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Psalm 84

(2019)

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Psalm 84.

Topics.

- My heart sings for joy to God, blessed are those who dwell in his house.
- Even the sparrow and the swallow find a home in the House of God.
- Blessed are those whose heart is the highway to Zion.
- Blessed are those whose strength is in the LORD.
- They go through the valley of Baca a place of springs and pools.
- A day in the courts of the LORD is better than a thousand elsewhere.
- Better to be a doorkeeper in the temple than dwell with the wicked.
- The LORD withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly.
- Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD of hosts.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

INTRODUCTION

Psalms are songs and prayers offered to God by the nation Israel, they cover the range of human emotion, expressing praise, faith, victory, sorrow, despair, depression, frustration and the troubled heart of a mourner. They contrast the righteous with the wicked, and include the wisdom and the treasure of God's word. Psalms were written at the beginning of the 15th century BC and probably collected in their final form in the 3rd century.

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BOOK THREE (PSALM 73-89)

PSALM 84:1-4

To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.

My Heart Sings for Joy to God, blessed are those in His House.

- **Psalm 84:1-4:** How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! ²My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. ³Even 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. ⁴Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise! *Selah*

Korah was a Levite who descended from the Korahites who were doorkeepers and musicians of the tabernacle and the temple. They appear in (Exod. 6:24) (Num. 26:58) (1 Chron. 6:22) (1 Chron. 9:19, 31) (1 Chron. 12:26) (1 Chron. 26:1) (2 Chron. 20:19) and the sons of Korah are named in the titles of the following Psalms (Ps. 42:44-49) (Ps. 84, 85, 87, 88). The Psalmist was probably a member of the Levitical family of the sons of Korah and as such would have been fully aware of what he was saying when he said that he preferred to be in the House of the LORD, in contrast to having worldly riches and great honour among the godless.

Because of some unknown circumstance he was unable to share in peaceful, joyful temple worship. Perhaps Jerusalem has been invaded by enemies and the people scattered so that he is dwelling in some foreign land. Based on the Psalmist words, "My soul longs, for the courts of the LORD" (v2) some reason that his faith was solely based upon outward ceremonial rites because the courts of the LORD were the place of sacrifice, but this type of reasoning is blind to the language of heartfelt devotion the Psalmist uses and deep passion of love he has for the LORD. Added to this he ends the Psalm with, "O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you," which means he is not trusting in outward ceremonial rites and religious works, but in God Himself.

Even the sparrow and the swallow find a home: (v3) sparrows and swallows in this context are used in a very general way to include a number of small birds. Obviously, this does not mean that birds actually nested on the altars since there would always be too much priestly activity and people surrounded them and too much noise, fire, and smoke for a bird to build their nest upon an altar. The idea is that they would be seen flying in the rafters of the temple or the buildings surrounding the temple or fluttering around the altar in the outer court most likely seeking food from the scraps of the animal sacrifices. Following are three ideas that express the thought contained in the words, "Even the sparrow and swallow finds a home and nest where she may lay her young, at your altars," (v3).

1. My heart cries out for the living God as a sparrow and a swallow cry out till they find a house for themselves and their young. O mighty LORD, whose servant I am it grieves me to see the birds who know nothing of you enjoy the freedom they have to dwell in your House which is denied me.
2. As the sparrow and the swallow with delight find access to the House of God and build their home for their young it is with this same joy I long to dwell at the altars in the House of the LORD.
3. As the nature of the birds prompts them to seek after a sheltered and safe place to make their home and they delight when they do so I desire a place near your altars in your house and your courts O LORD of hosts, my King and my God.

Whichever of the three one likes to choose the theme of them all is clear. The sparrows and the swallows had a happy estate that was to be envied since they were free to come to the altars where God was worshipped and make their home there because it is in the House of God and at the altar of God that the faithful find safety and shelter like a bird that has secured a little mansion for the home of her young.

