

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Psalm 24 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the psalm. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

PSALM 24:1-10 ESV

1 A Psalm of David. The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, 2 for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. 3 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. 5 He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. 6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah 7 Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. 8 Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle! 9 Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. 10 Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory! Selah

STRUCTURE

- I. Introduction: The battle belongs God because everything belongs to God (24:1-2)
 - a. Superscription: Davidic Authorship (24:1a)
 - b. Earth and its inhabitants belong to God (24:1b)
 - c. Even the waters of chaos and their associated "gods" belong to God, for He created all things (24:2)
- II. The battle belongs to the people of Yahweh who enter His temple in faith (24:3-6)
 - a. Only holy people can enter God's temple (24:3-4)
 - b. Holiness is not achieved by effort, but received as a gift to seekers (24:5-6)
- III. The battle belongs to the King of Glory who enters His temple in victory (24:7-10)
 - a. God enters His temple-throne after defeating His enemies (24:7, 9)
 - b. God's temple-rule manifested in earthly battle (24:8, 10)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

At first glance, this appears to be three songs mashed together: a song about God's ownership of all (24:1-2), followed by a song about entering God's temple (24:3-6), and at last, a song about the King of Glory, victorious in battle (24:7-10). It's not until we observe the way each piece fits together that we can understand the message of the song.

The first stanza (24:1-2) is not merely about God's ownership of all peoples and territories; in context, it is about the way His ownership over these permits Him to hand peoples and territories over to whom He will. Because the earth belongs to the LORD, so does the battle. The second verse hints at whom the Israelites are in conflict with. The Canaanite gods, Yam and Nahar, oversee the sea and the rivers—the very regions David emphasizes in verse 2, which are associated with Yahweh, the Creator God. The first two verses thus highlight the victory of Yahweh over false gods of chaos (waters are associated with chaos in the Bible and in Ancient Near Eastern literature), since the Creator owns all peoples and territories and does with them as He pleases.

Overall, the first stanza serves as an introduction to the rest of the Psalm. These two verses are different from the other two stanzas. The second and third stanzas both begin with a question, and both questions are associated with entry into God's temple. Since the temple (in Hebrew thought) doubles as God's throne room, the emphasis on God's sovereignty serves as a sensible introduction. The God who reigns over all (24:1-2) reigns from His temple (24:3-6), and He reigns over enemies (24:7-10). The second and third stanza are secondarily marked by the common hymnic command, "Selah" (24:6, 10).

Both the second and third stanzas center on entry into the temple. Just like the third stanza heightens the tension with a question—"Who is this King of Glory?"—so does the second stanza: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in His holy place" (24:7)? At first this seems to be irrelevant to the theme of battle, which is alluded to in the first stanza and addressed powerfully in the third. It does relate, however, for it shows the contrast between Yahweh's enemies (stanzas 1, 3) and His friends (stanza 2). Yahweh's enemies belong to Him, for all peoples and territories do (stanza 1), and He hands them over in battle as He sees fit (stanza 3). Yahweh's friends belong to Him in a unique way, however (stanza 2). We belong to Him, not merely by way of Creation, but by way of Redemption (which is alluded to by the word "salvation" in 24:5) and of covenant (which is alluded to by the word "blessing" in 24:5). Our covenant relationship with God not only gives us victory in battle (stanzas 1, 3), but also enables us to draw near in worship (stanza 2). Victory in battle is an expression of our covenant with God. Because we belong to Him (by covenant), He gives us victory over those who belong to Him (by creation but not covenant). O, to be in covenant with God! What could be more powerful than the oath of an omnipotent Being? To be branded by God's promise? Because God is sovereign, He wins. Because He covenants with His people—we win too.

