

The Teacher's Notes—Longing for God in Zion, Lesson 11

Adult Bible Study Guide, 2024 1Q, "Psalms"

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The Teacher's Notes



Sabbath School Lesson for March 9-15, 2024

Overview of Lesson 11, Longing for God in Zion

Memory Text: *"My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God."* **Psalms 84:2 NKJV**

The songs, or hymns, of Zion joyously expressed their love for the sanctuary of God. Wherever God was, His people longed to be. Many of the psalms that fit in this category were written by the sons of Korah, who either served as musicians in the temple (1 Chronicles 6:31-38), or as gatekeepers there (1 Chronicles 9:19). These temple workers rightfully knew what it was like to be in the arms of God, where they worshipped and learned more about His love and justice.

The term “Zion” in these moving psalms referred to either the temple sanctuary or Jerusalem itself. However, the blessings enjoyed in God’s refuge city were to extend to the whole earth. After all, the entire world belongs to God, its Creator.

With all our heart and body, we should desire to be near God, the true source of any peace and happiness we might enjoy on this troubled planet.

- **Sunday: A Day in Your Courts Is Better Than a Thousand**—what makes the sanctuary so unique (Ps. 84)
- **Monday: Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem**—when and how were they to come to Zion (Ps. 122)
- **Tuesday: Zion—The Home of All Nations**—what was Zion’s foundation that makes it our home (Ps. 87)
- **Wednesday: Safety and Peace of Zion**—when and how are we to experience peace (Ps. 46)
- **Thursday: Immovable Like Mount Zion**—why is it necessary to remain steadfast in the world today (Ps. 125)

Sunday: A Day in Your Courts Is Better Than a Thousand (Ps. 84)

As a bird longs for the relative peace and comfort of its little nest, so we experience a special longing for **the presence of the Lord, wherever that may be (Psalm 84:1-4)**. What makes this place with God so special is...

- **we see there “the beauty of the Lord”** (Psalm 27:4)
- **we are satisfied with “the goodness” of His house** (Psalm 65:4)
- **we are strengthened enough to trust Him with our lives** (Psalm 84:5, 12)

There are **three groups of people who are blessed** by God’s presence **in the sanctuary**.

1. **those who reside and serve there** all the time (Psalm 84:4)
2. **pilgrims who choose to come there at the appointed times** (Psalm 84:5-10)
3. **anyone who holds onto God**, as their sun and shield (Psalm 84:11, 12)

We must not forget the words in Psalm 84:11 that say: “No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly”. **When we’ve been with God in His sanctuary, the evidence will be shown by the way we live our lives. The stamp of His presence is seen by the world**, as a witness to the beauty and goodness of being with God. Nothing seems more important to us than walking humbly in His footsteps, guided by His love.

Bible Verses:

Psalm 84:1-4

What makes God's tabernacle such a lovely place to be?

Psalm 84:5-10

Who are also blessed by God's presence, besides those who dwell there as servants?

In what ways is God a sun and shield?

Monday: Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem (Ps. 122)

Psalm 122 is interesting because it presents two reasons for coming to Jerusalem. Three times a year they were to **celebrate together in Zion the Feast of Unleavened Bread (or Passover), the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Ingathering)**. These were joyous times, because the **people would be shown two aspects of God's character:**

1. Psalm 122:4—**His mercy (found within the temple gates)**—referred to as “the Testimony of Israel” (Numbers 1:50)
2. Psalm 122:5—**His justice (found in the throne rooms of the king's palace)**—referred to as a place for judgment (2 Samuel 8:15)

This twofold purpose for coming to Jerusalem is seen in how we keep the **Ten Commandments**. **The first four commandments pertain to our relationship with God (which is why a visit to the temple was essential), and the last six commandments dealt with our relationship to each other (which was encouraged in the judicial system administered by the king).**

This same system of **divine/human government in Jerusalem was forfeited when Daniel's 70-weeks prophecy ended** (see Daniel 9), **leaving us to look forward to and praying for God's New Jerusalem**, when Jesus comes back to earth at His Second Coming (Revelation 21, 22). **All human attempts to combine religion and government on earth have always experienced failure, and led to persecution of God's people.**

Bible Verses:

Psalm 122:1-5

What two places were possible to visit in Jerusalem when they came for their festivals there?