Even thine altar: (3) refers to the altar for burnt offering and the altar of incense which are used for the service of the whole tabernacle of which its structure afforded facilities for sparrows and swallows to build their nests. The Psalmist seems to envy the fact that these birds not only had such easy access into the House of God, but also were able to make their permanent abode there since this is what he longs to do.

O LORD of hosts, my King and my God: (3) the Psalmist pleads with God that birds that do not understand what the altar means and cannot offer Him praise are able to freely make their homes around the altar of God while he who longs to worship and praise his King and his God is separated from the House of the LORD. Jesus words: "Consider the fowls of the air; your heavenly Father feeds them." is full of encouragement when applied to this Psalm. The LORD who feeds the birds of the air will not turn a deaf ear to those who appeal to Him with the words on their lips, "My King and my God!" The fluttering swallows around the eaves of the temple and the twittering sparrows on its pinnacles proclaim to us that we shall not be left uncared for. Let us be like the swallows and rest at the altar of the temple and take God for our hope and make His love and His grace our home. Another interesting observation that can be

gleaned is the fact that the sparrows and swallows were building their nests in the House of God and around the altars and do not know whose altars they are flitting around. They seek after insects for food and twitter their little songs all the while totally unaware how all their busy, brief and trivial life is being lived in the presence of the invisible God. In this same manner those without God live under His glory that, lights up the heavens above the earth as they go about their short mortal lives that will eventually return to the dust of the earth from where they came.

The presence of God and the Sparrow: like the sparrow and the swallow some busy themselves in the church of God, with blind indifference to the presence in which they move. They have no more sense of the presence around them and no more consciousness of God's divine eye that looks down upon them, than if they were feathered sparrows fluttering around the altar. In contrast to this the heart of the faithful feels the unseen presence of God Himself when they are in the church and when they are at work or socialising with friends because they live all life as worship toward God in every place that they are so that when God's face looks down His heart is filled with delight. The presence of God is the believer's joy in this fallen and corrupt world it is in God's presence that they enjoy fellowship with Him and when they are separated from Him, they grieve over their absence from their Saviour and King as the Psalmist in this Psalm is doing. The presence of God is to the heart of the faithful as a nest is to a harmless bird. Those who are truly happy are those who go in the love of the LORD and the strength of His grace and not in the outward exercise of religion and ceremonial rites. Those who endure the troubles and hardships of life and press forward in their Christian faith will not only find that God abundantly and daily showers them with grace upon grace, but also find that those who grow in such grace will be perfected in glory.

PSALM 84:5-8

Blessed are those whose Heart is the Highway to Zion.

- **Psalm 84:5-8:** Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. ⁶As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. ⁷They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion. ⁸O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*

Selah: is a musical pause.

Zion: is the mountain on which Jerusalem the Holy City of God sits. Symbolically it signifies God, salvation, the church and the Kingdom of Christ and travelling with a company of faithful Christians on the golden path that leads up to the heavenly Jerusalem and eternal life. The allusion of these verses is to the faithful who were accustomed to travelling up Mount Zion to the temple in Jerusalem the place of public worship. In these verses there is a blending of the real and the figurative; the actual journey towards Zion is represented as being accompanied with Ideal blessings of peace and refreshment. It is the Hebrew manner to mix up the ideal with the actual, and to present the spiritual side by side with the literal. The following writing of Isaiah and Hosea are an example of such a style of writing:

- Then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. (Isaiah 35:6-7).
- There I will give her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. ¹⁶"And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.' (Hosea 2:15-16)

Blessed are those whose strength is in you: (5) or "How blessed are those whose strength is you O LORD." There are three such exclamations in this Psalm the first of them is:

1. Blessed are those who dwell in your house (v4).

The direct allusion here is to the Levites who lived around the temple at Jerusalem. Though the faithful under the Old Testament law rightly attached more importance to the Levitical ceremonial rites and Jewish external forms of religion than the faithful do today, it should not be thought that they were so bound by them that they had no spiritual communion with God apart from them. This is made very clear as we read of the Old Testament prophets and faithful men and women who were dwelling great distances away from the temple and yet still had great faith toward God and intimate fellowship in prayer with Him.