The sovereign victory of Yahweh was only foreshadowed by Israel's victories in battle. The greater victory was secured not by David, but by our greater David; not by the ascension of the ark to the earthly temple, but by the ascension of Jesus to the heavenly temple. Psalm 24 has been viewed throughout church history as an ascension Psalm and is often sung on Ascension Day. Here is what Justin Martyr said about it in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (2nd century):

"When our Christ rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, the rulers in heaven, under appointment of God, are commanded to open the gates of heaven, that He who is King of glory may enter in, and having ascended, may sit on the right hand of the Father until He makes the enemies His footstool... For when the rulers of heaven saw Him of uncomely and dishonoured appearance, and inglorious not recognising Him, they inquired, 'Who is this King of glory?' And the Holy Spirit... answers them, 'The Lord of hosts, He is this King of glory.'"

Wooooowww!

After Jesus rose from the dead, He maintained His lowly appearance for a time, even being mistaken as a gardener (John 20:15). It's not until after He ascended that He received glory in place of humiliation (Phil. 2:5-11). Justin Martyr thus pictures a lowly Jesus appearing at the gates of heaven, almost unrecognized by the celestial gatekeepers of God's heavenly temple before the Holy Spirit identifies Him: "The Lord of hosts, the King of glory!" O, to behold such a scene! A lowly Jesus, still bearing the wounds of crucifixion (cf. Jn. 20:27; Rev. 5:6), demanding by His earned righteousness and victory over death, entry into God's heavenly temple! What was it like, the moment God the Father glorified Him with the glory He had from before the foundation of the world (Jn. 17:5)?

Justin Martyr only interprets the final stanza as typologically pointing to Jesus. How does the rest of Psalm 24 point to Him? After Christ's resurrection, He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me"—in fulfillment of Psalm 24:1-2, where the resurrected Christ would become a Second Adam, reigning over all creation as God intended (Gen. 1:26-28). After Jesus' resurrection, He ascended God's "holy hill" with perfectly clean hands and pure heart, became our high priest, and granted us His "blessing" and "righteousness" and "salvation" (Ps. 24:5-6), in order that we might approach the Father, even as He had. Finally, the moment of Christ's ascension is portrayed, as Justin Martyr so eloquently expressed, in the final stanza, where the King of Glory returns to His temple, having defeated the principalities and powers of darkness on the battlefield of the Cross.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 A Psalm of David. The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, 2 for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

—"A Psalm of David":

- This song was likely sung by Israelites celebrating victory in battle (24:8, 10) by returning the ark of the covenant—a symbol of God's presence—to the sanctuary. They would have often brought the ark with them into the battlefield (1 Sam. 14:18; 2 Sam. 11:11) and returned it after God gave them victory. David, being familiar with battle, would have penned this song to tell this story and continue the celebration.

- Spurgeon: "From the title we learn nothing but the authorship: but this is interesting and leads us to observe the wondrous operations of the Spirit upon the mind of Israel's sweet singer, enabling him to touch the mournful string in Psalm twenty-two, to pour forth gentle notes of peace in Psalm twenty-three, and here to utter majestic and triumphant strains. We can do or sing all things when the Lord strengtheneth us."
- The song also looks forward to the coming of our greater "David"—Jesus—who gave us victory on the battlefield of the cross and then ascended into the heavenly temple to apply His sacrifice (Heb. 9:11-14, 24-26) and continually intercede for us (Heb. 7:25). David was king, but his descendant, Jesus, is the "King of glory" of whom David sang. Many churches sing this on Ascension Day.

—"the earth is the LORD's... the world":

- These statements run in parallel. All territory and all people belong to God.
- Paul quotes this in the 1 Cor. 10: 25 *Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 26 For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."* The context for Paul's quote of Psalm 24:1 apparently has nothing to do with battle (as Psalm 24 does) but rather with the ethical question of meat sacrificed to idols. Paul says that meat sold in the meat market belongs to the Lord, regardless of whether it's been sacrificed to idols. An idol does not have any rightful claim on meat sacrificed to it. (He does present other circumstances in which it is not appropriate to eat meat sacrificed to idols, however.)
- One might argue that Paul is proof texting (using a verse for a different purpose than intended), but I would argue he is not. While the direct context is not battle in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul does reflect an understanding that Psalm 24 is about Yahweh's victory over false gods (and the demons behind them). Thus, when he applies the quote from Psalm 24 in 1 Corinthians 10, he is emphasizing that Jesus Christ has conquered every demonic power and the "gods" they represented, which means we need not concern ourselves with them. Therefore, 1 Corinthians 10 technically is about battle—the finished battle of Jesus!—and its ethical implications on a church in Corinth.

