

Psalm 122 New King James Version
The Joy of Going to the House of the LORD

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

- 1 I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go into the house of the LORD.”
- 2 Our feet have been standing Within your gates, O Jerusalem!
- 3 Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together,
- 4 Where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, To the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD.
- 5 For thrones are set there for judgment, The thrones of the house of David.
- 6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you.
- 7 Peace be within your walls, Prosperity within your palaces.”
- 8 For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, “Peace *be* within you.”
- 9 Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good.

History / Background

This Psalm focuses on Jerusalem (verses 2, 3, and 6) and the house of God (verses 1 and 9). Some say that David is not the author of Psalm 122 and perhaps this Psalm was written during the times of Ezra and Nehemiah; but Psalm 122 would be contrary to what it says. David’s dynasty did not exist in the post-exilic days (verse 5), nor was the Jerusalem the well-built city in post-exilic times that it was during the reign of David (verse 3; 2 Samuel 5:9, 11).

The phrase “house of God” was used for the tabernacle (1 Samuel 1:7, 24; 2 Samuel 12:20), so it could certainly be used for the tent David pitched for the Ark in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6).

What is the Tabernacle?

Following the deliverance of God’s people from Egypt, God spoke to His prophet Moses to lead His people.

Part of the charge as they wandered through the wilderness was to build the Tabernacle. It was so that God's people had a constant reminder of His presence with them. **“And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture. There I will meet you, from above the mercy seat”.** (Exodus 25:8-9, 22)

This unique tent served as a blueprint for how the children of Israel were to approach God: in holiness, in purity, and in reverence. Moses was given very detailed instructions on how this structure was to be built, what furniture was to be placed in it, and who was permitted access. It was in the tabernacle that the high priest would offer sacrifice once a year to atone for the sins of the people.

Wherever the people of Israel moved through the desert, the tabernacle would move with them. It was a visible sign of God's presence and His power to Israel that He watches over them day and night. He was with them through struggles and triumphs, and every day on their journey to the promised land.

What was the ancient Temple?

After the people of Israel settled in the promised land and the kingdom of Israel expanded under King David, this man after God's own heart expressed a desire to build God a house. He was moved to set up a permanent dwelling place to host the presence of the Lord. David was no longer content to let God dwell in a tent while he lived in a beautiful palace. **“I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord is under a tent.”** (1 Chronicles 17:1)

David's son, King Solomon, went on to build a prosperous temple. There, the high priest would sacrifice lambs on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). Scripture also commanded the Jewish people to appear before the Lord three times a year, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:16).

Invading armies later destroyed the Temple. And the Jewish people rebuilt it after returning from exile, only to be destroyed again by the Romans.

Psalm 122 carries the title “A Song of Ascents. Of David”. It is one of the four Songs of Ascents that is specifically attributed to King David.

David is the author of Psalm 122. He wrote it both for what Jerusalem was in his day, and for what it would become under his son and their successors.

The psalm speaks of a people that were united during David's reign; but it was divided after his son, Solomon's death (1 Kings 12:25-33). The tribes after this division were not united during the post exilic days. The fact that King Jeroboam set up his own religion after the kingdom divided is evidence that the tribes must have been going up to Jerusalem annually during the reigns of David and Solomon.

David expressed his great joy over Jerusalem, which he had settled by defeating the Jebusites (2 Samuel, chapter 5) The Jebusites tell David he would not be able to get in the land and that even their lame and blind would ward off David and his men. Verse 7, "Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion, the City of David". Who can stop the plans of God?

David also had great joy bringing the Ark of God to Jerusalem (2 Samuel chapter 6). This is during the time that David danced before the Lord as he entered the City of David. It is ironic that Jerusalem, which means "city of peace", has been fought over through history more than any other city in the world. Prophetically, David's desire will not be experienced in its fullness until the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6), comes to rule permanently (Zech. 14:9, 11), as the promised Davidic King

Isaiah 9:6 New Living Translation

"For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace".

Zechariah 14:9 New Living Translation

"And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day there will be one Lord—his name alone will be worshiped".

Zechariah 14:11 New Living Translation

"And Jerusalem will be filled, safe at last, never again to be cursed and destroyed".

In Psalm 121 they are in transit. Now in Psalm 122, they have arrived in Jerusalem. They are filled with joy because their "feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem."