2. Blessed are those whose heart are the highways to Zion (v5).

Means that those who desire to be on the path to the LORD and share the joyous company of others that come up from every corner of the land singing songs of praise as they travelled to the feasts in Jerusalem and share in communion with God is a great blessing.

3. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you! (v12).

This final one shines a brilliant spotlight upon the truth that we do the faithful of the Old Testament a great injustice if we conceive their faith in God and their walk with Him as only ever being slavishly bound to external forms of ceremonial rites and outward acts of religion. Those who trust as this Psalmist and the Old Testament faithful did possess the one, they are trusting in. The prophets and the faithful men and women of old understood that if the chief aim of their heart was the desire to get closer to God and they accepted that God's great purpose was that they would be moulded into a people that would become His treasured possession, then not only would all their sorrows and tears become a sources of spiritual growth and all their troubles, large and small would look different, but they would also be enriched by the indwelling of God's love and grace and at the end of their days resurrected to eternal life and everlasting happiness. The words, "Blessed are those whose strength is in you" means blessed are those who whose thoughts and affections are set upon God and trust in Him as their only refuge and strength for their righteousness, salvation and spiritual journey. The strength of God belongs to those whose full heart is in their worship and not to the half-hearted. Neither prayer, nor praise, nor the hearing of the word will be pleasant or profitable to those who have left their hearts at home. It means blessed are those who trust nothing in themselves for righteousness that leads to eternal life, but trust only in God's path to salvation and allow Him to rule their life.

Blessed are those whose heart are the highways to Zion: (v5) carries the following four ideas:

1. Blessed and happy is the one in whose heart is the way of peace and righteousness and the desire to join the faithful on the road towards Zion the place of public worship.
2. Blessed and happy are those whose heart, is set upon God's ways and who thinks on them as they make preparation for going up to Zion to worship the LORD.
3. Blessed and happy is the heart of those whose affections and thoughts are fixed upon going up to Zion the place of public worship.
4. Blessed and happy is the heart that knows the highway to God's love and grace and the way to God's favour and salvation as expressed in the following two verses:

- The highway of the upright turns aside from evil; whoever guards his way preserves his life. (Proverbs 16:17).
- A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. (Isaiah 40:3-4).

The words, "In whose heart are the highways to Zion" (v5) finds a response of happiness, peace and joy in the heart of thousands of true worshippers who go to the House of the LORD. In the mind of the writer of the Psalm this would have an additional beauty and attractiveness since it would be associated with the thought of the multitudes of faithful men and women walking the path to Zion in groups and families that crowded the way to the place of Jewish public worship on their great festal occasions at the temple in Jerusalem on Mount Zion.

NOTE: the words, "In whose heart are the highways to Zion" is not limited to the joy of those who love God and have His ways in their heart going up to the temple of God on Mount Zion in the city of Jerusalem to worship or to the joy New Testament believers have as they travel to their local church building, but embraces the joy of going to any gathering of the faithful whether it be in a church building, in A park, a coffee bar or home etc., because the church of God is not the bricks and mortar building but the people in it and the presence of God is not bound by stone walls.

As they go through the valley of Baca: (v6) the word Baca comes from the Hebrew word (Baka') and means weeping, it is a valley in Palestine. Figuratively the expression, "As they go through the valley of Baca," refers to an experience of sorrow turned into joy. The picture seems to be of a dry barren valley that during the rainy season is covered with lush green grass and beautiful refreshing pools of water that people passing through it make it a place of rest and refreshing. As they go through the valley of Baca carries the idea that the faithful before entering the eternal heavenly city may have to pass through valleys of weeping and dry deserts, while the words, "they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools," means that even though they may pass through such times of weeping and sorrow they will also enjoy springs of living waters welling up in the heart and eternal life is awaiting them on the other side of valley. For the faithful travelling with the Lord Jesus Christ and the strength of God's grace Baca carries the following two the ideas:

1. Travelling through valleys of grief, sorrow and weeping and spiritually dry deserts and the storms of life (i.e., troubles and hardships).
2. Travelling through oasis's of living water that well up in the heart with joy and peace and with eternal salvation and everlasting happiness.