—"and the fullness thereof... those who dwell therein":

- These two phrases also run in parallel. The first emphasizes that everything on the earth is God's; the second that everybody on earth is God's. All people and all things—all are God's.
- Spurgeon: "The 'fulness' of the earth may mean its harvests, its wealth, its life, or its worship; in all these senses the Most High God is Possessor of all."

—"for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers":

- Why does the earth belong to God? David's answer: because He made it.
- When something belongs to me, I can do with it as I please. For instance, if I create a clay pot and then destroy it, that's my prerogative. If, on the other hand, I visit your home and destroy your clay pot, I have wronged you. I have destroyed that which does not belong to me. In the same manner, God can destroy in battle any nation He pleases; He created the nations. This is David's reasoning in beginning the Psalm this way.
- But why does David not just say that? Why does he talk specifically about "the seas" and "the rivers"? In context, David states that the earth belongs to God because—we discover later—the battle belongs to God. The "earth" is His territory and the "people" are His possession. He gives territories and peoples to whomever He wishes—all belong to Him. Furthermore, pagans divided "territories" among the gods, with one possessing the rivers, another the valleys, and another the mountains. It is likely that David sings about victory over the Canaanite gods, Yam and Nahar (also called, "Prince Sea" and "Judge River").
- David is basically talking trash to his enemies: "Your false god is nothing before mine; my God founded the seas and established the earth on rivers." In other words, "My God is the boss of your god. That's why we destroyed you in battle." In the Jewish (and Christian) understanding false gods were understood to be demons (Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37). Yahweh triumphs over demons.
- Ross: "In Canaanite mythology the forces of nature were deified, two of them identified as Prince Sea (Yam) and Judge River (Nahar), the precise words used in the verse. These deities were powerful forces of the underworld to the pagans, but to the Israelites they were simply forces of nature that God had created and controlled when he established land. Since they were venerated as spirit forces by the Canaanites, Israel could single them out in the praise of the LORD's sovereignty, to stress that in defeating the Canaanites, the LORD demonstrated his sovereignty over their gods as well."

- Ross: "In general, we find an emphasis in the Old Testament that the LORD establishes his sovereign creation by victory over the waters of chaos. Accordingly, the psalm begins with a shout of victory over the chaos, real or imagined, in the Canaanite world."
- I am reminded of Isaiah 43:3-4, where God hands over entire nations for the sake of His own people: *"3 For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. 4 Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life."*
- By covenant, Yahweh is the God of Israel; by creation, Yahweh is the God of all.

3 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

—The "hill of the LORD" was the Jewish manner of referring to the temple mount (which is about 2500 feet above sea level). David's two questions mean the same thing: who can enter Yahweh's temple? The first question focuses more on approaching Yahweh's temple; the second, on remaining there. The answer to both is the same. Unless one is holy, he can neither approach nor remain in the temple of the LORD.

—Spurgeon: "It is uphill work for the creature to reach the Creator. Where is the mighty climber who can scale the towering heights? Nor is it height alone; it is glory too. Whose eye shall see the King in his beauty and dwell in his palace? In heaven he reigns most gloriously, who shall be permitted to enter into his royal presence?"

—Luther: "It is not he who sings so well or so many Psalms, nor he who fasts or watches so many days, nor he who divides his own among the poor, nor he who preaches to others, nor he who lives quietly, kindly, and friendly; nor, in fine, is it he who knows all sciences and languages, nor he who works all virtuous and all good works that ever any man spoke or read of, but it is he alone, who is pure within and without."

—"He who has clean hands and a pure heart": the one who can enter God's temple must be perfect in both motive (heart) and action (hands). Only God can enter God's temple! Verse 6 will qualify this, however. God can qualify whomever He pleases. More on that in a moment.

