

"The Psalm of a Longing Heart"



An exposition of Psalm 84

*Prepared by
Pastor David Braden*

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PSALM 84 EXPOSITION

Lessons from this Psalm:

1. In this Psalm, we see a picture of a true, worshipping heart, a heart that loves the place where God dwells.
(And if we are interested in worshipping God with all of our heart, it would be very useful to learn where this worshipping heart of the sons of Korah came from.)
2. Where God is, that's where I want to be.
3. We see a picture of a pilgrim growing stronger in trials.
They have undertaken a quest to master each crisis (obstacles of the journey) and find peace in the midst of each one. (This is my interpretation of a pilgrim who has determined to reach his destination. He will not allow any obstacles along the path to keep him from his objective.)
4. An upright (righteous, morally whole, free from blemishes) walk is a blessed walk.
5. God values all areas of service.

Titles for this Psalm:

1. The heart of worship
2. Yearning for God's House (Word Study Old Testament (OT))
3. The Psalm of the Janitors (Boice Commentary on Psalms: note that the word for gatekeepers can also be translated porter or janitor.)
4. Love for the place where God dwells (Leupold)
5. A Psalm of Blessing (see outline)
6. A Psalm of a Longing Heart

Theme: God's living presence is our greatest joy.
His radiant presence helps us grow in strength, grace and glory.
(from Application Study Bible)

Background: Dates are from The Reese Chronological Bible

The exact context is not clearly defined in the text. There are several options for the setting of this psalm as follows:

Option 1:

This psalm is designated as "for/to the sons of Korah." (from Heb. text)

Korah was one of those who led a revolt (1461 B.C.) against Moses in Numbers 16 and was swallowed up by the earth. (Num 16:32) Note that Num. 26:9-11 indicates that the children of Korah did not die.

I Chron. 26 (985 B.C.) tells us that the sons of Kore (Korah) were assigned by David to positions as gatekeepers for the temple. They are described as mighty men of valor, strong men, able men for strength for the service, a service which included “prevented unqualified intrusion.”

Psalms 84 was written in 586 B.C. (*Reese Chronological Bible*)

So, the descendants of Korah wrote Psalm 84 approximately 925 years after God’s judgment on Korah.

And now, 2600 years later, we have access to this beautiful, passionate psalm.

Makes me wonder if the descendants of Korah ever told their children: “Don’t be like grandpa Korah.”

Note especially the heart of psalm 84. This is not the heart of Korah in his rebellion. One possible answer is that the children of Korah saw the catastrophe of the earth opening (something they had never seen before) and swallowing their father and they gained the fear of the Lord.

One objection to this setting is the number of years from Korah, of the rebellion, and the authors of this Psalm, a distance of almost a millennia.

However, it is no secret that the Jews were very meticulous regarding genealogies...note that Jesus’ lineage in Luke is meticulously traced all the way back to Adam (approximately 4000 years). And...owning property in Israel was dependent on your name being recorded in the genealogies.

An objection to the sons of Korah as being the descendants of rebellious Korah is: “How could this longing heart be a descendent of one who was so obviously rebellious and far removed from the tenderness of this psalm?”

However, we would only need to look at the kings of Judah to see that within one generation an evil king had a good son, then a good king had an evil son, etc.

It would not be unlike our God to allow this record to exist to show his great mercy in allowing Korah’s descendants to have this major “change of heart.”

Option 2:

The person writing the psalm has, for unknown reasons, been away from the sanctuary for a period of time. (Leupold) He longs for that which he knows from having dwelt in the temple.

Option 3:

It is a psalm of people who were present in the temple, who served in God's house, and who are expressing here how intensely their very souls yearned and even fainted for God. (Boice)

Option 4:

The actual setting is undefined.

So...which setting would you select? _____

My choice would be a combination of options 1 and 2.

