

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Session 20, Sacred Sites, Personal Seasons – Psalm 73

20-min. Podcast Audio Overview

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Hey there, ready for a deep dive into the Psalms? Always. You've come to the right place. We're going to explore them in a way that might surprise you.

Using the lectures of a brilliant Old Testament scholar, Dr. Bruce Waltke, as our guide. Sounds fascinating. Now get this: the central idea weaving through all of his lectures is this.

The temple in ancient Israel. Okay. It wasn't just some random building.

It was designed as a physical representation of heaven itself. It's like a model of the cosmos right here on earth. You're saying it was built to help people connect with the divine.

That's what the temple was all about. Mind blown, and that completely changes how we see the Psalms. Think of it like this: the temple is the stage, and the Psalms are the script and the music for this epic sacred opera.

That's a great analogy. Now Dr. Waltke uses Psalm 73 to illustrate this point beautifully. He talks about the psalmist going on this intense journey, almost like climbing down a ladder of faith, rung by rung, until he reaches a point of real crisis.

Yeah, so let's climb down this ladder with the psalmist. What's the first step he takes? Dr. Waltke calls it a keyhole theology. Keyhole theology.

Yeah, imagine peering through a keyhole. Okay. And trying to understand an entire room.

Yeah. Based on that tiny glimpse. I see.

That's what the psalmist is doing. Okay. He's looking at the world through this very limited lens of his own personal experiences, seeing the wicked prospering while the righteous suffer.

So he's essentially judging God based on a very narrow slice of reality. Right. Have you ever found yourself doing that? Oh, yeah.

Maybe making a judgment about a situation or a person without having the full picture. Sure. How did that affect your understanding? It happens to all of us.

It's human nature. I guess so. To try and make sense of things.

Yeah. Based on what we see immediately in front of us. Right.

You know. And that limited perspective leads the psalmist to the second step on the ladder. Envy.

He starts to covet what the wicked have. Yeah. Focusing on material wealth and possessions instead of God.

Mm-hmm. It's like he's created a false God out of their prosperity. And that's where things get really dangerous.

Oh, so. Because when we place our desires on things that can't truly satisfy us. Yeah.

We set ourselves up for disappointment. It's like trying to fill a bottomless pit with sand. Yeah.

No matter how much you pour in, it's never enough. Exactly. And Dr. Waltke connects this to the experience of early Christians.

Oh, interesting. As described by the Apostle Paul in 2nd Corinthians. Remember, Paul himself acknowledged the struggle with suffering.

Saying that they were hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed.

Perplexed, but not in despair. Wow. Even those with strong faith can be shaken by doubts.

So true. And for the psalmist, this doubt ultimately takes him to the third step. Okay.

He loses his footing. Oh. He's on the verge of giving up on God altogether because the world just seems too unfair.

He's at a breaking point. Right. But then something remarkable happens.

Okay. He chooses to enter the temple. Ah.

So the temple is like a lifeline for him. It is. It's where he turns in the midst of his crisis.

But what is it about the temple that sparks this shift in him? Well, remember, the temple is designed as a model of heaven. Right. A visual representation of God's presence and power.

Okay. So stepping into the temple is like stepping out of the chaos and confusion of the world and into a sacred space. It's like hitting the pause button on all the noise and distractions of life.

Exactly. And entering a zone of peace and tranquility. Exactly.

And it's in this sacred space that the psalmist begins his journey. Okay. Back up the ladder of faith.

Dr. Waltke outlines seven key steps in this upward climb. The first step is recognizing that internal conflict. Yeah.

That inability to reconcile the prosperity of the wicked with the idea of a just and loving God. So he's still wrestling with those doubts and questions. He is.

But now he's choosing to bring that struggle into the presence of God. Yes. He's not running away from it.

He's facing it head-on. That's a crucial point. Okay.

The temple isn't just a place to go when you have it all figured out. Right. It's a place to go when you're hurting, when you're confused, when you need answers.

It's a sanctuary. Exactly. A place of refuge.

Exactly. And it's in this sanctuary that the psalmist experiences the second step. Okay.

A profound encounter with God's presence. Right. He pours out his heart, expressing his pain, his doubts, his frustrations.

And it's through this outpouring that he begins to find healing and understanding. You got it. So the temple becomes a place where he can be completely honest with God.

Yes. Where he can drop the mask and just be himself. Exactly.

That's so powerful. What happens next? The third step is all about gaining a new perspective. Okay.

The temple with its intricate design and symbolism. It helps the psalmist to see beyond his limited keyhole view of the world. Right.

