Psalm 84: Cherished Symbols in a New Context?

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[0:00] All right, well, thanks for that warm introduction. I've recently been listening to some lectures from Dr. Packer, and a Packer lecture always begins with the doxology, and I think that's wonderful.

So if it's amenable to all of you, maybe let's begin by singing the doxology. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.
Praise Him, all creatures here below. Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts.
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.
Thank you. And if you would join me in praying this prayer from Thomas Aquinas for students.
Come, Holy Spirit, divine creator, true source of light and fountain of wisdom.
[1:02] Pour forth your brilliance upon our dense intellects. Dissipate the darkness which covers us, that of sin and ignorance. Grant us penetrating minds to understand, retentive memories, method and ease in learning, the lucidity to comprehend, and abundant grace in expressing ourselves.

Guide the beginning of our work, direct its progress, and bring it to successful completion. This we ask through Jesus Christ, true God and true man, living and reigning with you and the Father forever and ever.
Amen. Amen. All right. So, as Christians, we want to be able to use our Bibles well. To read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, as the prayer book says.
And in Scripture, there are a variety of genres present. We have origin stories, we have histories, parables, epistles, apocalypse. And a great deal of our Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, is within the genre of poetry.
By some commentators' counts, nearly a third of the Old Testament is actually poetry. And that seems to be a rather remarkable and significant fact to me. Given that Scripture is specific divine revelation, and given that medium and message can never be separated from each other, it follows that God intended and intends to communicate with his people through poetry.
[2:28] Thus, as Christians, we ought to strive to become good readers of God's poetry, as he has set it forth in Holy Scripture. And poetry can make for some heavy digestion, if we even absorb it at all.

Poetry says a lot with incredible economy of speech, hardly wasting a word. It's usually concise, it has short lines, heavy with meaning, and they need to be unpacked.
One upshot is that poetry is often very memorable. Poetry can also be difficult because it relies on our senses. It makes use of image, scent, texture, sound, and we don't get a series of logical propositions.
So those of us who like to think in very ordered ways struggle with poetry sometimes. We might get poetry in our gut, but our head doesn't know what to do with it. Good poetry demands our engagement.
And in our contemporary culture, that's not always something we're willing to give. An additional difficulty, at least with biblical poetry, is it comes to us from a culture well removed, both in time and in space.
[3:36] It was written for us, the community of faith, but not originally to us. To read well, we need to do a little bit of work. So to that end, I have two goals today, which overlap a bit with each other.

The first is to offer a few interpretive guidelines for approaching biblical poetry in order to help us all as readers engage well with it. For those of you who are adept readers of poetry, my treatment might be a little bit pedantic, but ideally not tiresome.

And in our discussion of these guidelines, that will happen within the context of reading poetry, which is usually where the chief joy of poetry always lies. So I hope that this dimension of the lecture is nonetheless engaging.
The second goal is to offer a humble, responsible, and edifying exposition of Psalm 84. To listen, unpack, discuss, and take to heart what it has to say to us as Christians.
And as we work through this particular psalm, we'll strive to read within the original context and within our contemporary context. Now the first question to get the ball rolling is, how do we know something is poetry?
[4:49] What are some themes or characteristics of poetry? I thought it might be helpful if we do this as a group exercise, actually. So I've got a pen here. We have some flip chart paper.

Just off the top of our heads, spitballing. What's poetry? An expression of emotion in words.
Emotion in words. Okay. Okay. An escape into something.
An escape. Yeah. That you need sometimes. So it's maybe not taking place in a concrete location.
A bit more imaginative or...
Yeah. Yeah. An escape imagination. Singing a story.
[5:50] Singing a story. Well, that's an interesting one. Yeah. I like that. Is that from your own brain trap? I think it was the left side.

You like the flip? I would say intensity of ideas in a small space. Intensity of ideas. So intense. And maybe not just emotion, but also ideas.
Okay. How about structurally? Yes. Either lyric, dramatic, or epic.
Hmm. A good classical answer. Lyric. Dramatic. Epic. Epic. Epic. Pictures.
Pictures. Or image. Yeah. Pictures and images. Those are really important. We could maybe add to that.
[7:02] Metaphors. Metaphors are often images. That's how it's structured. Would emotionally support it be part of structure? Because politically can...

Sometimes you're really upset. Oh, I see. I mean, so while praying the Psalms and stuff like that, it's better than just... I'm a pharmacist. I'm going to the doctor, to the druggist, taking a sleeping pill, taking muscles, relaxing.
Maybe your own system can naturally do that. And so you need something emotionally supportive. Some escape into pictures, a walk through the forest. Okay. You need something like that.
And poetry is one of many things. And the secrets of things pair together. Poetry certainly can do that. I think when I was talking about structure, I was thinking specifically in the text as it comes to us on the page.
What are the structures that kind of tell us this is a poem? Oh. Maybe... A cadence. A cadence. Yeah. There's a rhythm. Cadence or rhythm. Okay. What is cadence?
[8:08] Right now? Yeah. Basically. A steady time. And the rhythm. And then how the rhythm affects us. It just... You sometimes need it in you. Mm-hmm.

