

Psalm 24
“Celebrating the Arrival of the King of Glory”

Introduction:

According to Jewish tradition, the original setting of this psalm was the arrival of the Ark of the Covenant at Jerusalem in David’s time (II Sam.6:12-19). This event represented a significant moment in Israel’s history in two ways. First, this was the point when Mount Zion in Jerusalem was established as the permanent home of the sanctuary of Yahweh, and it marked the completion of the conquest of the land of Canaan under David. For with the defeat of the Jebusites, who had previously controlled Jerusalem, the last Canaanite stronghold had been removed from the Promised Land. Though this Psalm was composed for this particular occasion, it is believed that the Psalm carried significance beyond that historical event, it has generally been interpreted as a prophetic expression of the time of Christ’s ascension after His victory over death and sin, when He would be enthroned over all creation at the right hand of God the Father.

There are conservative scholars who believe that this Psalm was written purely as a prophetic description of the coming of the Messianic king to set up His kingdom of righteousness and peace. Though this sounds attractive there is really nothing in either this Psalm itself or in the New Testament that supports this conclusion.

Finally, for this introduction, it is likely that this Psalm was sung antiphonally.

I. Proclamation of Yahweh’s Universal Sovereignty: (vs.1-2)

In verse one we read, *“The earth is the LORD s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.”* David began the Psalm by praising Yahweh because everything in the world belongs to Him since He is the One who created it.

According to the customs of the day, this Psalm was composed using Hebrew poetic parallelism. Therefore, throughout the Psalm, there are expressions built in couplets that complement one another. This begins immediately, as the first verse of the Psalm contains a couplet of two complementary statements about Yahweh and what He has done. The parallels in the verse are as follows:

Earth – World

All its fullness – those who dwell therein

The use of the word *“world”* in parallel to *“earth”* clarifies that the reference is to the inhabited world. This is helpful for the interpreter since the Hebrew word translated here as *“earth”* is used many times in the OT to refer to a portion of land (often in reference to Canaan). The word *“everything”* is amplified in the parallel phrase as *“and all its fullness”*. The Hebrew word translated as *“fullness”* literally refers to that which fills something. In this specific verse it refers to all the animals and people who live upon the earth. Since Yahweh made the world, it is therefore to be understood as being under His dominion. His right to rule over the world rests upon the reality that He is its Creator (Isa 45:18). Therefore, in this celebration of God’s creation of all things, David was acknowledging God’s universal sovereignty. The rhetorical point that is made here is that the earth, into which

Yahweh moves is already His by virtue of the fact that He created it. Therefore, Yahweh's arrival (in the form of the theophany that rested upon the top of the Ark) was not the hostile act of an invader seeking to conquer what belongs to someone else. Rather, Yahweh was coming to Jerusalem as the legitimate sovereign over every part of the earth, including that city. It is likely (given similar things that are written elsewhere in the OT) that this verse is to be understood as a warning against limiting Yahweh to either one city or one temple. His people were never to see Him as a regional God, but as the only true and universal God.

In verse two we read, "*For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters.*" Many liberal scholars have suggested that the Psalm expresses a primitive cosmology, the idea that the earth floated on a cosmic ocean (a belief that existed among some of Israel's pagan neighbors). However, there isn't even the slightest hint of such a primitive cosmology in the words "*He has founded it upon the sea*". Rather, these words signify that Yahweh has manifested His wisdom in creating an orderly world. This Biblical perspective was specifically opposed to the deification of nature, because, while everything God has made is (in its own way) glorious, its glory is ultimately derived from the glorious Creator who made it. It is likely that the similarity of language with that of the Canaanites was used intentionally by David to express a counterpoint to the beliefs of the pagans. He employed the language of their myths in order to forcefully portray Yahweh's creation of an ordered world, upon seas and rivers, symbolizing the subdued forces of chaos. This language also ultimately reflects what was recorded in Genesis. According to the creation account by Moses, Yahweh's act of creation included the transformation of an initially lifeless place. The earth was originally created without form or life, dominated by a primordial ocean. God brought order and form to the creation and caused land to emerge from the sea. He proceeded not only to create all life upon the earth but made the earth suitable for that life. This was the contrast between Biblical truth and pagan myths, the Bible presents the world not as an extension of God, but as something distinct from Him that He made.

This verse establishes the basis for the statement in verse one. As was mentioned above, it states that the earth belongs to God because He created it.

Most likely, the moment of the Ark's arrival at the place that God had specifically chosen as His dwelling place made David reflect on God's sovereign providence, and how it had made that moment possible.

II. Characteristics Necessary for Entering the Sovereign's Presence: (vs.3-6)

In verse three we read, "*Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place?*" In the flow of the song, the bringing of order into what had been chaos in terms of creation is now applied to the moral context of the order God seeks in the lives of those who worship Him. Those who are to worship the Creator must embrace the moral order of holiness and abandon the moral chaos of evil, or they will not be permitted to enter into His presence. Thus, this verse addresses the question, how does one qualify to approach God's presence and make requests of Him. The implication here is that Yahweh's presence raises the

question as to whether just anyone can approach Him, or if there are requirements for doing so that go beyond just being alive. The questions imply that there are significant requirements for those who would approach the presence of God.