—"who does not lift up his soul to what is false":

- For "lift up his soul", see commentary below on 24:7-10. There is a link between "lift up his soul" and "lift up your heads, O gates".
- Kidner: "The meaning of 'lift up his soul' is enlightened by Ps. 25:1, where it is parallel to trust." Ps. 25:1-2: *"1 Of David. To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. 2 O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me."* The Canaanites trusted in / lifted up their souls to idols. Therefore, they (1) could not enter God's presence, and they (2) lost in battle.
- "Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, not sworn deceitfully" (NKJV); "who do not worship idols and never tell lies" (NLT); "who do not trust in an idol or swear by a false god" (NIV); "who has not appealed to what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully" (CSB); "who has not lifted up his soul to deceit and has not sworn deceitfully" (NASB); "who hath not lift up to vanity his soul nor hath sworn deceit" (YLT).
 - The word "idol" is not present, but many translators assume David intends it by the language, "what is false"—because idols are false.
 - In context, I agree with those who understand this to be about idolatry. Remember, the first and third stanzas emphasize Yahweh's reign over false gods. The picture we have is of Israel bringing the ark into battle, while Canaanites bring (or swear by) their idols. The Canaanites cannot win the battle (stanzas 1, 3) because they cannot even approach Yahweh's presence (stanza 2). The battle belongs to Yahweh AND to those who *are* Yahweh's. Put differently, the battle belongs to Yahweh and to those who belong to Yahweh.

—One might argue that David is not using "clean hands" and "pure heart" (etc.) in the sense of possessing ethical perfection, but rather in the sense of being relatively holy. In other words, those who aren't even trying to be holy can't enter God's presence, but those who are trying their best to live for God can. Does this interpretation pass muster?

- I don't believe so. First, we know that "relative righteousness" is by no means sufficient for standing in the presence of God. "If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O LORD, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared" (Ps. 130:3-4). Only forgiven people can stand in God's presence, which sets us up for a second point.
- Second, verse 5 clarifies that the only "righteousness" by which we can stand in God's presence (in answer to the question of v. 3) is one that is "received" and is associated with "salvation."

- In sum, it is not my relative holiness that enables me to stand in God's presence. Relative to God, we are all unholy! Rather, it is perfect holiness that enables me to stand in God's presence; this holiness is one that I "receive" by faith.

5 He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. 6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah

—No impure human can enter God's presence, but verses 5-6 qualify this statement, allowing for "those who seek Him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob" to enter, and to "receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation."

—How can this be? Because purification was provided for seekers. Priests would wash their hands ("clean hands", v. 5) and make sacrifices ("a pure heart", v. 5) before entering the holy place. Built into the Mosaic Law was provision for all of us who have filthy hands and corrupt hearts. Thus, Levites would enter God's presence, purified. When verse 6 mentions "those who seek Him," it speaks of those who seek Him in accordance with the Law of Moses—by ritual cleansing and sacrifice.

—Priests who entered sought God by ritual washing. This pointed forward to Christian baptism, which itself symbolizes the washing of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:5: "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit."

—Priests who entered sought God by blood sacrifices. The altar at the entry of the temple foreshadowed the Cross, which stands between God and humanity. Those who wish to enter God's presence do so by the sacrifice, not of animals (in accordance with the Old Covenant), but of God's own Son (in accordance with the New Covenant). Humanity enters God's presence by means of the Cross, which purifies our hearts on a level that no animal sacrifice ever could. *Hebrews 10:11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*

—"blessing from the LORD... righteousness from the God of his salvation":