Yes. That's true. So, anything else that jumps to mind? Yes, Harvey. It is... In asking that question, it's presupposed. Correct me if I'm sorry.
It's workmanship. Workmanship. Always a piece of workmanship. Carefully worked. Yeah. Yeah. To get something so poignant and so short takes time.
Yeah. All right. I understand. Hard to understand. Let's throw that under, too. Okay. So, that's not a bad start.
And we're not trying to build a typology of poetry here. Is poems mainly structured object, verb, subject, versus English sentence structure, subject, verb, object?
[9:06] Poems, they almost look like an object, verb, subject. It almost looks like a Latino sentence structure. How it's... Because... In English, that can be tough without prepositions, because we don't have case marking on our nouns.

But... All right. So, let's wrap that up. Good work, everybody. So, now we're going to take one more step.
I'm going to pass out Psalm 84 on this beautiful pink paper, because I ran out of white paper. And I hope I printed enough copies. If you came with somebody, maybe share with that person.
And we're going to focus. There's actually... The text is presented twice. We're going to look at the left-hand column and try not to look at the right-hand column. So, if you need to cover it with another sheet of paper or fold it in half, we want to look at the right-hand column...

Sorry, left-hand column, where it's just kind of a wall of text. Okay. It looks like the pink paper has made its way around.
[10:19] I guess pink is actually an upshot, because I can see where it's at. So, we're looking at the dense block. There's no spaces. There's no lines. So, if we read through it, what are maybe some things that will tell us this is still a poem?

We talked about short lines, or intensity. Is that true of Psalm 84? Or maybe images.
Are there some images here that jump out at us? Yeah, we've got some imagery. Is there any symmetry or cadence? Yes. So, it's a bit tough to tell, hey?
It's hard because this is a translation. In the original, we did have that. That's a good observation. Yes. So, this is coming to us from the Hebrew into English.
So, there's an additional complication there. Yes. I would think that in Hebrew, as well as in English, what happens over and over again is a continuing praise towards God.
[11:39] Oh, Lord of hosts. Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Yeah. And then, even when it's not that, appear before God in Zion and then the next, Oh, Lord God of hosts.

I would think there would have been a continual crying out to God, whether it was in the original or as now in English. So, we're noticing some repetition. Very nice.
No punctuation. No punctuation, which is also true in the original Hebrew text. So, if we go to the Hebrew text of Psalm 84, you might think there's a bit of a rhythm here, but there's no meter, like in classical Greek or Latin poetry, or even in Shakespeare.
And there's not really a rhyme scheme either. In English poetry, classically, we kind of like to have an A-A-B-B or an A-B-A-B rhyme scheme where the ends of the words line up and you get kind of this rhythm going that way.
Hebrew doesn't have that. And so, that makes it a little bit different. So, some scholars actually prefer to speak of elevated discourse and plain discourse.
[12:43] And on the one side, you have basically what we would call poetry here in North America, and on the other side, just kind of normal talking. But I think we can still say that biblical poetry is poetry, because there's rhythm, it's short and tight, images, repetition, and there's a structure to it.

So, the rhythm in biblical poetry that's also found in other ancient Near Eastern literature is called parallelism. We talked about it a little bit already. It's probably the defining characteristic of poetry in the Bible.
It's a little tough to pin down at times precisely what it's doing, but at the very least, we can see it all the time throughout the Old Testament. And intuitively, I think most of us probably grasp parallelism fairly well.
It is profound, and it is accessible, which is probably an assessment we can apply to all of Scripture as a whole. So, an Anglican bishop by the name of Robert Louth, he was the first modern scholar to really talk about it at length in his lectures on the sacred poetry of the Hebrews.
That was 1835. So, it's been nearly 200 years since him. Others had noticed it, of course, but they hadn't really systematically tried to understand or study it, as far as we know.
[13:56] Now, by Louth's estimation, there's three kinds of parallelism. Sometimes, we find synonymous parallelism, where a single clause seems to be expressed twice.

So, if we turn back to the text of Psalm 84, and this time, we use the much clearer right-hand column with verse numbers and line divisions and strophes.
Verse 2, My soul longs and yearns, my heart and flesh cry out. Or verse 3, The sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself. Verse 9, See our shield, O God, look upon the face of your anointed.
There's this pattern of parallel structures, right? Sometimes, we can find what's called antithetical parallelism, where two subjects are opposed or in contrast. And Proverbs uses this technique all the time.
So, Proverbs 12.8, for example, There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Short statement with an image, and then it's opposite. It's quite interesting.
[14:58] Sometimes, the parallelism isn't so orderly and predictable. When it resists tidy classification, Loth calls it synthetic parallelism. And it ends up being kind of a grab bag for all this stuff he doesn't quite understand.

Everything that doesn't fit in. So, Psalm 84, 4 and 5, for example. Blessed are those dwelling in your house. Continually they shall praise you. Blessed is the man whose strength is in you.
They cross highways in their heart. Is that parallel? Well, maybe. There's at least a repetition of the word blessed. And the difference between this synthetic and the synonymous parallelism is that the early examples, verses 2, 3, and 9, there's a very tight overlap.
Similar subject, similar verb, similar object, similar word order. And if the comparison is very direct, you can even elide the verb in the second line. So, verse 2, Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow...
dot, dot, dot, a nest for herself. Because as a reader, you already know what the verb needs to be.
Now, if you don't find this terribly helpful using such discrete categories, that's okay.
[16:05] Some people find it helpful, some people don't. But the basic idea underlying all of these parallel structures is fundamentally emphatic. X and what is more, Y.