Once again, the reader must recognize the parallelism of the Psalm. The question in each stanza of the verse is parallel to the other in the sense that they say essentially the same thing in two slightly different ways:

*Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?
who may stand in His holy place?*

The parallels are:

Ascend – stand
Hill of the LORD – His holy place

As to the use of the word “*stand*”, it conveyed two things. One, it comes as a conclusion to the earlier idea of ascending (to “*ascend*” referred to approaching the Tabernacle, while to “*stand*” referred to one’s arrival before it), and two, it implies requests will be made, as worship would normally be conveyed by the idea of one bending the knee or bowing down before God (this imagery would be in light of the idea of coming into the presence of a great king). The “*hill of Yahweh*” was the mound in Jerusalem where the temple was to be built, where during David’s time the Tabernacle rested.

In later use in Jewish worship, these questions about qualification were probably chanted by the priests or Levites.

In verse four we read, “*He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.*” David here answered the question that he posed in verse three. The privilege of entering Yahweh’s presence belongs to those whose conduct is pure and whose worship is faithful (see also Ps.15). The idea of “*clean hands*” is that one’s outward actions must be righteous, and the idea of a “*pure heart*” is that one must also have a righteous attitude and disposition. Yahweh expects purity and singleness of heart from all who seek His presence (Matt.5:8). Living before God requires that one be obedience to God’s precepts. Not only outwardly in one’s behavior, but in the privacy of one’s heart (73:1). The one who has “*clean hands*” is innocent of wrongdoing and readily asks for forgiveness when he has sinned against God. In contrast to this is the lifestyle of a sinner whose “*hands are full of blood*”, who needs cleansing, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Isa.1:15–18). God also expects loyalty and single-minded devotion from those who worship Him. Those who are accepted into His presence do not dishonor His name by engaging in idolatry, nor do they lie or practice hypocrisy. Here David was speaking of a comprehensive holiness that defines the entire person and all that they do. The use of the idiom of lifting up one’s soul, refers to an attitude of adoration and worship, things never to be directed to anyone but God.

The answer that David gives to his question regarding the requirements for entering Yahweh’s presence makes it clear that these requirements are primarily moral, and not ritualistic (as was true in pagan worship). David’s words were intended to impress upon his fellow Israelites that these requirements were what

Yahweh expected from His people in general. In view of the absence of cultic or ritual specifications, it is clear that he was not addressing what one was to do in preparation for the worship of Yahweh alone.

In verse five we read, “*He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.*” The Hebrew word translated as “*take*” (*nasa*) in this verse was translated as “*lift*” in verse four. This dual use of the word was a poetic way of conveying the idea that one who is not carried away by what is false, shall, as a reward, carry away a blessing. Characteristically, the idea of “*blessing*” refers to God’s involvement in the everyday reoccurrences of life, making it fruitful, whereas “*deliverance*” (salvation) refers to God’s more occasional involvement in the periodic crises of life. However, the flow of thought in this Psalm indicates that David was using this language a little differently here. In this verse, David was speaking in general about who was qualified to enter God’s presence. Therefore, he was speaking of those who were coming to meet with Yahweh and seeking ongoing blessing from Him, and not those coming because of a particular crisis. Therefore, here, David was saying that those who meet the qualifications of verse four receive blessing and righteousness because they have already been delivered by God in His mercy (righteousness being an outgrowth of a redeemed life). The reward of a righteous life is the enjoyment of God’s presence along with His blessing and vindication. In the context of what has previously been revealed in the OT, “*blessing*” is the status of God’s favor extended to His loyal servants, who enjoy the promises of the covenant (Num.6:23–26). Therefore, Yahweh’s blessings are not subject to feelings, circumstances, or outside influence (15:5b). Yahweh will help, provide justice, and grant the ultimate vindication to those (and only those) who are faithful to Him (5:8; 22:31; 36:10; Isa.45:8; 46:13).

In verse six we read, “*This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face.*” In this verse, the title “*Jacob*” is parallel to the Hebrew word translated as “*generation*”. The use of the title “*Jacob*” makes it explicit that those who are referred to here are more than a collection of unrelated people. The parallel term “*generation*” refers to those living at the same particular time. Therefore, these two terms make it clear that the distinct group of people that David was speaking about were the Israelites of his day. They had in common not only a shared lineage, but they all were (at least outwardly) among God’s covenant people. The idea of seeking Yahweh, which David referred to here, involves more than superficial religiosity, the expression conveys a sincere desire to know God, and a willingness to do what is necessary to dwell in His presence. This description then is what Israel was intended to be. Not merely Jacob’s physical descendants, but a people who also shared their progenitor’s faith in and devotion to Yahweh. Therefore, those who wish to have recourse to Yahweh and gain His blessing need to be the kind of people who are described in the verses above. According to tradition, this line in the Psalm may have been used as a chorus.