Believers today need not make long pilgrimages to "holy places" to worship God, for the Lord does not dwell in man-made buildings (Acts 7:48-50). The key thing

is the heart. We can see from David's words in this psalm, the kind of heart believers need if we are to please God in our worship.

- A Heart for God (verses 1-2)
- A Heart for Praise (verses 3-5)
- A Heart for Prayer (verses 6-9)

A. Heart for God (verse 1-2)

Nothing is stated in this psalm about a pilgrimage although this psalm is placed among the "Songs of Ascent". David lived in Jerusalem and had to go but a short distance to reach the tent and the ark. Even though David lived in the holy city, he did not take for granted the privilege to go to the house of the Lord. You see, David had a heart for God and for God's house. He was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

Verse 1 - "I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD."

a. David had in mind both the community (when they said) and the individual (I was glad). He pictured the individual coming together with the group to go into the house of the LORD. That invitation and the acceptance of it made him glad.

Are you glad when someone says, 'let's go to church'? David loved the Lord. He was always excited when it was time to go to worship with his God. He was not only glad for himself, but he was glad that others wanted to go as well.

b. "The house of the Lord": A term used of the tabernacle (compare Exodus 23:19; 34:26; 2 Sam. 12:20), not the temple that would be built later by Solomon.

During David's days there was never a temple, but he knew one would be built, having extensively planned, and prepared for it (1 Chronicles 22:2-16). It's possible that David wrote here of the pilgrimage to the tabernacle, which did exist in his day and was regarded as the house of the LORD.

It's more likely that David wrote this psalm in anticipation of the pilgrims who would come to the house of the LORD built by Solomon. It is wonderful to think

of David's extensive preparation for the people of Israel to come to the temple, especially for the required feasts three times a year.

c. Coming to God's house made David happy, though he knew that no building could contain God in all His glory and greatness. At the house of the LORD, he could focus his thoughts, prayers, worship, and receiving of God's word in the community of God's people in a special way, and David was glad for that.

We should go into the house of the LORD. It is good and important for us to gather with God's people for prayers, worship, and receiving of God's word. The gathering should be formal and ordered enough so that it is regarded as a gathering of God's house – not everyone doing their own thing, but God's people coming together for His glory and their benefit in His house.

Our going to God's house should be a glad thing. This isn't the same as saying it should be entertaining, especially in an age when entertainment is a dangerous idol. Not everything that happens at the house of the LORD must be fun, but it should all be good, both welcoming to the not-yet-believer and good for those who are believers in Jesus.

We ought to worship God in our own houses, but that is not enough; we must go into the house of the Lord, to pay our homage to him there, and not forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

We should not only agree with one another, but excite and stir up one another, to go to worship God in public. **Let us go**; not, "Do you go and pray for us, and we will stay at home;" but **we will go** also (Zechariah 8:21). Not, "Do you go before, and we will follow at our leisure;" or "We will go first, and you shall come after us;" but "**Let us go together**, for the honor of God and for our mutual edification and encouragement."

Zechariah 8:21 New Living Translation

"The people of one city will say to the people of another, 'Come with us to Jerusalem to ask the Lord to bless us. Let's worship the Lord of Heaven's Armies. I'm determined to go.' Let's be determined to go into the House of the Lord.

Verse 2 – "Our feet have been standing Within your gates, O Jerusalem!"

a. Most regard this as David's description of the joyful statement of the pilgrim who has finally arrived. The most important aspect is the evident joy and gladness at coming to the destination.

The word stand, here, means a stationary fact. This means they are not leaving but standing. The joy of the first verse has run on over in this. It is such a joy just to stand within the gate. Are we excited when we get to our destination of the church building? To arrive and anticipate the Glory of the Lord during worship, fellowshiping with other believers and the mere joy that this is the day the Lord has made, and I will rejoice in it. Standing at the gate and anticipating that others will be added unto the church as we reach the lost.

b. They came to Jerusalem because that was where David set up the tabernacle and where the ark of the covenant and the altar of sacrifice were. Later, Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem that David planned and prepared for. David's joy is that the Ark has found its proper location.

David was a man after God's heart; let's make sure we have a heart for God.

B. A Heart for Praise (verses 3-5)

The Lord had told His people that one day there would be a central place where they would worship (Exodus 23:14-19; Deuteronomy 16:2, 16), and that place was Jerusalem. The Lord instructed David that the place on Mount Moriah where he had built the altar was to be the site for the temple (1 Chronicles 21-22), and He also gave David the plans for the structure (1 Chronicle 28).