- The blessing David sings of must be the blessing of Abraham (which later became part of the Aaronic priestly blessing in Num. 6:22-27), by which he became a father of many nations (cf. Gen. 12:1-3). God's blessing of Abraham is tied to His original blessing of creation, which carried procreative power (Gen. 1:22, 28). Abraham and Sarah were made to conceive, and just like in creation, God called "into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom. 4:17). This is Paul's commentary on Sarah's miraculous conception; he links it to creation. Through God's covenant with Abraham, God began His "new creation" project. This "procreative power" was not just physical, but spiritual, extending God's friendship to every tongue, tribe, and nation. When David sings of blessing, He has this covenant in mind; he has the Gospel in mind.
- There is a world of difference between "blessing" and "blessings." All things we possess—from homes, to cars, to gadgetry to love—could be called blessings. But the "blessing" is the Gospel, passed through Abraham, by covenant, to the nations (cf. Gal. 3:8). When we seek the Father, in Christ, by the Spirit, we are "blessed with every spiritual blessing" (Eph. 1:3).
- That David has the Gospel in mind, and not just everyday blessings, is clarified by the next light: "righteousness from the God of his salvation." True blessing is the righteousness that comes by faith. In the context of approaching God's holy place, this is no doubt the "blessing" David has in mind. We could possess all the blessings in the world, but if we lack this blessing, we lack everything. On the other hand, we could possess none of the world's blessings, but if we have the blessing of knowing the Triune God, we possess everything.

—"generation":

- Spurgeon: "He who longs to see his friend when he passes takes care to clear the mist from the window, lest by any means his friend should go by unobserved. Really awakened souls seek the Lord above everything, and as this is not the usual desire of mankind, they constitute a generation by themselves; a people despised of men but beloved of God."
- Calvin, commenting on the generation that seeks His face: "the psalmist erases from the catalogue of the servants of God all counterfeit Israelites, who, trusting only to their circumcision and the

sacrifice of beasts, have no concern about offering themselves to God; and yet, at the same time, they rashly thrust themselves into the church.

—“Jacob”:

- Some translations render this, “Seek your face, O God of Jacob,” while others translate it, “Seek your face, O Jacob.” Literally, it is the latter. In a struggle to unpack the abruptness of Jacob’s name in this line, most translators think David was intending to talk about seeking the face of the God of Jacob.
- Others have seen “Jacob” has a reference not to God, but to God’s people. In full, the line would read like this: “This is the generation / seeking him // seeking your face / Jacob” (Ross). In rendering it like this, “Jacob” is parallel with this “generation.” If this is right, perhaps God’s people are called “Jacob” here for the way they, like he, sought blessing from the LORD in an intense wrestling match (Gen. 32:22-32). If so, Jacob’s example of wrestling with God offers a picture of what “seeking your face” really looks like. It is a struggle!
- I lean toward the latter understanding because both “blessing” (Ps. 24:5) and “face” (24:6) appear in the wrestling narrative with Jacob (Gen. 32:26, 29, 30). This encourages me because I often feel like Jacob, wrestling with God in the middle of the night—conflict both within and without. “Seeking” is rarely just a calm, restful activity for me. Second, it encourages me because I am far more like Jacob than the person in 24:3 with clean hands and a pure heart. Like Jacob, my unrighteousness is ever before me. Jacob is an example to all of us that it is only by grace that we can approach the house of God. In Genesis 28, Jacob named the place “Bethel”—house of God—because God descended to meet him. This stood in contrast with Genesis 11, where Babylonians tried to ascend to meet God. Psalm 24 touches on the same themes. Who can ascend the hill of the LORD? On our own, none of us. We need God’s blessing, God’s righteousness, God’s salvation (24:5-6). In short, we needed God to come down to us before we could go up to Him. Praise God, He has done this through Jesus!

—“seek”:

- See comments above under, “Jacob”.
- Ross: “The verb ‘seek’ means ‘to inquire, seek, investigate.’ It is a significant word for worshipful acts in the Bible, referring to the diligent pursuit of the LORD, sometime (sic) to find out something from the LORD (as in going to inquire of the LORD).”

