

PLEADING FOR GOD'S PROMISED PRESENCE

IN PSALM 132

AN ART OF TALEH MINI-STUDY

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Introduction

Even before we were married, my wife’s family treated me as one of their own. But as the last of six siblings to get married, I was final “outlaw” to join the family—which inevitably meant there were years worth of memories I missed. Whenever these stories come up at family gatherings, I politely nod and do my best to imagine. Although I’m part of the family, the names and places of those memories gained their significance before I married in.

Scripture can be the same way, especially the Old Testament. Even though God adopted us into his family, the people of God have a long, rich history before we joined. The people, places, and memories may not carry the same significance for us as they did for the Israelites. While Psalm 132 acts as the climax of the Psalms of Ascent, its references may fall flat on our ears because we’re new to the family. With some simple background and context, however, this psalm rightly becomes a bold plea for God to uphold his promises.

Even better, it sets up the questions for which the New Testament authors see a clear answer in Jesus. The themes in Psalm 132 connect to the heart of the Old Testament narrative—mainly the promise God made to David to preserve his kingly lineage so long as the kings keep the covenant. The subtext for this poem comes from 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17. Take a minute to read through 2 Samuel 7 if you’re not familiar with the God’s promise to David, then slowly read through Psalm 132.

Getting Started

Read Psalm 132. Then, summarize each of the following sections in 2-5 sentences.

Verses 1-5:

Verses 6-10:

Verses 11-18:

Devotion

Verses 1-5 introduce the first of two requests to God: remember David. David was the second king of Israel but the archetype of a godly king (in spite of major moral failures). The author needs God to act so he invokes the memory of the first king of Israel who really cared about God's dwelling place. Verses 2-5 elaborate the pains to which David went to prepare materials for Solomon to build the temple. There doesn't seem to be a direct quote elsewhere in the Old Testament, but I Chronicles 22:14 describes this idea. Twice God is referred to as the Mighty One of Jacob, which emphasizes God's power in battle against enemies.


At the center, verses 6-10 setup the main request. The psalmist wants God to come back to his preferred dwelling place. There are two seemingly obscure places mentioned.

Another name for Bethlehem, Ephrathah is significant as the birthplace of David, and Jaar is short for Kiriath-Jearim where the ark rested for twenty years before David took it back to Jerusalem. In the Holy of Holies, the ark acted as the footstool to God's heavenly throne. It was literally the meeting place of heaven and earth—the center of the spiritual universe. To zoom out for some context, pilgrim worshippers sang Psalm 132 while traveling to the temple. God must return to his resting place, i.e. the temple, so that God's people may benefit from all that comes when God's presence protects and preserves. Verse nine describes that hope with righteous priests and joyful saints.


Verses 11-18 provide the basis for why the psalmist believes God can and will return. Verses 11-12 give an explicit reference to the covenant promise described in 2 Samuel 7. Verses 13 and following explain more that God always intended to dwell in Zion and all the blessings that come from when he's there. The priests who mediate God's presence do so with righteousness (vs. 9) and, therefore, help bring rescue (i.e. salvation) to a needy people. With a secure and morally faithful government, God blesses Israel so the poor are satisfied as opposed to left wanting. No wonder the people shout for joy! The mention of a "horn for David" refers to military strength and victory over enemies. These three descriptions show that proper justice, right worship, and lasting peace flourish in the land when God returns to his resting place and establishes his "anointed one" on the throne.

Don't miss the second reference to God's anointed, the Hebrew word from which we get Messiah. Clearly written after David's time, this psalm looks forward a new leader, a new "David," who would secure the kingdom and faithfully rule over God's people while God rested in his temple. If that doesn't sound like Jesus, I don't know what does. The New Testament makes it abundantly clear. Matthew's genealogy draws a direct line from David to Jesus (Matthew 1). Zechariah applies the horn of David language to Jesus (Luke 1:69). Peter makes a direct reference to Jesus fulfilling the Davidic covenant in his speech at Pentecost (Acts 2:30ff). Paul bookends his letter to the Romans with references to Jesus being the promised descendant of David (1:3, 15:12). And if that weren't enough, John hears directly from Jesus himself that he is "the root of David" (Revelation 22:16).

Even more wonderful and mysterious, John identifies Jesus as the very presence of God come back to his people. The presence of God, embodied in Jesus, returns to Zion (John 1:14; 2:19-21). The two pleas of Psalm 132 find their answer in the person of Jesus. He is both the victorious "anointed one" and the promised presence of God returning to his people.



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Study Questions

1) What other Old Testament passages look forward to God's return to Zion, thereby bringing peace and blessing?

2) Do you see Jesus as the answer to the pleas of Psalm 132? What other New Testament passages come to mind that describe Jesus as the presence of God and the promised Messiah?

3) While the New Testament clearly sees Jesus as the promised Messiah, he didn't establish a political kingdom like many anticipated. How is Jesus victorious and over whom or what? What Scripture come to mind describing Jesus' kingdom?

Application

As my in-laws retell the stories again and again, I become quite familiar with the memories that pre-date me. I can even recite some of them myself. But the real significance is limited - fun events that live on in the memories of those who were there. In contrast, however, the significance of Psalm 132 is not localized to an ancient people wishing they could return to the good ol' times of their favorite leader. Precisely because of Jesus' work to build a new family marked by faith as opposed to ritual, the new in-grafted members find meaning and significance in prayers that pre-date them. Psalm 132 and others give voice to our need for God's presence and all the blessing that flows from him.

Where does this leave us? Because we live in a time when this psalm has been answered but not fully realized, let us work in a way that demonstrates this reality. With the very Spirit that dwelt in the Holy of Holies living in his redeemed people, let us work to bring about proper justice, right worship, and lasting peace. After the clearest and longest explanation of how the resurrection of Jesus defeats our last enemy—Death—Paul doesn't end his first letter to the Corinthians with a platitude. He exhorts us to get to work (I Corinthians 15:58)! Let's live out of the true reality that God remembered his ancient promise to provide a victorious King and return to his people.



Application

1) Take a moment to meditate on the idea that God adopts us into his family purely by faith in Jesus as the Christ (i.e. anointed one). While we all joined the family after the promises made in the Old Testament, do you treasure them as your own?

2) When God's presence returns to Zion and his Messiah reigns, the psalm describes a satisfied poor, righteous priests, and defeated enemies. What does it look like to work towards these ends in your local church and community? Take a moment to pray again through Psalm 132 with this in mind.