Jerusalem had been a Jebusite stronghold before David captured it and made it his capital city, "the city of David" (2 Samuel 5:6-10). This was a wise choice because it helped bind the northern and southern tribes together. King Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, and David was from the tribe of Judah. When the psalmist looked at the city, he thought of unity and security. The people were bound together in their worship of the Lord and their respect for the throne. This is like the stones of the walls and houses that were "compact together".

There was much to see in Jerusalem, but the most important task was to give thanks to the Lord which was a great privilege. The people also were to give allegiance to the dynasty of David, for the same Lord who assigned the feasts also established the throne. In Romans, Paul makes it clear that the Lord established

the system of governmental authority that we have, and we must respect the offices even if we cannot always respect the officers. Though there is separation of church and state in modern democracies, there must never be a separation of God and country. Regardless of our political affiliation, our most important civic duty is to pray for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-6).

Verse 3 – “Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together”,

a. David had conquered the city of Jerusalem, taking it from the Jebusites who held it as a Canaanite stronghold. He built the city in his own day, and David rejoiced in declaring, Jerusalem is built.

b. David’s city of Jerusalem was not large, but it was not a disordered collection of tents and shacks. It was built and built together in an orderly way (compact together). It was a real city.

The city, many times in the Bible, is speaking of the church. We know that the church is also compact. It is a close-knit group (family).

Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together - literally, “joined to itself together;” that is, when one part is, as it were, bound closely to another part; not scattered or separate. The walls are all joined together; and the houses are all united to one another to make a compact place. The ground occupied by Jerusalem never could be large, as it was surrounded with valleys, except on the north, and hemmed in with hills, so that, from the necessity of the case, when it became the capital of the nation, it was densely crowded. This, moreover, was usual in ancient cities, when they were made compact for the sake of defense and protection.

Verse 4 – “Where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, To the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD”.

Now we see an important reason for going up to the temple. This is still one of the reasons for going to church. ***O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good.*** There were twelve tribes of Israel, but the thing that kept them together was their God. The temple in Jerusalem would be their gathering place of worship. The families of the tribes would come at least three times a year to the temple to worship.

a. One of the reasons David conquered Jerusalem and established it as the capital of both the political and religious life of Israel was because it did not previously

belong to a specific tribe, being under Canaanite occupation. Since it belonged to no tribe, it belonged to all the tribes, and the tribes of the LORD could come together as one at Jerusalem and the house of the LORD.

b. To the Testimony of Israel: This describes the *ark of the covenant*, which was often called by this title (Exodus 25:22, Exodus 27:21, Numbers 1:53). Representing the throne of God and His presence in Israel, the Testimony of Israel was the center of the tabernacle and later the temple.

Matthew Poole explained why the ark of the covenant was sometimes called the Testimony of Israel: "...the tables of the covenant [were] laid up in it, which are called God's testimony, and the tables of the testimony."

Explanation of the Ark of the Covenant:

The ark of the testimony got its name from the fact that it would be the housing for God's testimony to His people. His Law was not only verbal, but written, etched in stone (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 5:22), so there could be no excuse for disobedience. Hebrews 9:4 tells us that, later, the Israelites added to the stone tablets within the ark of the testimony a jar of manna (Exodus 16:32–33) and Aaron's rod that budded (Numbers 17:8–10).

The ark of the testimony represented the presence of God with His people, and His power went with them wherever they took the ark (Joshua 3:6; Numbers 10:33–35). The enemies of Israel, the Philistines, stole the ark once (1 Samuel 5:1), hoping its power would help them. They set it in their idol's temple and waited for the good luck it would bring. But calamity broke out among the Philistines, until they begged their leaders to send the ark back to Israel (1 Samuel 5:4, 6, 9, 11–12). God demonstrated that He was not a good luck charm whose power could be had by whoever captured His ark. The power was not in the ark of the testimony itself; the ark only represented the presence of God with His people.

Since the death and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 14:9), God no longer uses an Ark of the Testimony to dwell with His people. We are under a New Testament or covenant. At Pentecost, He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell every believer (Acts 2:1–4, 38–39). We become His temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). When we have been born again by faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:3, 16), we take God with us everywhere we go. It did the Philistines no good to harbor the ark, because the ark had no power if God was not on their side. Likewise, we do not need physical items—

crosses, images, holy relics—to carry the power of God with us because He already abides in us. That awareness of His presence, called the fear of the Lord (Psalm 19:9; Proverbs 15:33), helps us make decisions that honor Him.

c. To give thanks to the name of the LORD: The primary purpose of the feasts of Israel was for the people of God to come together and give Him thanks. Their appreciation for what He had done gave them faith in what He would do in the future. Watch what God does next!