There's kind of this dynamic energy in this parallelism, which seeks to heighten our engagement, to lead us on or in or up. It's not merely repetition. An excellent, although somber, example of this intensifying effect is Psalm 88, verses 12 and 13, where the psalmist, who is really in dire straits, asks of God, Will your steadfast love be told in the grave?
Your faithfulness in the abyss? Will your wonder be known in the darkness? Your righteousness in the land of oblivion? And in this ponderous, terrible rhythm of questions, a parallelism in parallel with another parallelism, it draws us deep into the mind of the psalmist, more poignantly than a straightforward question like, what happens to my relationship with God when I die?
So a good question to ask ourselves when we read biblical poetry is, where is the parallelism? And what is it trying to accomplish? What's the relationship between the two pieces? Just as the rhythm of music intends to communicate, so too the rhythm of parallelism.
And there's another kind of structure in biblical poetry, which we could maybe call the rhythm of structure. Biblical poetry divides itself not only into sense units of parallel lines, A and B, X and Y, but also into larger sense units that we could maybe call strophes.
[17:39] Now, a strophe is an old-fashioned word, but we need to use it because we already have the term Bible verse, so we can't talk about verses when we already have a verse, right? That's sort of clear. So strophes, what we may call verses in English poetry, they're in a sense an interpretive choice made by the reader.

Original Hebrew scrolls didn't have any punctuation, and in poetic texts, there's also no line divisions, and there's no spacing. Since writing surfaces were so precious, they just wrote and wrote and wrote and used all the space they had.
And that's what I was trying to do with our left-hand column, where it's just a wall of text, right? So no punctuation, hardly any capitals, except when we have the Lord's divine name, Yahweh.
But if we go through this left-hand text slowly, thinking about where we might pause when we read, where a natural end-to-one thought begins, the organization of the right-hand text is maybe where you would end up.
And we also get some help from the medieval Jewish scribes, who at least gave us line divisions. So to return to the original point, the verse division which I've given you on the right-hand side of the page, that's not in the original Hebrew text.
[19:00] That's my interpretive choice. Take it with a grain of salt. And if you compare individual psalms across English translations, you'll notice that the editors will divide things up differently, depending on how they understand the relationship of the parts.

So sometimes it's helpful, first read through in a biblical poem, to just ignore all those white spaces, and read the whole thing. Sometimes what I'll do is I'll cut and paste from somewhere, put it into a Word document, and then delete all of the white space.
And this isn't to dismiss what our translations are doing, but it's just to qualify them, to point out that when you read a poem, it can be helpful to ignore these divisions, to help you think about how is the flow of the poetry moving.
Now, personally I find the easiest way to think about structure in poetry is just to get one's metaphorical hands dirty in a poem. So, let's try, just for a little while, to go through the left-hand text of Psalm 84 as a group, and see if we can come to some consensus where we think the pauses in the lines should be, and let's try not to look at the text on the right-hand as we do it, so that my choices don't influence your choices.

That's not totally possible, but let's give it a try. So, Psalm 84, and then when you think, maybe this will get a little bit crazy, but when you think there should be a stop, just someone say stop.
[20:29] Okay? So, for the director of music, upon the Getith, by the sons of Korah, a psalm, how lovely is your dwelling place? Nobody told me to stop. I don't know. I don't know. Well, I might, my, my, my voice was a bit slower.

Oh, okay. So, so, so, so, where, so where, so where, so where, so where, so where, so where did you see, where did you see the pause or the stop? Well, I would, I would say the sons of Korah, the song.
How lovely is your dwelling place? Yeah, there we go. That, that makes sense. So, there's one stop. How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord of hosts? Stop.
Stop. Yeah. My soul longs and yearns for the court of the Lord. Stop. My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.
Stop. Even a sparrow has found a home and a swallow a nest for herself where she may set her chicks at your altar, Lord of hosts, my king. So, that one's a bit tougher, hey?
[21:30] Where, where should we put the, where should we put the break? After chicks. After chicks. Even a sparrow has found a home and a swallow a nest for herself where she may set her chicks.

Well, that's not too bad. At your altar, Lord of hosts, my king and my God, blessed are those dwelling in your house. Continually they shall praise you. Stop. Stop. And we've got Selah there. So, that's pretty helpful. We don't quite know what Selah means. It may have been just a musical term. And sometimes you'll actually get Selah in a psalm where you think maybe I shouldn't be stopping.
But often it is helpful. So, we've got to stop there. Selah, whatever that means, we don't know. Blessed is the man whose strength is in you. They cross highways in their heart. So, there's a disagreement of number there.
We've got to stop. So, what about pauses? You know, there's any kind of writing from pauses and there are stops. So, we're not putting them in the right and then just to stop.
[22:30] No, that's probably a bit too sophisticated for us as a group activity. But this is a good point. It might happen if you go a little bit more slow. A little slower? Sure. I can do that.

