

Psalm 122: A Song of Ascents. Of David

Week 3: 10th June 2020

This is the 3rd psalm of 15 (Ps 120-134). In Deut 16:16 “Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will chose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles.”

It is thought these psalms were sung by pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem on these 3 annual pilgrimages. Ascents – because no matter what part of Israel the pilgrim came from, they would ultimately have to climb up to Jerusalem on top of Mount Zion.

Other Bible commentators go further and suggest there were 15 steps to the main entrance to the temple and each Psalm was sung on each of those steps. Calvin disagrees. “Some conceive that there were 15 steps to the entrance to the temple, but this is a silly conjecture for which there is no foundation and we know the liberties which the Jews, in obscure and uncertain matters like this, take of giving forth as an explanation whatever comes into their fancy. I am not disposed to make it the subject of elaborate investigation, but the probable conjecture is that the title was given to these psalms because they were sung on a higher key than others. To be fair to Calvin he didn’t have the benefit of modern archaeology. (See attached photos.)

The title says, “of David”. This is another bone of contention. Some say David wrote it and others suggest it was written much later and “of David” simply means about David, his life or his descendants. (1 Kgs 3v4 states that Solomon went to Gibeon the most important high place to sacrifice. Although the ark of the covenant was at the city of David, the old tabernacle and bronze altar remained in Gibeon. So, it’s unlikely pilgrims would have gone to Jerusalem before the temple was built and dedicated.

The building started 4 years after David’s death. (1 Kgs 6v1). Let’s get on and read God’s word. 1 Jn 2v27. As for you (believers) the anointing remains in you and you do not need anyone to teach you. The teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (illumination) helps every believer to appropriate God’s revealed truth in His word so that it becomes meaningful in thought and daily living.

As we look at Ps 122, note. 2 Tim 3v16. All scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Read Ps122 through quickly and then once again slowly.

Psalm 122

A song of ascents. Of David.

- ¹ I rejoiced with those who said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD.”
- ² Our feet are standing
in your gates, Jerusalem.
- ³ Jerusalem is built like a city
that is closely compacted together.
- ⁴ That is where the tribes go up—
the tribes of the LORD—
to praise the name of the LORD
according to the statute given to Israel.
- ⁵ There stand the thrones for judgment,
the thrones of the house of David.
- ⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May those who love you be secure.
- ⁷ May there be peace within your walls
and security within your citadels.”
- ⁸ For the sake of my family and friends,
I will say, “Peace be within you.”
- ⁹ For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your prosperity.

Any thoughts on its key issues? Perhaps, Jerusalem, house of the Lord, peace, worship, or joy? Let’s look at the Psalm in a bit more detail.

Read vs 1-2

What's the psalmist saying to us?

He's delighted and joyful at having joined the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and to be amongst like-minded people. But now we have arrived in Jerusalem let's forget about sight-seeing. Let's go to the house of the Lord. Here we see a heart for God and His house.

Read vs 3-5

What's the psalmist telling us about the significance of Jerusalem?

V3 “ closely compacted together, close-knit construction. This is not just about bricks and mortar. The psalmist is using the imagery of the construction of the stones of the walls and houses being firmly bound together to reflect the way the people were bound together in their worship of Yahweh. These pilgrims – 12 tribes from throughout Israel come together as one to worship God. Interesting to look at other translations of this verse. CJB. Built as a city fostering friendship and unity. The Message. Built as a place for worship. NEB. Built to be a city where people come together in unity.

V4 *Why do pilgrims meet in Jerusalem?* There are 2 reasons.

- (i) To praise the name of the Lord. Worship. Giving thanks for His saving acts on behalf of Israel and His blessings to the nation.
- (ii) As an act of obedience. Look back to Deut 16:16.

V5 *What does the psalmist say about Jerusalem?*

It's a royal city, the city of King David. His capital. The permanent seat of government through God's chosen dynasty – the descendants of David. There the people of God would be ruled and receive justice from a man after God's own heart.

It is not possible to look at the history of Jerusalem or the temple here. But before we look at the last section of this psalm, it would be useful to look at some background.