Verse 5 – “For thrones are set there for judgment, The thrones of the house of David”.

a. For thrones are set there for judgment: As the seat of government for Israel, Jerusalem was where their main courts for judgment were established. Jerusalem was to be a city of justice, where good was honored and where evil was corrected. The throne of judgement was in Jerusalem. David was the leader of all 12 tribes at this time. Each tribe had a leader, but matters of great importance were judged by David in Jerusalem.

b. The thrones of the house of David: David’s house was established to reign over Israel. Saul’s house never reigned, supplying only one king. David’s lineage reigned in Jerusalem and will forever reign in the Messiah, the Son of David.

We should have a heart of praise; Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good!

C. A Heart for Prayer (verses 6-9)

The name “Jerusalem” means “foundation of peace.” But the city has been a center of conflict for centuries. Biblical prophecy lets us know there can be no *absolute* peace in Jerusalem or on earth until the Prince of Peace reigns on David’s throne (Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:26-33).

So, when we pray for the peace of Jerusalem, we are praying, “Thy kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10) and “even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20). Jesus wept over the city because they were ignorant of the peace God had for them (Luke 19:41-48) and had rejected their own Messiah (John 11:47-48).

Verse 6 – “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you”.

a. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: David exhorted pilgrims coming to the Holy City to pray for the peace of the city. Jerusalem's name itself marks it as the city of peace, but it has known much war and conflict, which continue to this day.

Our prayers must come from our heart because we love God (who loved us first) and love His people. Notice the Fruit of the Spirit in this Psalm: love (verse 6), joy (verse 1), and peace (verses 6-8). (Fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23).

Jerusalem was taken from the word Salem, which means peace. The city of peace has known very little peace. We should all pray for Jerusalem, the city of our Great God. This city is called the city of God.

b. May they prosper who love you: David continued by giving a prayer for Jerusalem. The prayer included a blessing for those who love the city, and a direct request for peace and prosperity for the city.

The "prosperity" mentioned in this verse does not refer to material wealth but to the spiritual enrichment that comes to those who love God, His Son, His Word, and His chosen people. To promise that all who pray for the peace of Jerusalem will become wealthy is to misunderstand the promise. Paul prayed for his people (Romans 10:1) and yet was a poor man materially (2 Corinthians 6:10)

Romans 10:1 New Living Translation

"Dear brothers and sisters, the longing of my heart and my prayer to God is for the people of Israel to be saved".

2 Corinthians 6:10 New Living Translation

"Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything".

Old Testament History of God's goodness

Obed-Edom and his family were blessed for the sake of the Ark he took in and took care of. And in their spiritual affairs their souls prosper. Obed-Edom was a man from the tribe of Levi. We first read about Obed-Edom in 2 Samuel 6:10 when David was bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem for a more permanent resting place.

The ark had been in the home of Abinadab and his sons Eleazar, Uzzah, and Ahio for many years since being captured by the Philistines and returned to Israel (1 Samuel 5:1; 7:1–2). David and thirty thousand men arrived at Abinadab’s house to escort the ark to Jerusalem. The problems began when they placed the ark on a cart drawn by oxen instead of transporting it on the shoulders of the Levites as God had instructed in Numbers 7:9. Uzzah, Ahio and all David’s men were joyfully transporting the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem on a cart when the oxen stumbled.

Fearing the ark was about to slide off, Uzzah reached out to steady it. When his hand touched the ark, the “the Lord’s anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore, God struck him down, and he died there beside the ark of God” (2 Samuel 6:7). While this punishment may seem extreme to us, the Israelites had been warned for centuries that the ark of the covenant was holy to the Lord.

Only Levites could carry it, only high priests could minister before it, and no one was to look inside it (Exodus 40:20–21; Numbers 4:15; 1 Samuel 6:19).

David was angry over this incident and became afraid of the Lord, refusing to take the ark to Jerusalem himself. Instead of completing the journey to Jerusalem with the ark, David placed the ark in the home of a man named Obed-Edom the Gittite, and it remained there for three months (2 Samuel 6:10–11).