Thanks for the feedback. Quick question. Yes. I mean, in English we have commas and full stops. In Hebrew, we have commas? No, nothing. Yeah. So, even in narrative text, you just have to figure out on your own where you think the period should be or where the comma should be.
Well, it forces you to analyze while you're reading, I guess. Mm-hmm. You often hear that Paul, sometimes when they're reading Paul, oh, that's a long sentence. Well, how do they say that when the whole thing was...
Paul's writing in Greek and Greek is a bit of a different situation. But they also didn't have punctuation. And Paul, in general, is just very difficult to read in Greek, to be perfectly honest. Yes? I'd like to suggest that this exercise would be a little more honest if we did not have your intonation and your program that each word had the same way of stress and time.
[23:41] So that's another good observation because even as I'm reading, I'm unconsciously giving a shape to the words. And you can't really not do that. Yes, Elizabeth.

I have a question. Originally, in those days, people sang those songs. So would it be like a region? Would you guys be taught like to send as original versions?
No, because we don't have the melodies, so we don't quite know how they should have been sung. And a lot of times, I guess, in... I'm not Jewish, so I'll just not say anything about how contemporary psalms are performed there.
I have a few experiences, but I can't generalize. Let's maybe wrap this up. Just because... I think... Well, I hope it was helpful. Because you can see there are natural breaks just because it's a short, tight line. And then all of a sudden there's a transition.
[24:43] So let's go back to the right-hand side. And I've given you a lot of interpretive choices.

Right? So do you think there's any justification for those choices? Like, do my strophes, those kind of blocks of text, do they have any underlying patterns?
Is there natural breaks when I make a natural break? What's the word stroph? Strophe is like a verse. Yeah. But we can't say verse because then it would get confusing talking about verse 1 when there's, you know, 84 verse 1.

So we'll call the verses the big chunks of lines, strophes. So if we go through the first three, how lovely is your drawing place, O Lord of hosts. My soul longs and yearns for the court of the Lord. My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even a sparrow has found a home and a nest for herself. Where she may set her chicks. At your altar, O Lord of hosts, my king and my god.
[25:49] And I put a full stop there. Does that make sense? Seems to. We've got kind of this scene. There's some yearning and then we have an image and then there's a bit of a conclusion and then we get another thought.

So sometimes that's a good way to work through a poem as well is to think, where are these focusing images? Are we in a certain imaginative location? When do we move to another location? What's the connection between those two locations? So to summarize where we've been so far, it's been a little bit haphazard, but first, biblical poetry has rhythm, not meter, even in Hebrew.
So the rhythm is expressed through parallel lines and the parallel lines are not mere repetition. And in biblical poetry, we also have larger structural considerations. So different parts of the poem have different themes or they present different locations, different images, and they provide organization to the whole.
So when we read biblical poetry, it's important to recognize these two elements work together to address usually a central topic. We might call that the heartbeat of the whole poem. A good question to ask when reading poetry is why is this written?
[27:04] Who's the audience? And we're going to try and answer that for Psalm 84. But we'll have to do a little bit of detailed exposition and we'll begin with a superscription. So this is when I'll offer my commentary on Psalm 84.

So the first term for the director of music that occurs with some regularity in the Psalms 56 times, I think, it's fairly opaque, but Bruce Waltke, along with a few others, thinks it's probably an indication to, like, the leader of the service.
So this is something that was supposed to be sung. Maybe a cantor. Upon the getith might be an instrument whose name we've lost or it might be a particular style.
We won't dwell on these terms much today except to say that they indicate Psalm 84 was intended for public worship, which is true of many of the Psalms. And then we get another thing, the authorship, probably, of the sons of Korah, a psalm.
So we learn from Exodus 6 that the sons of Korah are among the tribe of Levi. Numbers 26, there's a list of them among the Levitical families. And 1 Chronicles 6 is a reference to the sons of Korah along with a list of officials whom David instated for the service of song in the house of the Lord.
[28:21] So, fairly clear. There's a fellow by the name of Michael Gouldert. He's tried to do some historical work on the Korahites, but barring any archaeological discoveries, we can't really say too much about them. But what's also interesting in the book of Psalms, at least, is that we've got more than one Korahite psalm within the whole Psalter.

So, Psalms 42 to 49 have the title of the sons of Korah and Psalms 84 to 88 excluding Psalm 86. Now, as you might expect from a priestly guild, a central theme in their psalms is temple worship. Psalm 43, Psalm 46, Psalm 48, Psalm 84, Psalm 87. Maybe Psalm 47 too. And in many respects, Psalm 84 is the fullest expression of this theme. The poetic locus of the whole thing is the temple courtyards.
So then we move to the poem itself. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs and yearns for the court of the Lord.
My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even a sparrow has found a home and a swallow nest for herself, where she may set her chicks at your altar, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. So the psalm opens with a central theme that winds through the entire thing.
[29:34] The psalmist exults confidently, expressing joyful admiration for the place where the Lord dwells. Regular gathering for communal worship that would require pilgrimage for many, and that was a core component of Israel's religious life during the monarchy.