Outline of Ps 84:

- vv. 1-4 The blessing of dwelling in God's house
- vv. 5-7 The blessing of those who center their life in God (although not abiding in the sanctuary)
- vv.8-9 A prayer for blessings on the king
- v.10-12 The blessing of trusting in the Lord of the sanctuary

Table of Worshipper Qualities:

Verse	Key word	Quality	Comment
1	Lovely, greatly loved	Admiration/loving	The sons of Korah were true worshippers.
2a	Longs	Longing	See v.2 notes below on longing
2b	Heart, sing for joy	Joyful song	Note that it is the heart that is doing the singing.
3	Sparrow, swallow	Humility	"Are you not of more value than they?" God cherishes and cares for all of His creation.
4	Dwell	Abiding	"in His presence"
5	Strength/highways of Zion	Strong in the Lord/pilgrim heart	They have the ways of God in their hearts.
6	Baca/place of springs	weeping, sorrow for sin, persevering, fruitful	They pass through their "Bacas" and, in the process, minister to others
7	Strength to	Increasing,	growing in their faith

	strength		
8/9	Prayer	Prayerful life	Concern for others
10	A day in your courts is better...	Humility	They have a clear understanding of spiritual values.
11/12	Walk uprightly	A righteous life	And God blesses them: sun, shield, favor, honor, good things
12	Trust	Faith	faith/confidence in God

Exposition – Verse-by-verse:

vv. 1-4 The blessing of dwelling in God's house

v.1 *lovely* – 6 of 7 OT usages indicate this is predominantly used to show that an object is “greatly loved.” (However, lovely is also an acceptable translation of the Hebrew word *yadhidh*.)

places - This word is plural. First the tabernacle (wilderness tent), then the temple, next the synagogue, now, in our hearts. But, for this psalm, I believe the focus of the sons of Korah is on the temple.

Love for the place where God dwells is a key theme of this psalm.

Hosts – is a divine name – He is Lord of all things in heaven and on earth.

Note the exclamation mark at the end of the sentence indicating strong emotion.

(The exclamation mark is also provided in the Jewish “Tanach”, their version of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings.)

v.2 *longs* – to become pale, pine after, desire

This indicates they were totally focused on God, that they were whole-hearted
Apparently, the author didn't have access to the temple for a period of time.

faints - spent, consumed entirely, take away until there is nothing left

These words show strong emotions.

cries out – “*ranan*”: to shout joyfully

Note that his soul, heart and flesh (all of him) are involved in the longing.

v.3 *sparrows* – 2 for a penny (see Mt. 10:29, Jesus speaking.)

swallows – little birds that flit about...they are busy little creatures until their nest is constructed. Then they settle down to attend to their parenting duties.

This is not an allegory but is a simple illustration from the real world of God's all-reaching love and care.

A simple observation: The author sees these little birds flitting and darting about the temple indicating that they feel at home there. They have great liberties.

This shows God's love and concern for even the smallest of creatures.

"Are you not of greater value than these?" (Mt. 10:31) (a rhetorical question)

My king and my God- ruler, Lord, master, creator

v.4 v.4 is a continuation of the thought and application of v.3.

Just as there are birds who find a sanctuary in the holy place, so also there are those appointed by God who also have the privilege of abiding there.

Theirs is a joyful life.

They are ever, continually praising God.

Need for special revelation: If one considers the day-to-day activities of the temple...slaughtering animals, lighting lamps, washings, etc., it would seem (to the natural man) that these are repetitive, vain and empty exercises. It takes the special revelation and work of God to transform these "seemingly meaningless" tasks into something that is a blessing and joy.

Think of this statement in terms of the routine, daily tasks we perform in the home and in the office. Without God's divine opening of our understanding, these become meaningless, monotonous and fruitless tasks that take up space in the empty hours of our days.

But God is always at work in these activities, in ways we don't understand, working out His plans and purposes for us.

And, with the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit, these tasks can become a joy and we will find ourselves in the "place we want to be."

blessed – In the OT, those who served in the "courts of the Lord" experienced the presence of the Lord.

Because they "knew" God's presence, they also valued working and abiding where they were far above all other occupations. This is where they wanted to be.

The Lord is the source and strength of their love, not the sanctuary itself.

"ever singing your praise" – current and on-going

The *Selah* at the end of the verse suggests a pause for reflection. (although the exact meaning of *selah* seems to be elusive.) It can also mean "to give attention to" and "to heed."

vv.5-7 The blessing of those who center their life in God

v.5 takes up the theme of the previous verse of blessing, this time applying it to those not physically abiding in the sanctuary, yet they have the ways of God in their hearts.