It means that for those who endure the sorrow and the weeping of tears as they travel the path of faith times of sorrow will be turned into times of spiritual strength joy and growth which will make us forget the sorrows and discomforts. The spiritual journey of walking with Christ is not always bliss, blessing and glory there are times of travelling dreary and dry roads, rocky and muddy paths that even the faithful cannot avoid, but there are also roads of happiness and joy, blessing and favour. This is especially true when they travel the road cheerfully speaking with each other while on the golden and royal path that leads to eternal life and to the Saviour and King who surrendered his life to the bloodstained cross of Calvary and seeing him face to face.

The end of the march of the faithful of the Old Testament was the centre where they all met at the House of the LORD, the delight of all their hearts. Not merely to be in the assembly, but to appear before God was the heartfelt desire and joy of each devout Israelite as it is today of all the faithful in Christ who gather together in one centre to stand in God's presence and worship as one body. Those who do not realise the presence of God in His House of worship have done nothing of any spiritual worth, but merely gathered together.

The rain also fills the pools: (6) can figuratively be seen to mean that God gives to His people all they need for salvation while travelling the Baca path through the highs and lows and the joys and sorrows of this world.

They go from strength to strength: (v7) the path to Zion takes us from strength to strength and unless this growth is happening, we will know very little about the blessedness of walking with God and of His love and grace. No one ever wanted God who did not possess Him the measure of our desire is the measure of our possession. Growing in strength in God should be a continuing characteristic of professing Christians? Sadly, there are people that have been members of Christian churches much of their life, but are not a bit better than they were back in the years when they began. Some remain babes throughout all their days of church life because they have no conception of continual growth as an essential part of Christian life.

It cannot be said of other courses of life, "Blessed is the man that enters on it," because all other paths are elusive since no one can be sure they will reach what they desire because there is no guarantee of achieving the goal. In contrast to this there is one path on which every man or woman can walk with the confidence they will attain to the winners' crown that is awaiting them at the end of the path. This is because the path that leads to the eternal crown is paved with the abundant and boundless grace of the invisible, immortal Almighty God of all creation and source of all life and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ and he promises that:

- Whoever comes to him he will never cast out. (John 6:37).

When heaven is made the passion of the heart and the goal of the mind of the faithful and Christ is made the King of their life they, even though wearied, will not only go from strength to strength as they proceed and endure through the trails and hardships of life, but will also become spiritually stronger and happier as they grow and advance and find strength in God's grace and increase in His love.

O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer: (v8) the Psalmist prayer was that God would once again allow him to be in the courts of the LORD worshipping his King and his God at the altar and singing praises in the House of God, because a day in His courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. His heart and soul longs, and faints to appear before his King and his God in the courts of the LORD.

NOTICE: The Psalmist asks the LORD to hear his prayer (v8) he does not assume that God is listening to him, he begins his prayer by asking God to hear him and consider His prayer.

PSALM 84:9-12

A Day in the LORD'S Courts is better than a Thousand Elsewhere.

- **Psalm 84:9-12:** Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed! ¹⁰For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. ¹¹For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. ¹²O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!

The face of your anointed: the word anointed comes from the Hebrew word (*mashiyach*) and usually refers to a consecrated (i.e., holy, blessed and dedicated) person (as a king, priest, or to one set one aside for God and for Christ) and especially applies to Christ as the anointed Messiah. From the Hebrew word (*mashach*) it carries the idea of rubbing with oil for the purpose of anointing, consecrating and setting a person apart for the service of God or for the Lord Jesus Christ.

