

# Psalm 134

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*

## 1. Introduction

Psalm 134 is the shortest of the Songs of Ascents. It could be easily overlooked as a Cinderella Psalm, a “Tail End Charlie”. It is, however, the proper climax to the fifteen Songs. “The Songs of Ascents, which began in the alien surroundings of Meshech and Kedar (Ps. 120), end fittingly on the note of serving God ‘day and night within his temple’” (Kidner). So we are not to think that Ps. 134 is dismissing pilgrims at the end of the festival. Rather, Ps. 134 is their homecoming song. They “stand”, i.e. they remain in God’s house.

The word “bless” is the keynote of the Psalm, appearing in each verse. In vv. 1-2 it is the assembled people of God who acknowledge that God is blessed; in verse 3 it is the high priest who pronounces the blessing of the LORD upon the people.

Remember the connection between the Songs of Ascents and the Aaronic Blessing (Num. 6:24-26) the first two words of which (“The LORD bless you...”) are identical to the first two words of verse 3. Thus we have in the Psalm the people of God engaged in their chief end, i.e. glorifying God (“Bless the LORD, you servants of the LORD!” vv. 1-2) and enjoying him (“The LORD bless you!” v. 3). The Psalm also reflects on the threefold promise to Abraham of people (“the servants of the LORD”), land (“in the house of the LORD”) and blessing (“the LORD bless you”).

Compare the Psalm with Ephesians 1:3-4, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love.”

## 2. Structure

Stanza 1 comprises verses 1 and 2 – in it worship (God’s blessedness is acknowledged) is directed upwards from earth to heaven. After the attention grabbing “Behold!”, the stanza is 14 words long. The stanza opens and closes with the imperative “Bless the LORD!” The middle words are “in the house of the LORD”.

Stanza 2 comprises v. 3 – in it blessing is pronounced from heaven upon earth.

## 3. Notes

### (a) *Bless the LORD!* (vv. 1-2)

To bless God is not to benefit God or to wish God well. It is to acknowledge that God is utterly blessed in and of himself. God does not need his creatures in any way. God’s triune life is life in all its fullness – an infinite ocean of life – perfect life which lacks nothing. Such is the perfection of God’s life as Father, Son and Spirit, that rather than need to receive anything, it belongs to him to give himself. This is the foundation on which we stand. Our being, life, and ability to act, are established upon God’s blessedness. When we “bless the LORD” we are simply acknowledging (gladly and joyfully) who God is.

Worship also says who we are – that we are God’s *servants*. Worship keeps before our eyes the distinction between the Creator and his creatures. It’s true (Eph. 1:5) that in love God has predestined us to be his adopted children – but adoption does not make us gods. We are still creatures, and as creatures our calling is to serve.

“Standing” is the posture of servants. There were no seats in the temple furniture on which the priests could sit. Only Jesus sits in the presence of God, because his sacrificial work in complete (Hebrews 10:11-14).

“The house of the LORD” has been the focus of the Songs of Ascents – see especially Psalms 122, 127, 132. It was to rebuild the house of the LORD in Jerusalem that Cyrus issued his decree that any willing Jew was to “go up”, literally “let him *ascend*” – the same root as “the songs of *ascents*” (2 Chron. 36:23). The house of the LORD was (supposed to be) at the centre of the life of Israel.

“Through the night” – the word “night” is plural, and may mean “night after night”. The LORD does not slumber or sleep, and his praise is to be uninterrupted. Levitical singers were on duty night and day in the temple offering up songs of thanksgiving and praise (1 Chron. 9:33; 23:30).

“Lift up your hands *in the holy place*” may be translated “lift up your hands *in holiness*” i.e. “worshipping in holiness”. This may be behind 2 Timothy 2:8, “lifting up holy hands”. “Raising the hands is a gesture of dependence on the LORD that complements direct worship of the LORD, and in a way constitutes worship because it connotes that dependence” (Goldingay).

### (b) *The LORD bless you!* (v. 3)

The opening two words of v. 3 are identical to the opening two words of the Aaronic Blessing – the part stands for the whole. Four elements of the Aaronic Blessing have appeared throughout the Songs of Ascents (i.e. the LORD (a) bless you, (b) keep you, (c) be gracious to you, (d) give you peace). Returning to the opening words is a fitting way to conclude the Songs. Since this is the Aaronic Blessing, we assume that the speaker in v. 3 is the high priest. This is Jesus, setting his Father’s name upon us, so that we are blessed indeed.

The “you” is singular. “He exhorts many to bless, and Himself blesses one, because He makes one out of many, since ‘it is good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in one.’ ... Let none of you say, It comes not to me. Do you know of whom he speaks, ‘the Lord bless you out of Zion.’ He blessed one. Be one, and the blessing comes to you” (Augustine).

The LORD is the Maker of heaven and earth who alone is able to bless (cf. the Creator’s blessings in Genesis 1:22,28; 2:3). “Worship at Zion is a doorway that opens out into the power behind the world” (Allen). Worship of the living God (vv. 1-2) makes us more human (v. 3) – in contrast, worship of the “no-gods” of the world makes us less and less human (cf. Psalm 115; Matthew 10:39; 16:25).

God’s blessing is “from Zion” – “not ‘far off’; not ‘in heaven’, nor ‘beyond the sea’, but ‘very near you’ (Dt. 30:11-14; cf. Rom. 10:6ff.). His true Mount Zion is, as Hebrews 12:22-24 shows, where ‘Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant’, reigns in the midst of his people. In the words of the previous psalm, ‘There the Lord has commanded the blessing, life for evermore’” (Kidner).