What two features of God's character were shown in each of these places?

Psalm 122:6-9

What were they to pray for while in Jerusalem, or Zion?

Tuesday: Zion—the Home of All Nations (Ps. 87)

Three times in Psalm 87, we are told that **all nations, both Jews and Gentiles, may be born in Zion, whether physically or spiritually**. The foundation of its holy mountains extends far beyond the confines of the beloved city of God. Although the Lord rightfully places Zion above all others, the inclusive nature of this majestic nation indeed reveals that it is **the spiritual birthplace of all who accept God as their own** (Galatians 3:29).

Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream in Daniel, chapter 2, shows us that the stone, which struck the image of kingdoms, "became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:34, 35). This **new Kingdom then is established by Christ (who is called the Rock in 1 Corinthians 10:4 and is the foundation to build on, in Matthew 7:24)**.

That Rock which consumes all the other kingdoms will stand forever (Daniel 2:44, 45). It is the heavenly Kingdom, not one established now here on earth.

Jesus helped us understand the majestic nature of His Kingdom by using the example of a **mustard seed. It may be small, but it becomes a great tree that has many birds build nests in its branches** (Matthew 13:31, 32). This is why **Jesus sent His disciples out to preach the gospel to every nation** (Matthew 28:18-20).

Bible Verses:

Psalm 87:1, 2

Why is Zion so special to God?

Psalm 87:3-7

What makes Zion such a glorious place?

Wednesday: Safety and Peace of Zion (Ps. 46)

The need for peace and safety for those who dwell in Zion, who are called His treasure, is especially portrayed in **Psalm 46. Here, the psalmist describes the world in extreme turmoil**. God's refuge in Zion will certainly be needed because of the intensity of **natural disasters and the many wars that engulf the world** in the last days.

Psalm 46:6 indicates that at the utterance of His voice, the earth will melt. Therefore, by His word the earth was created, and by His word it will melt with fire, as we are told. **The earth will be re-created in all its glory** for mankind for eternity.

Even though the world seems controlled by many catastrophes, God does not abandon His people. **We are assured of His love and power in the midst of any storm**. We are told to **be still and know that He is our refuge** (Psalm 46:10, 11).

Bible Verses:

Psalm 46:1-7

What is God telling us in these verses?

Psalm 46:8-11

How can we find peace in the midst of a storm?

Thursday: Immovable Like Mount Zion (Ps. 125)

Psalm 125 shows a sharp contrast between those who love God and those who love their sinful ways. Those who trust in God are like **Mount Zion, which is a symbol of steadfast power.** When we dwell with God, we can be certain of His merciful, divine protection. **We are not moved, or tossed about, like the mountains of iniquity** described in Psalm 46:2, which are tossed into the seas.

We tend to be discouraged when we see the wicked prosper, and are often led to abandoning our faith and taking up their crooked, hateful ways. There are mysteries in the spiritual world that we don't understand, but this should not make us doubt God's word to the point that **we lose our immovable position on Mount Zion.**

We will always have the freedom to "put our hands unto iniquity" (Psalm 125:3), but **the Scriptures and even the beauties of our natural world are available to keep us steadfast and true to God,** whose character is always loving and just.

Bible Verses:

Psalm 125:1, 2

Who are those who can't be moved?

Psalm 125:3-5 and Psalm 94:3

Why is it easy to reach our hands out to iniquity?

Friday: Final Thoughts

Although looking to the past is helpful for guidance and assurance of protection, it is also valuable for us to look to the future for comfort during stressful times.

Zion is a symbol of both God's people, and His presence. Being with God, and God being with us, are wonderful thoughts for us to contemplate as we struggle with horrific events in these last days.

These hymns remind us our longing for Zion...

- **“Marching to Zion”, #422**
- **“I Shall See the King”, #426**
- **“Sweet By and By, #428**
- **“Over Yonder”, #431**

Next Week: Worship That Never Ends

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