Read 2 Sam 7 vs 1-16

At that time in history, David is settled in the old city of the Jebusites, now called Jerusalem or the city of David. It is Israel's new capital and the city of the nation's political affairs. David now wants to build God a permanent house/temple there to make it the centre of the nation's spiritual life. But the Lord said he would build David a house, a dynasty from which the Messiah would come. For Jews this marks the beginning of the "5 ones" which underpins their reading and understanding of the Old Testament. The 5 ones are: **One God**; **One nation** through whom this one God reveals Himself to the world; **One king** to rule this nation; **One dynastic family** from which the king would come; **One capital city** from which this dynasty will rule. A city that will house the Lord's sanctuary (or earthly dwelling place). This gives us an insight into how important Jerusalem is in the psyche of a 10th century BC Jewish believer and onwards to the present day. This is what prompts the psalmist to finish Ps 122 as he does.

Read vs 6-9

What's the psalmist calling pilgrims to pray for, and he himself is praying for?

Peace, security and prosperity of Jerusalem and those who love her. Note here prosperity is not material wealth but spiritual enrichment.

What's the psalmist's motivation for calling for these prayers for Jerusalem?

Vs 8 and 9. "For the sake offor the sake of"

That's where brother's and friends (God's people) are found. That's where God's house is.

Summary

The psalm is a hymn of joy to Jerusalem. It is God's Holy and Royal City. The psalmist expresses his joy at being part of the pilgrimage to the city and going to the temple to worship God in the fellowship of fellow believers. This inspires the psalmist to pray and seek the city's peace because it is the supreme place where God and his people meet in fruitful union.

What does this psalm say to a 21st century Christian?

There is no more temple. It was completely destroyed by the Romans in 70AD. It was replaced by an Islamic shrine in 680AD. There is no more sacrificial system. Indeed, it is no longer needed. 1 Peter 3v18. For Christ died

for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God. There is no Davidic descendant ruling in Jerusalem today. Although it became a Christian city in the 4th century AD under Constantine it has been occupied by Persians, Arabs, Turks, Crusaders, British and Israelis since. The city was divided into quarters in the 19th century. (See attachment) Today the Israelis and Palestinians both claim Jerusalem as their capital.

Should we pray for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem?

Let's look at some New Testament Scriptures.

Jn4v21. Jesus to the woman at the well. A time is coming when you will worship the father neither on this mountain (Gerizim) nor Jerusalem. True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

Matt12v6. I tell you one greater than the temple is here.

Jn2v19. Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in 3 days. V21. The temple he had spoken of was his body.

1Cor6v16. Don't you know you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit lives in you.

1Peter2v5 You also like living stones are being built into a spiritual house.

What is the equivalent of going to the house of the lord today?

Christ church, St. John's, house groups, prayer meetings.

What does the psalm say to us today?

Four things:

V1 We should encourage each other to go to church. Heb10v25. Let us not give up in meeting together as some are in the habit of doing but let us encourage one another..... Eugene Peterson (The Message) "too often Christians have a tourist mindset, content to make occasional brief visits with the Lord that are leisurely and entertaining, all the while conforming to this world and enjoying it.

V3,4a We should strive for and pray for unity in our fellowship and Christ's worldwide church. Eph4v2. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

V4b Worship. For Selwyn Hughes the keyword for this psalm is worship. Through worship God communicates His presence to us. In that worship we complete ourselves. Whether or not we feel like it we should instruct our souls to worship the Lord. Feelings must not be our masters. It's true we live in an age of sensationalism. We think if we don't feel something there's little point in doing it. Eugene Peterson. Worship is an act which develops feelings for God. Not the other way around. It's not our feelings for God expressed in an act of worship.

Vs6-9 Prayer. We must pray as God's people for one another in our local fellowship and beyond. Pray for the ministry of God's church here and abroad. Warren Wiersbe: we belong to each other; we need each other, and we must help each other. We must pray for peace within and among the Church. Pray for the needs of our brothers and friends and for the lost.

We must pray for those in authority. 1Tim2vs1-2. I urge you then That requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone for kings and all in authority – that we live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Lastly, Jesus instructs us to pray “Your kingdom come.” We are praying for the new Jerusalem to come where there is no temple. Read Rev21vs1-4. and v22.