



Psalm 134 - Praise in the Night

A Song of Ascents.

Introduction

This final Song of Ascents is geared toward a liturgical occasion, perhaps the opening or closing of a festival, depending on the identity of the <<**servants of the Lord**>>. By the reading argued for here, this would suit well the close of a worship service. It is also a call to the priests and Levites of the temple to continue their service of praise, with the answer of a blessing from those servants to the people.

Charles Spurgeon suggested that the scene was of pilgrims departing Jerusalem in the darkness of early morning, calling out to the priests and Levites who stood watch at the temple. The pilgrims then receive the blessing spoken to them by those same servants.

Psalm 134:1-2 - Call to the Temple Helpers to Bless the Lord.

The psalm opens by calling a group described as the servants of the Lord to bless the Lord. The title 'servants of the Lord' could refer to Israelites in general, as it seems to in Psalm 135:1; but since they are said to stand by night in the house of the Lord, it seems better to take these words as addressed to Levitical personnel, whether priests: <<**And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord**>> (1 Kings 8:10-11) or attendants from the non-priestly Levitical families: <<**Now these are the singers, the heads of ancestral houses of the Levites, living in the chambers of the temple free from other service, for they were on duty day and night**>> (1 Chronicles 9:33). The worshipping congregation calls on them to lift up their hands to the holy place and bless the Lord: <<**Hear the voice of my supplication, as I cry to you for help, as I lift up my hands towards your most holy sanctuary**>> (Psalm 28:2).

¹ Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord,
who stand by night in the house of the Lord!

Psalm 134:1

Come, bless the Lord. This phrase is a call to worship God in spirit and in truth: <<*But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth*>> (John 4:23-24), and to do so from one's inmost being. Spurgeon commented, "Be not content with praise, such as all his works render to him; but, as his saints, see that ye 'bless' him. He blesses you; therefore, be zealous to bless him." Adam Clarke added his views on bless the Lord, "That is, speak good of his name: tell the wonders he has wrought, and show that his name is exalted."

All you servants of the Lord. The servants of God have special reason to bless and praise him. If the servants of the Lord will not praise him, who will?

- They partner with God in his work, which is a special privilege.
- They enjoy the nearness that comes with working together with God.
- They receive special strength and anointing as they serve him.
- They have new and exciting challenges of faith.

Since this is addressed to servants of the Lord, this psalm shows that praise should be added to all types of work that each Christian undertakes and not just ministry. The reader can imagine a temple guard asking, "Is it not enough that I do my work and stand watch throughout the night?" The answer is: "No, that is not enough. To all your work, add praise – bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord. Spurgeon observed, "Not one of you should serve him as of compulsion, but all should bless him while you serve him; yes, bless him for permitting you to serve him, fitting you to serve him, and accepting your service."

Who stand by night in the house of the Lord! As stated earlier, the singer probably had in mind the priests or Levites who had special duties at the temple, including night watches in the house of the Lord.

² Lift up your hands to the holy place,
and bless the Lord.

Psalm 134:2

Lift up your hands. The lifting of the hands was not only the common posture of prayer among the ancient Hebrews; it was especially appropriate for praise. It displayed the anticipation of gratefully receiving from God, and the sense of surrender to him.

Lift up your hands to the holy place. It may be that sanctuary is used more generally here, referring to the temple precincts as a whole. Yet, the priests or Levites had access to the sanctuary or temple building itself. Derek Kidner commented, “So it may speak of worshipping ‘in holiness’ (rv mg.), and be the passage underlying 1 Timothy 2:8, ‘lifting up holy hands’.”

And bless the Lord. The idea is repeated for emphasis. God’s people should give him their thanks, honour, praise, and glory. Alexander Maclaren commented, “They are exhorted to fill the night with prayer as well as watchfulness, and to let their hearts go up in blessing to Jehovah. The voice of praise should echo through the silent night and float over the sleeping city.”

Psalm 134:3 - Blessing upon Each Worshipper.

The priests then address the worshippers and pronounce on each one of them, for ‘you’ is singular, “May the Lord bless you from Zion,” i.e. “from the place where you have been worshipping.”

³ **May the Lord, maker of heaven and earth,
bless you from Zion.**

Psalm 134:3

The Lord, maker of heaven and earth. The psalmist looked to God as the creator of all things, and appealed to the God of all might, design, and wisdom with the prayer that follows. Most commentators see this as a reference to the priestly blessing commanded in Numbers 6:23-27.

Bless you from Zion. The idea is that blessing from the God of all creation flows from Zion unto his people wherever they may be. This is a beautiful and fitting close for the Songs of Ascent. The people came to Zion in pilgrimage to bless the Lord, singing the songs of Psalms 120-134. They end with the idea that God’s blessing went with them from Zion. The blessing does not remain in Jerusalem, but flows out from there.

Bless you uses the singular, not the plural. This is because the idea is drawn from Numbers 6:23-27, and also because God’s blessing comes to his people not only as a community, but also as individuals. He loves and blesses each one. Spurgeon commented, “Zion cannot bless us; the holiest ministers can only wish us a blessing; but Jehovah can and will bless each one of his waiting people.”

This was a spiritual conception of God different than the pagan ideas. The psalmist understood that God’s power and influence was not limited to Jerusalem. The God who had the creator’s claim to all **heaven and earth** was no local deity; he could bless in Zion and **from Zion**.