But it's not the temple in and of itself which the speaker desires, but rather it's the Lord, because it's not the temple specifically, it's the dwelling place of the Lord, whose presence there gives beauty and purpose to the temple which the psalmist yearns for.
Solomon's prayer to the Lord in 1 Kings recognizes that God is everywhere, and yet, in the gathering of his people something unique happens, and he's especially present. And where the Lord dwells, there the psalmist yearns to be.

Having offered praise, the psalmist shifts from an objective declaration to a subjective experience in verse 2, and we bump into our first parallelism. The very marrow of the psalmist's being desires to be in the temple courtyard, and within that moment of desire, both flesh and heart sing joyfully to the living God.
There's a similar sentiment in Psalm 42 and 43, which is a Korahite psalm as well. Now, soul, or nefesh, in the Old Testament is linked to ideas of individual personality, just like in English.
[30:53] And it's also the breath of a human being, the thing that comes out of you. It's typically the nefesh which longs for the Lord's presence. And the relationship is a little bit fuzzy, but the parallelism here strikes me as an expansion, or an explanation.

The soul yearns, and the response, the heart and the flesh together, is to praise the Lord. Here, the psalmist models for us the appropriate character of worship.
Where disposition and action are perfectly in tune. The inner and the outer person singing for joy to the living God. This is grounded, physical, earnest worship.
And verse 3 makes clear that true worship of the Lord contains both of these dimensions. So we get this warm, glowing introduction, and then the psalmist provides us with a marvelous example of why the Lord's dwelling place is so lovely.
Because there, even a sparrow can find a home. The image of a bird in danger of the follower's snare is a recurring metaphor within the Old Testament. So Jeremiah 5, Hosea 9, Psalm 91, a couple others.
[32:02] In Psalm 11, the image of the bird is used to refer to a child who is fleeing the wicked and taking refuge in the Lord. In Psalm 50, birds are among those that the Lord provides for.

Here in Psalm 84, we see not only an image of provision, the sparrow and a swallow have a home in the temple, but also refuge because the sparrow and a swallow find a home, which perhaps implies that they were previously homeless and searching.
The beauty of the image is extended further in a compact, multivalent instance of parallelism. Sparrows and swallows resting and nesting. Not only do the little birds find homes at the altar of the Lord, but they find homes where they may raise their young in safety.
It's a beautiful picture. Then we transition into a new strophe. Verse 4, Blessed are those dwelling in your house. Continually they shall praise you.
Blessed is the man whose strength is in you. They cross highways in their heart. In the valley of weeping they will set it to be a spring. Even the early rain covers it with pools. They shall walk from strength to strength to appear before God in Zion.
[33:16] Now our first strophe or thought unit transitions into the second with the familiar phrase blessed are those who dot dot dot. The Hebrew word for blessed, ashrei, denotes the happy, fulfilled, wise life of the one who fears the Lord and who dwells where the Lord dwells.

The blessed life is the one we have described to us in the book of Proverbs, for example. This phrase of blessing or macaorism, if you want a technical term, also links us to the next line which offers another parallel.
Blessed is the man whose strength is in the Lord. They cross highways in their heart. And if we see these two as parallel, then we need to ask ourselves what's the relationship? Why are these two lines next to each other?
Are these two macaorisms connected and in what way? That's actually a fairly difficult question to answer. So we'll set it aside and we're going to return to it.
Now what's meant by the second half of verse 5 is also not entirely clear. And the Hebrew is a bit ambiguous. But if we continue on to verse 6, it becomes clear that we've entered into an imaginative landscape of pilgrimage.
[34:30] If we look at the entire strophe from verses 4 to 7, we can see the goal introduced in verse 4 to dwell in the house of the Lord. That's realized in verse 7. Verses 4 and 5 also complement each other in their parallelism by reflecting interior and exterior aspects of the life of faith.

The blessed life is an interior disposition towards God as the one who gives strength and an exterior experience of gathering and worship, which mirrors very nicely with our parallelism in verse 3, heart and flesh singing for joy.
Moreover, those whose strength is in the Lord shall go from strength to strength, continually strengthened in their journey. So this strophe intimates that pilgrimage is that which issues out of a

desire for the Lord and is only possible with utter reliance upon the Lord.
He's the reason for the journey. He's the sustainer of the journey. He's the goal of the journey. It is the Lord's strength which prompts the pilgrim to begin the journey and it's also the Lord's strength that gives the pilgrim the ability to establish fountains in the valley of weeping.
Places of weeping can become wellsprings of life, as the Samaritan woman in John 4 learns. And not only are there springs of refreshment but early rains which cover the valley in refreshing pools.
[35:53] Now the reference to a valley of weeping might remind us of the valley of death's shade in Psalm 23 and highlights the reality that though the goal of pilgrimage may be glorious, the path trodden is not always easy or straightforward.

