion, to God’s holy city, Jerusalem; they mount up with wings like eagles; they run but don’t get tired; they walk but don’t become weary (cf. Isa. 40:31).

As Christians, from glory to glory, we all are being transformed into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). We eagerly await the consummation of our marriage to our bridegroom, the completion of our union with Christ.

“*Every one of them* appears before God in Zion.” Three times a year—at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths—all the males of Israel were to appear before the Covenant LORD in His appointed place (Exod. 34:23; Deut. 16:16). The pilgrim longs for his destination, Zion, the holy mountain of God.

<sup>42</sup> Delitzsch, p. 6; Briggs, p. 228.

<sup>43</sup> Kraus, p. 169.

<sup>44</sup> Kidner, p. 305.

<sup>45</sup> Calvin, p. 66; cf. Briggs, p. 228; Dahood, p. 281.

<sup>46</sup> Kidner, p. 305; cf. Delitzsch, pp. 6-7.

As Christians, we can be assured of our perseverance in holiness and glorification, knowing that we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). Christ's promise holds true for all those for whom He died: "I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him* My new name" (Rev. 3:12, NKJ). One day we shall stand with the Lamb of God on Mount Zion; we shall stand before God's throne, serving Him day and night in His temple (Rev. 14:1; 7:15; cf. 7:9)!

**8 O Covenant LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; listen, O God of Jacob! Selah.**

Stanza two concludes with a prayer of supplication. The qal imperative שְׁמַעַה expresses the psalmist's sense of urgency in petitioning God. Kidner explains that "the psalmist is alone; he cannot join the pilgrims whom he has just been visualizing. He returns from 'they' to *my*."<sup>47</sup> Although in spirit he accompanies the pilgrims to Jerusalem, he is now "all the more painfully conscious of being at the present time far removed from this goal."<sup>48</sup> Yet, the psalmist ultimately is not alone; for God is with him. He calls on God to listen (שְׁמַעַה, or "give ear"), appealing to God's covenant: He is the Covenant LORD; He is the God of hosts; He is the God of Jacob. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Israel, and, from a new covenant perspective, the God of the Israel of God, the Church (Gal. 6:16).

**- Stanza 3 (vv. 9-12) -**

**9 Look upon our shield, O God, and look *with favor* upon the face of Your anointed.**

Verse 9, commencing the third and final stanza, serves as the climax of the Psalm. The first imperative (רָא) calls God to look upon "our shield." Most likely, the Psalmist is appealing to God's covenant with Abraham, in which he told Abram: "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great" (Gen. 15:1). Elsewhere in the Psalms, God is referred to as "our shield" (Ps. 33:20; 59:11). The

<sup>47</sup> Kidner, p. 306.

<sup>48</sup> Delitzsch, p. 7.

Covenant LORD God of hosts is a victorious warrior (Ps. 84:8; Exod. 15:3; Zeph. 3:17; cf. Isa. 42:13). As our shield, God protects us; we may take refuge in the shadow of His wings (cf. Ruth 2:12; Ps. 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 91:4). As Christians, we are Abraham’s spiritual seed; therefore, we may be certain that the God of Abraham is also our shield (cf. Gal. 3:29).

The second imperative (הִבֵּט) calls God to “look *with favor* upon the face of Your anointed.” The verb הִבֵּט is emphatic and means to “behold favorably,” “look upon graciously,” or “look with favor.”<sup>49</sup> “Your anointed” (מְשִׁיחָךָ) may refer to the reigning king<sup>50</sup> (possibly David<sup>51</sup>) or to the high priest<sup>52</sup>; both were God’s anointed. However, David’s kingdom was “merely a shadow and type of something more illustrious”<sup>53</sup>—the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David. The Messiah, the Anointed One, Jesus Christ was anointed by God the Father to fulfill the roles of both priest and king. He is both our “great high priest” and also “the King of kings” (Heb. 4:14; Rev. 17:14). To call on God to look with favor upon the face of Christ is to ask him to look with favor upon us, for we are “in Him.” As Matthew Henry says, “In all our addresses to God we must desire that He would look upon the face of Christ, accept us for His sake, and be well-pleased with us in Him.”<sup>54</sup>