At the end of the verse, we find the word “*selah*”. This word appears approximately seventy times in the Psalms. There is a great deal of speculation as to what this word means, and the function that it has in the Psalm. However, many

things that are asserted about the term are not supported by anything clear from linguistics or history. The actual meaning of the word itself is unknown. The majority of scholars believe that it probably had musical significance. It may have referred either to a pause in the singing or to an increase in volume. The reality is that the meaning of many such musical terms in the headings continues to elude biblical scholars. But these terms do serve as a useful reminder that the book of Psalms is not merely a collection of poetry, but contains the hymns and songs employed in Israel's worship.

III. Proclamation and Reception of Yahweh's Arrival: (vs.7-10)

In verse seven we read, "*Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in.*" As mentioned in the introduction, the historical scene that inspired this Psalm was when David brought the Ark to Jerusalem from Kiriath-Jearim.

As we come to the last portion of the Psalm, the presumption of these verses is that Yahweh is outside of Mount Zion and that a group of people are urging that Yahweh be given admittance to the city and to what would become the temple mound. It seems best to understand that the words "*lift up your heads, O you gates*" refers to the city gates of Jerusalem. David therefore was calling for the ancient gates of the city to be opened wide for the triumphant entry of Yahweh (represented by the Ark). The opening line suggests that the lintels or tops of the gates were too low for the Divine king to enter. The idea was to convey that anything made with human hands would be inadequate for the admittance of the immensity of the Almighty. This then was a poetic way of displaying the majesty of the One entering the city. Here David again used the Hebrew verb "*nasa*" (twice in this verse), indicating it expresses a key idea in the Psalm. In light of how the term was used previously in the Psalm, it seems to have been a poetic metaphorical way of picturing the reverent and faithful attitude that everyone in the city should have at the approach of Yahweh (Isa.14:31). For this represented an incredible privilege and honor, out of all the places on the earth, Yahweh had chosen a spot within that city, amongst that group of people, to dwell upon the earth.

Jerusalem had been a Jebusite city with a long history. Long before David's time Melchizedek had ruled the city (in Abraham's time - Gen.14:18). At this point in history, Jerusalem became the city of God, because God chose to dwell in it. Consequently, both the city and the people were called on to receive with joy and anticipation the arrival of the Great King.

In verse eight we read, "*Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.*" In both the statement in verse seven and in the responsive question of verse eight, we find a reference to the title, "*the King of glory*". A clearer translation of the title would be "*the king who possesses honor*". Through question and answer, David stated that this King of glory was Yahweh, and that Yahweh was one who was mighty in battle. This designation was appropriate because Yahweh had shown Himself strong by giving the Israelites great victories, including the victory over the Jebusites that gave the Israelites

control over the city of Jerusalem. Therefore, Yahweh was the glorious and victorious King who was ready to enter the city He Himself had conquered. One can visualize a procession of triumphant Israelites carrying the ark, the symbol of Yahweh's presence, going up to where the sanctuary would rest, praising Him all along the way. The additional descriptive phrases "*strong and mighty*" and "*mighty in battle*" portray Yahweh as a mighty Divine warrior who fought on behalf of His people Israel (Exod.15:2–3; Num.10:35; Deut.10:17; Isa.10:21; Jer.32:18). He was therefore not coming to fight against them but for them. The implication here is that at this point in the Psalm, those who made requests of Yahweh in verse three were now identifying Yahweh in these military terms.

In later Jewish practice, when this Psalm was used, the question in this verse may have been called out by some individual or group within the city, while the response was sung by the people accompanying the Ark of the Covenant as its return was reenacted.

In verse nine we read, "*Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in.*" In this verse we find a repetition of the call to give Yahweh admittance to the city.

In verse ten we read, "*Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory.*" Here, the "*the King of glory*", Yahweh, is called "*the LORD of hosts*". The Hebrew word translated as "*hosts*" means armies. The armies that David refers to here are heavenly beings (89:6–8; 103:20–21; 148:2). The Old Testament does not associate Yahweh directly with human armies, rather only with His own heavenly army. As an example, I Samuel 17:45 pointedly used a different Hebrew word than the one translated here as "*hosts*" to refer to Israel's forces when associating them with Yahweh. The implication was that this was an army that was part of Israel, and thus belonged to Yahweh, but they did not represent Yahweh's personal army. The repetition in these last two verses was intended to stress the point that Yahweh is a glorious King and that He was approaching the city, and that only pure worshipers would be invited to come close.

Conclusion:

This Psalm conveys a number of ideas that are important for us to grasp. First, it reminds us of the majesty of God. He is our Creator, and because of this, He is also our Sovereign. Second, the Psalm reminds us that since our God is such a majestic being, we dare not assume that just anyone can approach Him. Approaching God and finding acceptance with Him requires that one be righteous, because He Himself is righteous (I Pet.1:16). Also, we need to know that the righteousness He requires must define our whole persons (our hearts included), and that He requires our allegiance and loyalty. Finally, the Psalm reminds us that we worship God not only as our Creator and as our Great King, but also as our Deliverer. For He has won the great victory on our behalf. For the Israelites the focus was on the earthly home He secured for them in Canaan. Ultimately, Scripture reveals that God secured for us an eternal home in a restored Heaven and Earth where we will forever dwell in His glorious presence.