And there's also a neat little bit of wordplay going on in verse 6. The word for pools is nearly identical to the word for blessings in Hebrew. Berechoth and barachoth.
So both happening at the same time. Paranomasia. And the pilgrimage which began as nothing more than a yearning at the start has resulted in a robust faith in action.
The pilgrims go from strength to strength finally appearing before God in Zion. which brings us to the third strophe. We have an abrupt shift from a scene of pilgrimage into a direct entreaty to God.
So the pilgrims have made the journey and having entered into the presence of the Lord at the temple they offer up their prayer calling upon the Lord of hosts. Another way to translate this title Lord of hosts to help draw out some of its majesty is Lord of Heaven's armies.
[37:08] or Lord Almighty. And yet this almighty God who commands the heavens is utterly personal. The God of the universe is also the God of Jacob. And it is to this all-powerful and deeply relational God that the pilgrim can call.

Another interesting dimension of this parallelism is to recognize the Lord Almighty is the Lord of a historical community because the name God of Jacob reminds us of his mighty acts and his covenantal faithfulness.
Now the content of the prayer is short and to the point. Lord, look favorably upon your Messiah, your anointed one, our protector.
Within the context of monarchy, this is very clearly a prayer that the Lord protect and bless the king, the one anointed to lead the Israelites. the number of times when the king is called a shield are fairly few, but it's not an unheard of metaphor in the Old Testament.
So Psalm 89 has it, Psalm 47, those are also both Korahite Psalms, so that's an interesting connection to them. Although it's ultimately the Lord who is the shield of Israel, which the psalmist tells us in verse 11, the king was expected to be a shield too, a military defender of the people.
[38:24] And with verse 10, we get to the crux of the psalm, where the big interpretive question is, what's the relationship between verse 9 and 10 in this pilgrim's prayer? The pilgrim asks the Lord to bless the king because a day in the courts of the Lord are better than a thousand of one's own choosing, because it is better to be at the outskirts of the temple precinct than to be among the tents of the wicked.

What's the causal relationship there? Now the second clause is maybe a bit easier to understand than the first. If the king is not favored and is unable to defend the nation, then conceivably the people under occupation would be among the tents of the wicked, as was often the case with the period of the judges.
But the pilgrim also speaks about a thousand days which he has chosen, which were not in the courts of the Lord. The answer, I think, lies in locating this psalm as one which came together during Israel's exile, when worship in the temple was no longer a reality.
Israel, in choosing apostasy, did choose a thousand days elsewhere, and during the exile they quite literally dwelt among the tents of the wicked. Under this reading, the closing of the third strophe begins to take on the colors of lament.
One day serving at the threshold of God's house would be better than dwelling in the tents of the wicked, if only that were the case. Then the prayer of the pilgrim in verses 8 to 9 becomes part of an extended plea for restoration, where the psalmist is asking that God return his anointed to the throne in order that the temple cult become a reality again.
[40:05] But wait, you might object. I thought this was a psalm of pilgrimage. There's no pilgrimage during the exile, and that's a valid objection. But, if we go back to verse 5, like I promised, when we ask the question, what does it mean to cross highways in the heart?

If we take the exile as the historical context, we have an answer to that question now. In this reading, to cross highways in the heart is perhaps to admit one can no longer make the physical journey.
Instead, the psalmist yearns to do so, wishing in fact he was in the temple precinct, for blessed is the one who dwells in the house of the Lord. The Israelites are the bird looking for a home where they may set their young, and they are in the valley of weeping.
And we can offer one more argument for the context of exile as we interpret this psalm. Psalm 84 can be read on its own, but it belongs to a larger collection. And contemporary scholarship has spent a good deal of time exploring the hypothesis that the Psalter is actually a consciously curated collection, not just kind of a haphazard jumble of prayers.
And it's subdivided into five books, much like the five books of Moses. Some of you have probably heard this hypothesis, and the research is quite interesting and persuasive.
[41:24] Most modern translations actually now, they'll divide the book of Psalms up into the five books. So there's a lot of consensus here. Psalm 84 belongs to the third book of this altar.

Book three spans from Psalm 73 to Psalm 89. And the loss of sanctuary and nationhood are the theme-shaping circumstances of book three. In Psalm 74, for example, we read, the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary.
And book three nearly ends with a somber lament of Psalm 88. My only companion is darkness. Psalm 89 asks, Lord, where are your former acts of loving kindness?
Even though the book closes with a benediction, the emotional timbre of book three communicates that this is a collection of prayers from and for a community in crisis.
To quote one psalm scholar, the effect of the final form is to suggest that book three has been decisively shaped by the experience of exile and dispersion.
[42:29] And it is this experience which leads to re-engagement with the symbols lying at the heart of Israel's self-understanding as the people of God. It is here within the context of exile that the fourth and final strophe becomes so significant.

Where we read, Truly, the Lord God is a sun and a shield. Favor and honor he will give. The Lord will not withhold good for those walking in honest devotion. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man trusting in you.
Despite everything that has happened, Psalm 84 closes with a confident benediction, expressing an unwavering trust in the Lord of hosts. Kingship and temple worship, two of the orienting symbols in Israel's religious life, here in the benediction they recede into the background.
They're not even mentioned. They're overcome by contemplation of the Lord himself, the focus of each final line. In verse 8, the anointed was called the shield, but now the psalmist reclaims, it's actually the Lord who is a shield, and not only a shield, but also a sun.
Now the metaphor of shield is fairly intuitive, I think, but what about the metaphor of sun? If you attended my last lecture, you'll know that there is a great deal which can be said on the subject, and in fact, we had to cut things short due to constraints of time.
[43:49] I won't rehash all of that. A helpful start to our consideration of the solar metaphor is found in the relationship between God and king, an important theme across the entire book of Psalms, not just Psalm 84.