**10 For better is *one* day in Your courts than a thousand *elsewhere*; I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.**

The comparison in verse 10 (“for better is . . . than”) is expressed with the customary (יִּם . . . טוֹב). יִּם may be stated as *one* day because singular יוֹם “without a numeral suffices to indicate oneness.”<sup>55</sup> Viewed in a biblical-theological context, “a thousand” (אַלְפַּיִם) should probably not be interpreted so narrowly as a literal, one thousand days; rather, it refers to “a very large number” (cf. Ps. 50:10; 2 Pet. 3:8; Rev.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Calvin, p. 67; Alexander, p. 357; *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*.

<sup>50</sup> Kraus, p. 169; Robertson, p. 216.

<sup>51</sup> Alexander, p. 357; Henry, p. 1339; Calvin, p. 67.

<sup>52</sup> Robertson, p. 216.

<sup>53</sup> Calvin, p. 67.

<sup>54</sup> Henry, p. 1339.

<sup>55</sup> Dahood, p. 282.

20:2, 4, 6).<sup>56</sup> A word such as *elsewhere*, although not in the text, “is needed to round off the first line of verse 10.”<sup>57</sup>

Joseph Addison Alexander explains the second line of verse 10:

The idea perhaps is, that he would rather stand at the door of God’s house and look in (which was all that the worshippers could do at the Mosaic sanctuary), than dwell in the interior of tents or houses where iniquity prevailed. The use of the word *tents* in this clause makes it still more probable that the tabernacle, not the temple, is meant by the parallel expression, *house of God*.<sup>58</sup>

Or, as Calvin paraphrases, it is better to be “cast into a common and unhonoured place” among God and His people than “exalted to the highest rank of honour among unbelievers.”<sup>59</sup> One day in the courts of the Covenant LORD, as a member of the body of Christ, the Church, engaged in the service of King Jesus, is better than a thousand days, five thousand weeks, ten thousand years in the courts of the world—that is, in the midst of worldly society, which stands in opposition to Christ and His kingdom and from which “true religion is banished.”<sup>60</sup>

**11 For the Covenant LORD God is a sun and shield; the Covenant LORD will give grace and glory; no good *thing* will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.**

Verse 11 provides a reason (כִּי) for why it is so marvelous to be in the presence of God. The Covenant LORD God is “a sun and shield” (שֶׁשֶׁת וְיָמִין). Elsewhere in Scripture, God is referred to as a light (Ps. 27:1; Isa. 60:19-20; Mal. 4:2; Rev. 21:23) and a shield (Gen. 15:1)<sup>61</sup>. As a sun, God, who dwells in unapproachable light, enlightens, enlivens, guides, and directs us<sup>62</sup>; as a shield, He protects “those who flee to Him” and renders them “inaccessible to their foes.”<sup>63</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Kraus, p. 170.

<sup>57</sup> Kidner, p. 306. He adds, “. . . in fact the Hebrew for *I would rather* (lit. ‘I have chosen’) looks as if it may be a copyist’s error for such an expression; perhaps for ‘at home’ (NEB).”

<sup>58</sup> Alexander, p. 358.

<sup>59</sup> Calvin, p. 68.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> See the earlier exegesis of “our shield” (מָגֵן) in Psalm 84:9.

<sup>62</sup> 1 Tim. 6:16; Henry, p. 1340.

<sup>63</sup> Delitzsch, pp. 7-8.

“The Covenant LORD will give grace and glory.” “Grace” (חַן) denotes both God’s good will toward us and His good work in us; “glory” (כְּבוֹד) signifies “both the honour which He now puts upon us, in giving us the adoption of sons, and that which he has prepared for us in the inheritance of sons.”<sup>64</sup> God gives His children “grace in this world as a preparation for glory, and glory in the other world as the perfection of grace”; both are God’s free gift.<sup>65</sup>

“No good *thing* will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” James echoes this promise: “Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights . . .” (Jas. 1:17; cf. Ps. 34:9). If we walk uprightly, we will find the Covenant LORD “a sun to supply us with all good and a shield to shelter us from all evil.”<sup>66</sup> Matthew Henry elaborates:

This is a comprehensive promise, and is such an assurance of the present comfort of the saints that, whatever they desire, and think they need, they may be sure that either Infinite Wisdom sees it is not good for them or Infinite Goodness will give it to them in due time. Let it be our care to walk uprightly, and then let us trust God to give us every thing that is good for us.<sup>67</sup>

Christ is the all-sufficient Savior. As Christ’s disciples, we all have received grace “according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph. 4:7). Jesus says that those who suffer shame for Christ’s name, being persecuted for the sake of righteousness, shall be blessed, inheriting the kingdom of heaven and a great heavenly reward (Acts 5:41; Matt. 5:10, 12). Likewise, those who love their enemies and do good (which only true believers can do—see, e.g., Isa. 64:6) will be rewarded for their obedience to God’s law (Luke 6:35).

## **12 O Covenant LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!**

Verse 12 provides a summary of stanza three, and it is the last of the three beatitudes in Psalm 84. God’s name, יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, which commences the verse, chiasmatically balances יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת at the end of verse 1. Trusting in the Covenant LORD of hosts, the psalmist is blessed, even if He must long for the courts of the

---

<sup>64</sup> Henry, p. 1341.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Covenant LORD from afar off. He finds His delight in the God in whom He trusts (cf. Ps. 1:1-2; 2:12; 40:4). By faith, the Psalmist has found blessing!

### **Conclusion**

The tabernacle (or temple) of Psalm 84 foreshadows Christ and His bride, the Church. The new covenant scriptures reveal that God is Lord of heaven and earth and “does not dwell in temples made with hands” (Acts 7:48; 17:24). Rather, Jesus Christ Himself is the true temple; “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb” are the temple of the New Jerusalem (John 2:19, 21; Rev. 21:22).

By virtue of our “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ) relationship, we also are God’s temple. The Church is the “rebuilt tabernacle of David” and the holy “temple of God” (Acts 15:16; 1 Cor. 3:16-17). And, as individual members of the body of Christ, our bodies are “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19).

As God’s temple, we behold the glory of God’s heavenly city even now. By the power of God’s Spirit and through our union with Christ, we are already seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). We worship in the courts of Heaven, at Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, in the presence of myriads of angels and “the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven,” and in the presence of our omnipresent God Himself (cf. Heb. 12:22-24).

Yet, ultimately the longings of the Psalmist find their fulfillment in the new heaven and earth. We long for that day in which the holy city, New Jerusalem, will come down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:1-2). We long for that renewed cosmos, “in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13). We long for that day when Christ shall appear, and we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him just as He is (1 John 3:2).

As a pilgrim people, as exiles from our eternal homeland, we long for the courts of the Covenant LORD. We long to stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1). We long to walk in the New Eden, the new garden of God. We long to stand before the throne of God and of the Lamb, serving and worshipping Him for all eternity. We long to see the face of God, to be illumined by Him, and to reign with Him forever and ever (Rev. 22:1-5). We long for the courts of the Covenant LORD!

### Works Cited

- Alexander, Joseph Addison. *The Psalms: Translated and Explained*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975.
- Boice, James Montgomery. *Psalms*. Vol. 2. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996.
- Briggs, Charles Augustus and Emilie Grace Briggs. *International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Vol. 2. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987.
- Calvin, John. *Commentary on the Psalms*. Translated by James Anderson. Vol. 2. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998.
- Dahood, Mitchell S. J. *Psalms II (51-100)*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968.
- Delitzsch, Franz. *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*. Translated by Francis Bolton. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971.
- Gunkel, Hermann. *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*. Translated by James D. Nogalski. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998.
- Henry, Matthew. *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Vol. 4. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1999.
- Kidner, Derek. *A Commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973.
- Kraus, Hans-Joachim. *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary*. Translated by Hilton C. Oswald. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Robertson, O. Palmer. *Psalms in Congregational Celebration*. Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1995.
- All Scripture references other than the author's translation from the original Hebrew or Greek text are from the New American Standard translation (NAS).