—“Selah”:

- Selah means, “Pause, and think calmly of that.” If we want to live healthy lives, spiritually and emotionally, we must “Selah” more. We must pause and think—but not about just anything. We must bridle our minds to think the thoughts of God; to meditate on His Word; to dwell on His character and works.
- In context, we are to dwell on the blessing of the Gospel: on the blessing of righteousness and salvation we receive from Christ through faith-filled seeking (24:5-6); on the purifying of our every thought and deed in order that we might enter God’s presence (24:3-4); on God’s possession of the whole world, which makes the sacrifice of the Cross all that more wondrous (24:1-2); on the victory of Christ over our enemies in the ascension (24:7-10).

7 Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. 8 Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle! 9 Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. 10 Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory! Selah

—David pictures the Israelites returning from battle (24:8: “strong and mighty... mighty in battle”; 24:10: “The LORD of hosts”).

—The tone of this return is one of celebration. They are celebrating a victory.

—They are also returning to the tabernacle. This explains why David sings about ascending the hill of the LORD and standing in His holy place (24:3). It additionally explains why David commands the gates and doors to be opened (24:7, 9).

—David doesn’t ask for the gates to be open merely so that the worshipers of Yahweh could enter, however. While context clues suggest that Israel is returning from battle in victory, David’s request is for the gates to be opened for “the King of glory” (5x in 24:7-10). This strongly suggests that they had brought the ark of the covenant with them into battle—the centerpiece of the temple—and now they are returning it. Israel would sometimes do this in battle. Sometimes they fell into treating the ark like a good luck charm, which

did not go well (2 Sam. 4). At other times, as here, they brought the ark as a way of expressing their wholehearted trust that the battle belongs to God.

—The ark of the covenant was unique. The centerpiece of every other temple in the ancient near east was an idol/image. This image represented the “god” on the earth. They would even hold a dedication service, where they invited the god to vivify the image. Supposedly, the image would sometimes even speak (cf. Rev. 13). In Judaism, the center of the temple was not an image because man was made in God’s image. We are His “vivified” representatives on the earth, which God originally created as a cosmic temple (one day, it will again become a cosmic temple). His original intention was that we would be fruitful, multiply, and subdue—imaging Him from Eden to the ends of the earth and making the whole planet look like Eden; like God was in charge. We of course failed in that, but God will achieve it once again in the New Heavens and New Earth.

—Now, back to my thoughts about the ark. As I said, God didn’t need an “image” of Himself in a manmade temple, for His intention is to make the earth His temple, filled with an image not made by human hands—us! So what went in the temple instead? The ark of the covenant. As the ark “of the covenant,” it held within it the stone tablets of the Decalogue. Unlike the pagans, who worshiped their God with murder, fornication, and the like, Yahweh is worshiped only by holy worshipers who obey His law. Unfortunately, like Adam and Eve in the original cosmic temple, we broke God’s law. But God provides the answer through blood, sprinkled on the mercy seat, which sits atop the ark. Interestingly, when the New Testament refers to Christ as our “propitiation” (Rom. 3:25), this is the Greek word for “mercy seat.” Jesus is our mercy seat!

—So the centerpiece of Israel’s worship was the ark, which held the law, which we broke, but which God propitiates through the blood of His Son Jesus.

—The ark not only brought together God’s perfect law and lavish mercy; it also provided a throne for God (1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; Ezek. 10:1; etc.). In Jewish thought, one could not distinguish between the throne and the temple, for wherever God dwells, He also reigns. It’s no wonder, then, that David sings of “the King of Glory” (5x) while entering the tabernacle. He is returning the throne of God to the house of God.

—Perhaps, notably, the cherubim (whose outstretched wings extend over the mercy seat) are called, “the cherubim of glory” (Heb. 9:5). The King of glory has a throne surrounded by cherubim of Glory.

—“Who is this King of Glory?”:

- Poetically, this question matches the earlier one, “Who may ascend the hill of the LORD?”
- The structure of question-asking reinforces the point that only perfect holiness can dwell in God’s house. Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? The King of Glory alone is worthy. But this King is merciful—He saves and sanctifies those who seek Him in faith (24:5-6). For this reason, when the King enters His temple throne room, the gates swing wide for the throng of worshipers following Him. These worshipers have been made holy by faith.
- “glory” was sometimes associated with the ark of the covenant (see 1 Sam. 4).

