

STUDIES IN PSALMS
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Of the various dates proposed as suiting the origin of this psalm which two are the more probable?
2. Read II Chron. 20:1-14 and find possible connections to this psalm.
3. Was there any good reason or reasons for God to answer the prayers of this psalm? If so discuss.
4. Someone suggested the thought of the defense of honor is different than the seeking of vengeance. Which is it here? Discuss.

PSALM 84

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Longing of a Levite for the Habitations of Jehovah in Zion,
with Inspiring Memories of a Past Pilgrimage
and Exultant Joy in Renewed Service.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-4, In the Intense Longing of his soul, the Psalmist Draws a Picture from Memory of the Joyous Scene in the Temple Courts, where Birds and Men Evermore Offer Praise. Stanza II., vers. 5-9, He traces a Pilgrim Journey Zionwards; recalling the Cheer by the Way, the Growing Enthusiasm, the Final Hope, and the Impassioned Prayer for the King. Stanza III., vers. 10-12, Renewed Experience of his Levitical Duties, leads him to Contrast his Present Privileges with his Past Detention in the Tents of the Lawless; and moves him to Admire the Character and Gifts of the God whom he Serves. A Three-fold *Refrain* Adapts the psalm to the Levites, to the King, and to Every Believer in Israel.

(Lm.) Psalm.

- 1 How greatly to be loved are thy habitations Jehovah of hosts!
- 2 My soul longeth yea even languisheth for the courts of
Jehovah,
my heart and my flesh ring out their joy unto the God of
my life.
- 3 Even the bird hath found her a house,
and the swallow a nest for herself where she hath laid her
young:

PSALM 84

- 4 At thine altars is praise evermore offered thee¹ my King
and my God.
*Jehovah of hosts! how happy are they who abide in thy
courts!*²
- 5 Highways are in their hearts as they pass through the valley
of Baca:³
- 6 A place of springs they make it⁴ yea with blessings the early
rain doth enrobe it.
- 7 They go from strength to strength⁵—"The God of gods will
be seen in Zion!"⁶
- 8 Jehovah God of hosts! oh hear my prayer,
oh give ear thou God of Jacob!
- 9 Our shield behold thou O God, and look well on the face of
thine Anointed!
*Jehovah of hosts! how happy the man whose stronghold is
in thee!*⁷
- 10 Surely better is one⁸ day in thy courts than a thousand,
I choose to be on guard at the threshold in the house of my
God,⁹
rather than to be dwelling in the tents of the lawless.¹⁰
- 11 For a sun and shield is Jehovah my God,
kindness and faithfulness he loveth,¹¹
grace¹² and glory he giveth;
Jehovah withholdeth no good thing from them who walk
without blame.
- 12 *Jehovah of hosts, how happy the man who trusteth in thee!*

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

(CMm.) For the sons of korah = The venerables of song.¹³

1. Two words transposed from next verse: thus avoiding too close an association of the birds with the altars.

2. As it is the happiness of a Levite to abide.

3. Or: "balsam-tree"; or, "weeping."

4. Or (by changing a vowel): "he maketh it."

5. Or: "from battlement to battlement."

6. So in Sep. Cp. G. Intro. 457-459; and Ps. 17:15, 42:2.

7. Transposed, w. Br., from beginning of stanza; so yielding a three-fold refrain to the psalm.

8. Found in Sep.

9. Eminently suited to a Levite.

10. Sometimes = "foreigner."

11. Found in Sep.: apparently original.

12. "Graciousness"—Dr.

13. See Intro., Chapter II., 3.

STUDIES IN PSALMS

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 84

How lovely is Your Temple, O Lord of the armies of heaven.

2 I long, yes, pant with longing to be able to enter Your courtyard and come near to the Living God.

3 Even the sparrows and swallows are welcome to come and nest among Your altars and there have their young, O Lord of heaven's armies, my King and my God!

4 How happy are Your priests who can always be in Your Temple, singing Your praises.

5 Happy are those who are strong in the Lord, who want above all else to follow Your steps.

6 When they walk through the Valley of Weeping it will become a place of springs where pools of blessing and refreshment collect after rains!

7 They will grow constantly in strength and each of them is invited to meet with the Lord in Zion!

8 O Jehovah, God of the heavenly armies, hear my prayer! Listen, God of Israel!

9 O God, our Defender and our Shield, have mercy on the one You have anointed as Your king.¹

10 A single day spent in Your Temple is better than a thousand anywhere else! I would rather be a doorman of the Temple of my God than live in palaces² of wickedness.

11 For Jehovah God is our Light and our Protector. He gives us grace and glory. No good thing will He withhold from those who walk along His paths.³

12 O Lord of the armies of heaven, blessed are those who trust in You.

EXPOSITION

Probably no circumstances better suit the origin of this psalm than those with which the Asaphic psalms have already made us familiar. Given—a time when the Assyrians, after long devastating the North, are in abeyance, and pilgrim-bands are again frequenting the ways to Zion; and given—a Levite singer and door-keeper who has for weary years been prevented from going up to Jerusalem to discharge his duties, but is now fondly

1. Literally, "Your anointed."

2. Literally, "tents."

3. Literally, "walk uprightly."

PSALM 84

counting on a return to his place in the Temple courts; and conditions are provided well fitted to the composition of this beautiful pilgrim-song.