Close fellowship with God makes them strong.

Their life is rooted and grounded in God.

v.6 *Baca* – weeping; the word is symbolic of difficult trials.

An Arabic parallel *bakha* is interpreted “lack of springs” or “dryness.”

Also interpreted: “parched valleys.”

“ways” – direction or course of action to be taken in a specific situation.

When a pilgrim goes on a trip, they are determined to reach their destination.

And no matter the obstacles encountered, they are on a mission and determined to be successful in overcoming each barrier.

When pilgrims pass through a *Baca*, they make it a spring which means it will refresh and nourish others.

In our walk with God, as pilgrims, we should consider each of our *Bacas* and set our hearts to master this crisis and find peace in the midst of it. This is where strong growth in Christian character occurs.

early rains – a symbol of many basic and essential blessings

“We pass through many valleys of *Baca* and many autumns with falling, brown leaves and cold slashing rains. But we are not disheartened by these things. On the contrary, we rise above them and go on from strength to strength, strengthening one another along the way and blessing all we meet.” (Boice, “An Expositional Commentary on Psalms” p. 692)

Note the flow of blessing:

1. in the sanctuary
2. those whose strength is in Him, but are not abiding in the sanctuary
3. valley of *Baca* (trials)
4. early rains
5. go from strength to strength (growing stronger)
6. appear before God in Zion

vv.8-9 A prayer for blessing on the king.

The tone of the psalm now moves from one of Godly reflection to prayer.

As the pilgrim passes through his trials, he is moved to pray for the king.

Note also that he knows God as Jehovah, Lord of hosts, the God of Jacob and *Elohim* - the strong One.

Shield - protector

Anointed – Heb. word Meshiach (Messiah)

Since the psalmist refers to his shield, I believe the context of the psalm indicates that his prayer is referring to the king of Israel during his time.

However, we cannot overlook the “foreshadowing” of our shield for eternity, our Messiah, Jesus our king.

v.10-12 The blessing of trusting in the Lord of the sanctuary

v.10 The “for” that begins verse 10 refers back to verse 7, skipping over the prayer for the king in verses 8 and 9.

gatekeeper – “one who stands at the threshold” also “doorkeeper”

also porter or janitor

Note that gatekeepers were men of valor. (1 Chron. 26) They had to be because they guarded the portals of the temple where treasures such as gold and silver (offerings) were stored. Additionally, they had to guard against the unscrupulous who were unclean and had no regard for the holiness of God.

Note that a single day as a doorkeeper is regarded as a matter of rare and intense joy. It far surpasses any benefits of dwelling in the house of the wicked or anywhere else for 1000 days.

v.11 The psalmist now continues to show why this blessing of the gatekeeper is so.

Note the extreme value of the blessings of God to the righteous:

He is a sun (light) and shield (protection)

He gives grace and glory.

He doesn't withhold any good (*tov* – big word in Hebrew) thing for those who walk *uprightly*, a word that means entire, complete, perfect, morally whole, free from blemishes.

The fruitfulness of godly lives is now traced to love for the sanctuary which is, in fact, love for God Himself.

uprightly – **8549** *tamim* entire, complete, perfect, morally whole, free from blemishes, faultless, upright in one's conduct

Note: The number, both emboldened and not emboldened, is the Strong's Number which corresponds to the original Hebrew word in *Strong's Dictionary of*

the Hebrew Bible. This provides a consistent reference for all Hebrew words in scholastic studies for all societies.

The alternate definitions provided for the Hebrew words are taken from *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*, Dr. S. Zodhiates.

v.12 This verse is a beatitude.

beatitude – **835** *ashar* or *esher* translated “happy”

Compare with New Testament (NT) *makarioi* 3107 Mt. 5:3-11 from the sermon on the mount, which means to be fully satisfied, a state of blessedness which begins at the moment a person receives Christ as their Savior and is born into the kingdom of God.

This would indicate that the NT blessing has a beginning and is progressive as we embrace the qualities Jesus identifies in Mt. 5:3-11.