In 2 Samuel 23, the anointed one, David, speaks of a king who rules justly and is like the sun rising on a cloudless morning. Mesopotamian rulers were also spoken of in solar terms as well.
So if solar metaphors can be applied to divinely appointed kings whose rule ought to pattern after the rule of the Lord himself. It's reasonable to say those same connotations can be applied to the Lord, the one whom the king is supposed to emulate.
So one contextually sensitive reading of this solar metaphor would focus on the sun as a symbol of the Lord's justice and his just rule. And that's consistent with the broader ancient Near Eastern trends of seeing the sun as a symbol of divine judgment.
But we can go a little bit further with our interpretation because we actually have two metaphors here. The Lord God is a sun and a shield. And a few examples of shield imagery from the Old Testament will help us, I think.
[45:03] So Deuteronomy 33, the shield of your help and the sword of your triumph. 2 Samuel 22, also repeated in Psalm 18, my shield and the horn of my salvation.

Psalm 28, the Lord is my strength and my shield. So from these examples and there's more, we can observe a consistent pattern where the Lord is both a defender and a deliverer.
He protects and he rescues. 2 Samuel 22, in particular, repeatedly speaks to the Lord's action in history with the language of shielding and delivering.
The anointed one, chosen by the Lord, anointed with oil and the Holy Spirit, the king, was often the means by which Israel was delivered and defended. So the sun metaphor is not just a symbol of justice but a symbol of salvation.
Justice connotes deliverance which makes sense because deliverance is just justice in action. If we consider solar imagery in the prophets, Isaiah 60, Daniel 9, Malachi 4, we can make a much stronger link between the sun symbol and deliverance because there solar imagery is used specifically to speak about restoration.
[46:19] A return from exile. That's also the theme of Psalm 80, another psalm replete with solar imagery and the refrain three times in that psalm is, Restore us, O Lord, God of hosts, let your face shine that we may be saved.

Within the broader biblical context, within the ancient Near Eastern cultural context, we read this solar metaphor as specifically and poignantly describing the Lord as a just deliverer.
And as the pilgrims leave the imaginative landscape of the temple and their feet turn back towards the road, back towards displacement, the psalmist reminds and encourages that the Lord does not withhold any good thing from those walking in honest devotion.
Blessed is the one who trusts in him. While the present circumstance of the pilgrim may be uncertain, while king and temple may no longer be a physical reality, at the end of it all, wherever they walk the earth, the pilgrim, walking in honest devotion, can trust in the faithfulness of the Lord.
And it is this theological reality which I think is the heartbeat of the entire psalm. That's why he can be praised. Now intuitively, I think we can all relate to Psalm 84.
[47:36] And this may be in part due to the influence of the Puritans. So the Puritans, who took shape as a group in the 17th century Reformation England, were very fond of the metaphor of the warrior pilgrim.

We need look no further than the transparently titled Pilgrim's Progress, written by John Bunyan. Here, the pilgrim road has become spiritualized or allegorized. And right out of the gate, Bunyan lets us know that this will be his guiding metaphor.
The first line of the book is, As I Walk Through the Wilderness of This World. And the scene begins. And the pilgrim's progress is second only to the King James for its impact in shaping Western evangelical understands in Christianity.
So historically, I think we get this. But there's also good biblical warrant for a metaphor of a Christian life as pilgrimage, ultimately going all the way back to the Exodus.
Paul frequently makes use of pilgrim language in his epistles. Romans 14. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.
[48:44] 2 Corinthians 10. I beg of you that when I am present, I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.

2 Thessalonians. Now we command you, brothers, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness. And then in the second epistle of John, we bump into the language again.
I rejoice greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth. All over the place. It's beautiful. Jesus himself makes use of this metaphor a couple times too. So Matthew 7.13, enter by the narrow gate.
The gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction. And those who enter it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life. And in the Gospel of John, of course, Jesus is clear that he himself is the way to the Father.
That our walk begins, is shaped by, and ends in him in whom we live and move and have our being. So, we can see that while Psalm 84 was first addressed to a forlorn and exiled Israel, it has, by the death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ, become addressed to us, the new Israel.
[49:59] And the temple, which was once a building in Jerusalem, is now the church, all of the saints, past, present, and future, who are being built into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit, as we read in Ephesians 2.

Psalm 84 opens, How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts. Those are words worth taking to heart. This, us, lovely, lovely, and, yet, as a theological reality, it's true.
But the work isn't done, either. We are the temple, and at the same time, we are being built into the temple, fully realized when our Lord returns. And our pilgrimage is to this completed temple, towards the community of faith we are meant to be.
Paul puts it rather beautifully in his encouragement at the opening of Colossians. And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you all, asking that you all may be filled with the knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of the Lord.
So as we leave today and continue to meditate upon Psalm 84, may we be encouraged, may we be convicted, and may we all walk in a manner worthy of our Lord.
[51:23] Blessed is the one who trusts in him. Amen. So it's 10 on the nose.