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere: (v10) this of course refers to the outer courts of the temple at Jerusalem. It was here the faithful brought their sacrifices and spent time fellowshiping together catching up on what was happening in other Jewish villages and towns. By extension it also applies to all the faithful of all generations who gather together in churches and homes or by the riverside or on the green grass of a park in God's presence to honour and worship God and share their faith in Israel's Messiah the Son of God the Lord Jesus Christ.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness: (v10) carries the following two ideas:

1. The most valuable and enjoyable thing in life for the Psalmist was being in the dwelling place of the LORD and with others who belong to the LORD and being in God's presence love and grace.
2. The Psalmist would rather be a doorkeeper of the House of God than be worldly rich, successful, famous or a most exalted leader of a global company or nation.

There was nothing in this world that could give him more joy than being with God and in the House of God gathered together with others of the same faith who also faithfully followed God and had the same passion of love toward Him as the he did.

The LORD God is a sun and shield: (v11) meaning he is the light, the comfort the warmth and the protection for all who make Him the King and Saviour of their heart, mind and life.

The LORD withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly: (v11) applies to Israel as a nation and to Christians in the following two ways:

1. Literally and materialistically to the nation of Israel because they at Mount Sinai entered into a covenant with God, that if they did right before Him, He would bless everything they did. He would prosper their land; their health; their livestock and multiply their children and make them the head of all nations and not the tail. But if they did evil and rebelled against Him and turned to other god's He would bring to ruing all they had achieved. This of course He did when Israel set their hearts diamond hard against the prophets, entered into gross wickedness and rebelled against the LORD and turned to pagan gods. God used Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon as His servant (Jer. 25:8-9) to bring the city of Jerusalem to ruin, destroy the temple, lay the land of Israel waste and take the people of Israel into captivity for seventy-years.
2. To the Christians spiritually in that God will supply in Christ all they need for salvation to eternal life and fellowship with God. No one needs to adhere to ceremonial rites and holy days or keep religious customs and traditions to be saved. Everything we need is in Christ, God's mercy and love, forgiveness of sin and eternal life all come to us through Christ.

If we are in Christ, we are clothed in all these spiritual and heavenly riches and the LORD will withhold no good thing from us meaning He will never withhold His love, mercy from us. These are the true riches of God that by far surpass any worldly wealth this world can give. It also means that God will not forbid us from enjoying what is good and wholesome in the world.

O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you: (v12) this does not mean that those who trust in the LORD will live a charmed life, never be sick or suffer hardships, troubles, sorrows and, grief, but that all who trust in God will be saved to eternal life and everlasting happiness not by self-effort and works of the law but by faith in Israel's Messiah the Lord Jesus Christ and God's amazing and abundant grace that He daily covers and pours out upon all those who faithfully follow the Lord.

CONCLUSION

When the Psalmist began his song he was far away from the temple and when he finished it he was still sitting on the same hillside on which he began the song, yet he ends it as though he is within the curtains of the sanctuary and wrapped about with the presence of his God. It is as though as he sang the song, he regained what he had lost, being the presence of God with him as he dwelt on the lone expanse of alien soil. It is as though having the presence of God with him is as though he is dwelling in the House of the LORD here is the great truth of those who have genuine heartfelt faith and devotion toward God, they do not need to be in a bricks and mortar building made by the hand of man to be in God's Holy presence.

All can be with God and the Lord Jesus Christ whether they are sitting in a church building, on a hillside, kneeling in prayer by their bed or at work, in fact those that believe in God and faithfully follow Christ are never separated from his love and grace, since he by the Spirit and the word and by his self-sacrificing love dwells in their heart and mind so that wherever they go he goes with them. This is the beauty the glory and the wonder of the message of the bloodstained cross of Calvary and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. May God be praised in the highest and His Son exalted as the royal King and Saviour forever and the glory of God cover the earth. Amen.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.