During the three months that the ark was in the possession of Obed-Edom, the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and his entire household (1 Chronicles 13:13–14). When King David saw that God had blessed rather than cursed Obed-Edom, his fear of transporting the ark dissipated and he went once again to retrieve the ark (1 Chronicles 15:25). This time he did according to God’s law and brought Levites to carry the ark on their shoulders.

He also showed utmost respect for the ark: “When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf” (2 Samuel 6:13).

One of the ways God blessed Obed-Edom was in giving him many sons—eight to be exact. First Chronicles 26:4–6 lists them and their own sons, along with their father, as gatekeepers in God’s temple. Obed-Edom named each of his sons in honor of God’s blessing on his household. For example, he named one son Jehozabad (“The Lord Has Given”) and another Issachar (“Reward”). Obed-Edom had sixty-two strong male heirs, and it appears that all were faithful to the Lord.

Although his was a minor role in Scripture, Obed-Edom is an example to us that God is fully aware of those whose hearts are wholly His (2 Chronicles 16:9), and He delights to bless those who honor Him (see 1 Samuel 2:30).

Verse 7 – “Peace be within your walls, Prosperity within your palaces.”

Within thy walls; in all thy dwellings. Within their palaces, especially in the court and the dwellings of the princes and rulers, whose welfare is a public blessing to all the people.

David teaches us to pray, (1.) For all the inhabitants in general, all within the walls, from the least to the greatest. Peace be within the walls; let them never be attacked, or, if they are attacked, let them never be taken, but be an effectual security to the city. (2.) For the princes and rulers especially: Let prosperity be in the palaces of the great men that sit at the helm and have the direction of public affairs; for, if they prosper, it will be well for the public.

This is a prayer for peace within the walls. Again, this can be speaking of the walls of physical Jerusalem, or it could be speaking of the walls of the church.

Verse 8 – “For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, “Peace be within you.”

For the sake of my brethren and companions: David prayed for blessings for those who loved and prayed for Jerusalem, but the blessing was not only for the individual but for the community of those who cared for the peace of Jerusalem, those who said, “Peace be within you.”

This Psalm started with someone asking David to go the house of the Lord. His brethren and companions, here, are the same as those mentioned (in the 1st verse), **“I was glad when they said to me”**. The psalmist narrows the focus—from Jerusalem’s walls and cities to his brothers and companions. He conveys the same blessing for peace to them. This is saying that all believers would benefit from the peace of Jerusalem. This is not a private place for just David to worship. It is a place for all who love God to worship.

Verse 9 – “Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good”.

a. Because of the house of the LORD our God: David understood that the gladness and goodness of the pilgrim toward God’s city was not primarily political in nature. It wasn’t because of loyalty to a political party, leader, or philosophy. It was because the house of the LORD was established there.

This has a special application for the Christian under the New Covenant. For us, the church is the house of the LORD, with Jesus the Head and Son of the house (Hebrews 3:6, Hebrews 10:21-22, 1 Peter 2:5, 1 Peter 4:17). What makes the church special is that it is God’s habitation, His house. His presence makes it special.

Hebrews 3:6 New Living Translation

“But Christ, as the Son, is in charge of God’s entire house. And we are God’s house, if we keep our courage and remain confident in our hope in Christ”.

Hebrews 10:21-22 New Living Translation

21 And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God’s house, **22** let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

1 Peter 2:5 New Living Translation

“And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What’s more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God”.

1 Peter 4:17 New Living Translation

“For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God’s household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God’s Good News”?

b. I will seek your good: Just as it was good for pilgrims in Israel to seek the good of Jerusalem for the sake of God’s house, so Christians today can and should seek the good of society for the sake of God’s house.

The psalmist tells us “I will seek your good”. I recall from one of Bishop Scales messages, the importance of seeing people first before seeing their conditions. With a heart of God, can we not see beyond the condition, and see what can be, see what God intends to be, and recall what we use to be, but God. “I will seek your good”.

In Conclusion

As believers and God’s people, we must pray for one another and for the ministry of the churches. We belong to each other, we need each other, and we must help each other. We must pray for peace within and among the churches. We must pray for the needs of our brothers and sisters and surely, we must pray for the lost.

A heart for God will surely be a heart filled with praise and prayer.

Resources:

The Leadership Bible NIV

Warren Wiersbe, Psalm 122

David Guzik, Psalm 122

Biblegateway.com

Bible-study.org/psalm 122

<https://www.gotquestions.org/ark-of-the-testimony.html>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Obed-Edom.html>