Do we have time for comments or questions? Yes. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. It's a nice way to relate through poetry like personification here, heart and flesh sing, and there's another one here, the valley of weeping, and you can use those things in your thoughts.
The sea is calling you out to go out and meditate upon it if you're really upset, and you can use those things in your day or the mountains are calling you to meditate upon and stare.
And so you can be all alone back up against the wall and this can affect your thinking and relating and calming. It can be quite emotionally supported with these kind of things. Yeah. I think it's no coincidence that the Psalms have been the prayer book of the people of God for their entire history, basically.
Yeah. Throughout the entire medieval church up into the modern day, the prayer book has been tremendously shaped by the Psalms. Apparently, at the Council of Trent, bishops had to have the entire book of Psalms memorized in Latin if they were to be promoted to the position.
[52:45] So that's, yeah. And it's a beautiful book that shapes our language and our thinking, our prayer life because it's very relational and it's very visceral and it gets right down to where we are as people.

In the Jewish synagogue, you read it back to front and it's the book of Psalms is the back page because the Jewish, they have the metal, the piece of metal and it goes like that.
The page of structures said it used to go right to left. It was left to right. You put page on top of page. It's the Jewish prayer back to front in the Arabic and the Bibles and the Middle East also back to front.
Right. Yeah. Yes, hold on. So one comment and a question. The comment is we've learned a lot from your presentation. Thanks.
And it will help in our study. So, the question is what happened to the first item on the scoreboard at front? Emotion and words?
[53:45] I'm wondering whether perhaps the way spontaneity is also something to do. I mean, I read the Psalms looking for a sense of spontaneity and certainly that emerges in this Psalm.

What's the relationship between the analysis? Undoubtedly, your thesis will be well evaluated because it's produced valuable insight into the structure of the Psalm.
I'm wondering what the emotional impact is. I see. Right. I guess I would say much like good Baroque music and J.S. Bach or others, there can be a warm core of spontaneity or emotion and then it very patiently works itself out.
So my general impression of the Psalms is they are in a sense spontaneous insofar as they react to needs that are very immediate.
But they express themselves very carefully in the sense that there's too much profundity there for it to be just kind of the verbal outpouring of someone who's beyond themselves with grief or ecstatic there's a bit of a balance I think in the book of Psalms.
[55:15] So certainly they strike us right to the core and in the same way we can spend well so I spent a year on this Psalm and it just keeps giving you more and more it's remarkable.

Yeah. Yes. Joseph. I was struck by your phrase temple worship to me it has a kind of a poetic interview and you I think you touched on both sides of that it's worship of the temple and worship in the temple and I think you expressed the worship of the temple as something that is possibly somewhat criticized from the standpoint of we have gone into exile so we were doing something

wrong.
Would you respond to that? Um hmm well thanks for the very kind compliment on the balance I tried to strike I guess it's it seems true that when Israel was in exile and they realized that they had sinned that they were and not just that they had sinned but that they were sinful nonetheless they leaned into God's covenant that he had chosen them so in that sense they were still a saved people and I think that's the continual balance that we need to strike all right oh last question yeah
I'd just like to go back to a point that Olaf was raising verse 2 no not verse 2 what did you call the first little section strophes yeah thanks here is somebody saying I really really really want to be in your temple Lord and that has a certain kind of impact but the emotions that a human being would feel have been given to certain parts of the body you know the soul is yearning for this we don't even know where the soul is or located I think the Jesuit wrote something called the exact location of the soul but I haven't been able to find that my heart and my flesh sing for joy you know here we are these are things we can touch about ourselves and singing is not one of their functions pumping blood is you know so we are actually trying to express emotion by assigning it to things that are not really emotional at all because just saying I really want to be there
Lord doesn't seem enough and I guess to the to the comment of the heart being a blood pumping organ I think even when we have good medical knowledge somehow organs are still very closely linked to states of our being and in Hebrew the heart was the place of volition so it was not only where you thought but also where your emotions kind of sprang from well yeah because they're still playing so yeah I think there is because there is always a sense of mystery in the life of faith that God as he reveals himself we can know things but it's always a faith seeking understanding and so there's always kind of a continual ascent and then by necessity there's going to be an ambiguity because to kind of pin something down too far in one direction might betray another reality that seems to be equally true and we don't know how to reconcile them necessarily so we have to leave them in tension and I would say that's maybe one of the healthy functions of ambiguity it seems like just in the very act of answering your answering question
[60:07] I want to I want clarification but sometimes Jesus answers a question with a question yeah maybe it's not to answer the question we want the rule book you and I step one step two step three this is the way you do it I'm going to let you close I like fancy language the existential limits of reason are always present in holy scripture yes I would agree with that could that be a topic for your next thank you Harvey very wise thank you thank you so much for a really wonderful combination of theory and application I just found it so useful to be able I don't read the songs like that to take things out and sit back and reflect

I think reflect on it rather than anyway it was very very helpful I hope you will come back again please join me in a few just thank you you go thank you easy to let me walk down into here sounds to a light in model carrots in in ahead out