—“Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in” (24:7, 9).

- There appears to be a play on words with “lift up” (Heb. *nasa*). Besides being used at the end of the song to speak to the gates/doors being lifted up, we also find it in verse 3, where the one who enters God’s temple is the one who has not “lifted up his soul” to falsehood/vanity—an idol (Ps. 24:4). The word also appears in 24:5, where it is rendered, “he shall receive” [a blessing]. The Young’s Literal Translation renders it, “He beareth away a blessing...”—which helps us see the relationship between “lifted up” and “he shall receive.” The blessing is received, borne, lifted, and carried away by such a person.
- Ross: “In this meaning of ‘lift up,’ there are some figurative uses. It is used for ‘lifting the eyes,’ meaning look closely (Ps. 121:1), or lifting the voice, meaning speak loudly (Isa. 52:8). One may lift up the name of the LORD in vain, meaning use the name falsely (Ex. 20:7; and perhaps the earlier part of Ps. 24). One can also lift up the soul to the LORD, meaning direct the mind and will to him (Ps. 25:1). The LORD is said to lift his hand, meaning to demonstrate his power (Ps. 10:12). A person might have his head lifted up, meaning restored to power (Gen. 41:13), and here in Psalm 24 the call is for the gates to lift their heads.”
- So what is the play on words trying to accomplish?
 - In the prior stanza, it relates to the one who does not lift his soul to vanity and therefore lifts/carries away a blessing. It refers to the blessed person who is made holy by faith, able to approach God’s holy temple.
 - In the present stanza, it relates to the gates that must be opened wide (“lift up your heads... be lifted up!”) for the “King of Glory.”

- In both cases, being “lifted up” relates to entrance to God’s temple. No one is allowed to enter (or stand) in God’s temple if he has lifted his soul to falsehood; the gates will not be lifted for such a one.
- Both the holy “King of Glory” and the worshipers-made-holy-by-faith can enter God’s house. The play on words means that the gate of God’s house will only be lifted up to those who don’t lift their souls to another. Put differently, only holy people are welcomed in God’s holy house. Thankfully, through the blood of Jesus, we are made holy and can enter His house with Him, sharing in His victory over sin, death, and false gods.

—“ancient doors”: some have suggested that this designation puts the song under Solomon’s reign, rather than David’s, as if “ancient doors” must relate to the temple and not just the tabernacle. I disagree.

According to the subscript, David wrote the Psalm, which I take at face value. David would not have returned an ark to the temple during Solomon’s reign. Furthermore, “ancient” could just as well refer to the tabernacle, which was first built under Moses, about four hundred years earlier. Finally, “ancient doors” could refer to the heavenly tabernacle/temple, after which earthly copies were modeled.

—On that note, this song is typologically fulfilled in Jesus—especially His ascent into heaven. The Book of Hebrews often portrays Jesus’ ascent as entrance into God’s heavenly temple.

- *“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:11-14).*
- *“For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Now was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with the blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (9:24-26).*
- Jesus is portrayed as both priest and sacrifice.

—How does Jesus fulfill the details of Psalm 24?

- Jesus possesses the whole world, for He created it (Ps. 24:1-2; John 1:1-5), and by virtue of resurrection, He has authority over it (Matt. 28:18).
- Yet He humbled Himself to become a human being—with hands kept perfectly clean and heart perfectly pure and soul perfectly true—in order to enter God’s heavenly tabernacle and bless Jacob’s descendants through the Gospel of His perfect life, sacrificial death, victorious resurrection, and priestly ascension (Ps. 24:3-6; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 9:11-14, 24-26).
- Jesus is the King of Glory who flings wide heaven’s gates so that all the descendants of Jacob might enter and stand in God’s holy presence forever (Ps. 24:7-10; Rev. 1:5; 19:16; 21:25).
- Spurgeon: “The picture is highly poetical, and shows how wide heaven’s gate is set by the ascension of our Lord. Blessed be God, the gates have never been shut since. The opened gates of heaven invite the weakest believer to enter.”