After an outburst of intense love and desire for the holy place where he has aforetime experienced so much blessing (vers. 1, 2), the writer shows his near intimacy with the courts of Jehovah, by one of those touches of memory which only a resident in the Temple-chambers would have had at his command. He had many a time of old watched the little birds building their nests in the nooks and crannies of the Temple courts; and perchance had little by little come to observe that the music of the choirs and congregation was accustomed to provoke the feathered songsters in their own way to join in the strains. Memory brings back the whole scene: Birds, nestling close by—and singing; priests and Levites, officiating—and singing; visiting worshippers, bringing their offerings—and singing: all in delightful unison. His reminiscence includes in it no awkward juxtaposition of the birds, rather than of the men, with the altar; but simply and naturally reproduces the harmonious whole; and excites his intense desire to share in such joy once more (vers. 3, 4).

But he is not there yet, and his mind is drawn to incidents likely to occur in the journey thither. Many a time has he traversed the roads leading to Zion; and he is able to clothe the ascent with probable incidents, such as he had aforetime known, or such as recent events would easily suggest. The *highways* are in the *minds* of pilgrims long before they start, as they think of the re-unions oft occurring as they go along; or, it may be, they wonder whether the *highways* will now be safe, or whether prudence may not suggest the preference of by-ways through secluded valleys, one such coming to his mind as his song is evolved—the memorable *Valley of Baca*, or *Balsam-vale*, or *Vale of Weeping*, entered with misgiving overnight in weariness and thirst, only to find that by morning the *early rain* has filled the pools and covered the sterile valley with a carpet of blessing. And, whereas, commonly, travellers become the more wearied the farther they go, he has often noticed that as they near their goal on *this* journey, enthusiasm rises, and *at every step their strength increases*. The alternative rendering of this clause is suggestive: *they go from battlement to battlement*—from one entrenched halting-place to another; which might be very prudent if any of the enemy were still lurking in the land.

STUDIES IN PSALMS

But the all-animating thought is: *The God of gods will be seen in Zion!*—some reflection of his shekinah glory; and therewith, it may be, some new prophetic discovery of his ways with Israel, and of his gracious purpose for the future (vers. 5-7).

But this Levite thinks of his earthly king as well as of his heavenly; and calling to mind how much all Israel in general and the Levites in particular are indebted to the good King Hezekiah who is shielding them from foreign foes and home neglect, the psalmist waxes importunate in his prayers for him: *Jehovah God of hosts! oh hear my prayer, Oh give ear, thou God of Jacob; and do this for us—Our shield behold thou, and shield him in mercy to us, O God, And look well, look intently, and with love as thou lookest, on the face of thine Anointed. Jehovah of hosts! how happy the man—*who is like the good king whom thou hast now given to us—who, in presence of Sennacherib and all his hosts, has found that his *stronghold is in thee.*

But events move on. Our Levite has been once more in his office, and spent a happy day in Jehovah's service. And he seems to say: "How much better this than the life I have lived of late!" Prevented from going up to Jerusalem, owning no possessions among the tribes, and compelled, it may be, to do menial work for a piece of bread in the *tents* of the invading *foreigners*, he has felt all the humiliation of it, all the bitterness. Better this—better thus—a *thousand times* better! And then in the ecstasy of his joy, his soul rises up to his God, and dwells upon the fruitful theme of his perfections. *For a sun—*giving heat and light, knowledge and love; *and shield—*affording protection from foes without and foes within, is *Jehovah my God. Kindness and faithfulness he loveth*, because they exist in himself, and he would have them exist also in me; *kindness*, first, without which he would not have created and redeemed, *faithfulness* also, by virtue of which he fulfils his promises and keeps his covenant. *Grace and glory he giveth: grace*, now, to enable me to resist the enticements of sinners and the clamourings of selfishness, and so become *kind and faithful* like himself; and *glory*, hereafter, when he has completed and perfected my character. For, truly, character he seeks, and hence would teach me to *walk uprightly, perfectly, wholeheartedly, without blame;* and from such he *withholdeth no good thing:* least of all the *glory* of a perpetual, perfected, personal existence. And this is Biblical Immortality. To produce this, is the end of Divine

PSALM 84 AND 85

Revelation; and the subjective instrument of its production being faith in a Perfect God, therefore, *O Jehovah of hosts,—thyself that Perfect One—how happy the man who trusteth in thee!*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Rotherham describes the circumstances behind this psalm in a most effective way. Retell them in your own words.
2. What particular desire of the heart is satisfied in the worship of God?
3. The sparrows were no distraction to the psalmist. Would they be to others? Should they be?
4. How could we apply verse 4 to our situation?
5. Who do you know who has claimed the promise of verse 11?

PSALM 85

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Praise, Prayer and Prophecy lead up to the
Reconciliation of Earth and Heaven.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, Praise to Jehovah for what he has Already Done.
Stanza II., vers. 4-7, Prayer for what Remains to be Done. Stanza III., vers. 8, 9, A Divine Word Sought by the Prophet. Stanza IV., vers. 10-13, The Final Reconciliation Announced.

(Lm.) Psalm.

- 1 Thou hast shewn favour Jehovah to thy land,
thou hast restored the fortunes¹ of Jacob,
- 2 Thou hast forgiven² the iniquity of thy people,
thou hast covered all their sin,
- 3 Thou hast withdrawn all thine indignation,
thou hast turned thee from the glow of thine anger.
- 4 Restore us O God of our salvation,
and break off thy vexation with us:
- 5 To the ages wilt thou be angry with us?
wilt thou prolong thine anger to generation and generation?

1. Or: "turned the captivity."

2. Or: "taken away."