The chief ingredient in all worship and every relationship with the Lord is that one trust in Him. The most fortunate of the children of men are those who have learned this lesson.

trust **982** *batach* qpta qal participle active 98, 2, 63, 92 (These numbers, from Zodhiates, provide additional descriptions of the unique functions of the grammatical forms.) In this instance, they describe the qal, participle, active verb.

qal – the most basic Hebrew verbal action (2/3 of all Hebrew verb forms)

participle – a verbal form used as an adjectival noun

definition - to attach oneself, to trust, to confide in, feel safe, be confident, secure;

The basic idea is associated with firmness or solidity.

The blessings of a heart of worship:

1. God's dwelling – sing for joy, great praise
2. All are welcome, even the tiniest of birds.
3. great value
4. water others
5. blessings – sun, shield, favor, honor, good things

How do I get this heart of worship?

1. I believe the sons of Korah, who passed this heart of worship down to their descendants, got it through the cataclysmic earthquake that opened the earth and swallowed their father to his death.
So...we can learn from Korah and his sons.
We can also learn from others of our close associates who are going through difficult seasons.
2. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all of these things shall be added to you"
3. Ask, seek, knock for it. (and keep asking... for it) (Note: Greek present tense is one of continuous action)
4. Meditating on God's Word, especially passages like Proverbs chapters 1-9 and Psalm chapter 119.
5. We increase in the heart of worship by faithfully following after God, living according to His Word.
6. Embrace difficulties with the objective of honoring God in the trial and you, yourself, having peace in the midst of it.
7. God designed our trials for our good. You will reap the benefits of your perseverance if you keep on to the end of the trial.

Keep this in mind as you wrestle with the unique circumstances He has allowed into your life.

Also recall that God, who is infinite in wisdom and understanding, designed our trials and allows them. The trials He allows are one of the ways that He conforms us to the likeness of Jesus.

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." (ESV) Rom. 8:28

And don't neglect the next verse: "For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son..."

We are predestined...that means, since God is the predestinator, it's going to happen. "It's a done deal."

If we are bitter and complaining or neglectful in a trial, we are actually complaining about something that God has designed for our good.

I can't help but believe that God is pleased when we embrace our difficulties with a thankful heart.

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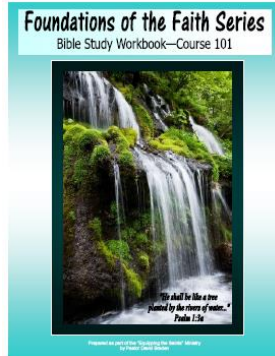
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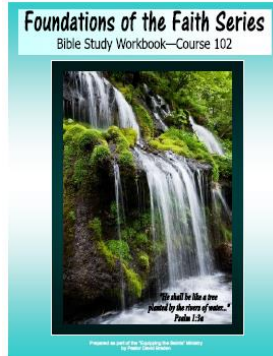
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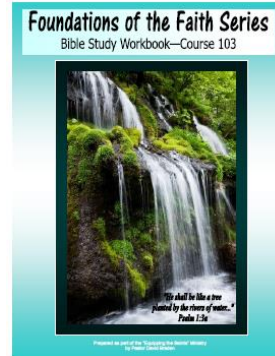
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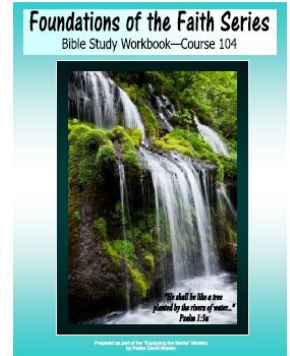
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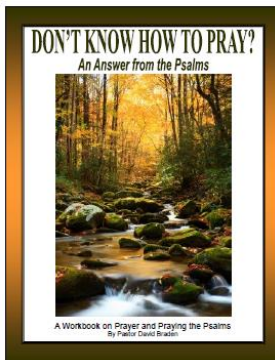


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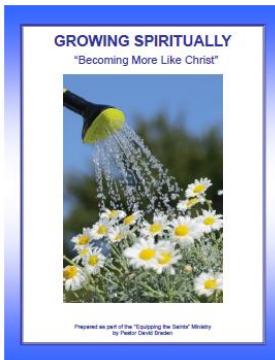


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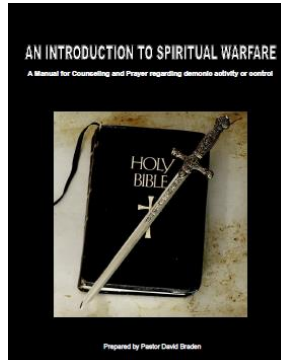
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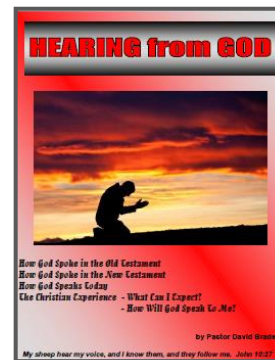
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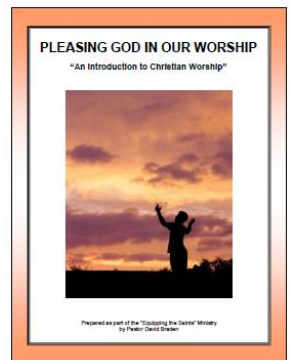
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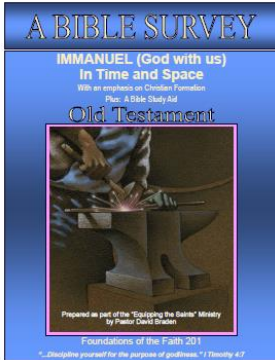


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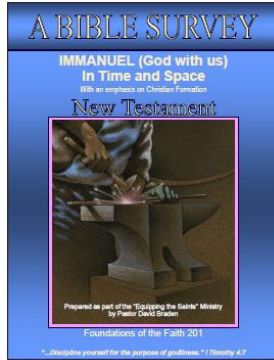
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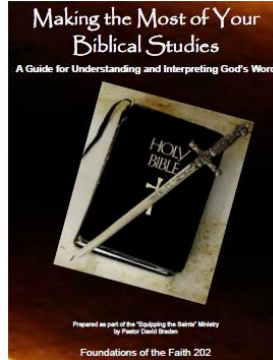
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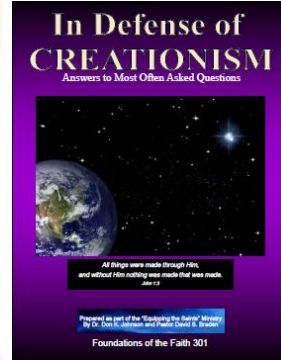
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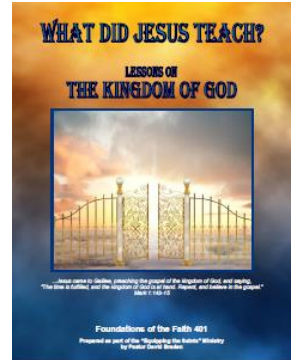
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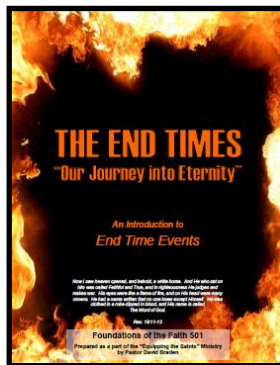


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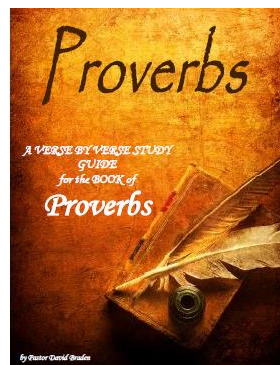


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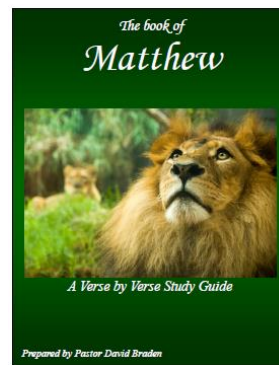
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