He starts to grasp the idea that there's a bigger picture. Okay. A divine plan that he's not fully privy to.

It's like suddenly realizing that you've been watching a movie on a tiny screen. Yes. And then someone throws open the curtains to reveal a giant IMAX screen.

Exactly. With incredible detail and scope. Yeah.

You see things you never even noticed before. You've got it. And that shift in perspective leads him to the fourth step.

Okay. A humbling realization. What is that? He recognizes that he's been acting like an animal driven by base desires and cravings.

I see. Instead of what truly matters. So it's a moment of self-awareness.

Yes. Of recognizing his own shortcomings. Right.

And acknowledging that he's been looking in the wrong places for fulfillment. Exactly. And this humbling realization sets the stage for the fifth step.

Right. Which is recognizing God's guidance. The psalmist begins to understand that God has been present with him all along.

Even in the midst of his suffering. It's like the wilderness experience of the Exodus. They went through intense trials and hardships.

Yeah. But God was always there guiding them, providing for them, shaping them into the people they were meant to be. That's a perfect parallel.

It is. The psalmist realizes that his trials haven't been pointless. They've been part of a larger process of refinement.

Right. A journey that God has been orchestrating all along. And this leads him to step six.

What's that? A profound shift in his desires. Okay. The ultimate satisfaction in God alone.

It's a complete transformation of his heart. It is. He realizes that nothing on earth can compare to the richness of knowing God.

Right. And experiencing his love. That's incredible.

From envying the wicked to finding his ultimate fulfillment in God. Talk about a turnaround. What's the final step in this upward climb? Step seven is all about affirmation.

The temple, with all its symbolism and grandeur, serves as a powerful reminder of these newfound truths. So the temple is more than just a place of worship. It is.

It's a concrete, tangible expression of God's reality. Yes. A symbol of everything the psalmist has come to understand about God through his journey.

It's like a giant exclamation point on his newfound faith. And that, I think, is the key to understanding the power of the psalms. Oh, how so? They're not just, um, abstract poems or songs.

Okay. They're expressions of lived experience. Right.

Deeply intertwined with the physical space and rituals of the temple. You're right. The temple isn't just a backdrop to the psalms.

It's woven into the very fabric of their meaning. It's like a key that unlocks a whole new level of understanding. Exactly.

And here's where Dr. Waltke takes us even, even deeper. He says the temple. Yeah.

It wasn't just a place to go through the motions of religious rituals. Okay. It, it actually served several distinct functions in ancient Israel.

So it was, it was more than just your average place of worship. Way more. One of the terms Dr. Walkie uses is, uh, typical.

Typical. Which might sound a bit confusing at first. Okay.

But what he means is that the temple was like a divinely appointed blueprint of heaven. It was designed to give people a glimpse. Okay.

A, a taste of that eternal reality. A way to connect with the divine on a physical, tangible level. So picture this: you're walking into the temple, and it's almost like you're stepping into a, a miniature version of heaven.

Absolutely. And then there's the sacramental function. Okay.

The temple wasn't just about thinking about God. Right. It was about experiencing God through physical acts of worship.

Yeah. The sacrifices, the offerings, the rituals. These were all ways for people to enter into a tangible communion with the divine.

It wasn't just about going through the motions. Right. Right.

These rituals had a deeper spiritual meaning. They did. A way of connecting with something, something bigger than themselves.

Exactly. And Dr. Waltke highlights another fascinating function of the temple. What's that? Uh, what he calls artistic propaganda.

Propaganda. That sounds a bit, uh, intense for a holy place. He, he doesn't mean it in a negative way, though.

Okay. Think of it more like, um, making a powerful statement through art and architecture, the grandeur of the temple. Yeah.

Its sheer size and beauty are designed to inspire, um, awe and wonder. Right. It was a way of declaring God's power and permanence in a way that everyone could see and experience.

Ah, so it was a way of communicating God's majesty and authority without even saying a word. Right. Kind of like how we might be impressed by, uh, a towering skyscraper or a magnificent cathedral today.

Exactly. Those, uh, those structures evoke a sense of awe and power. Right.

Even if we don't consciously think about it. That's a, that's a great way to put it. And finally, Dr. Walkie discusses the temple's didactic function.

That's, that's just a fancy way of saying that it was also a place of teaching and learning. So the temple was like a school too. In a way, yes.

The priests served as instructors, guiding people in the ways of God. It was a place where people could come to deepen their understanding of their faith and learn how to live in accordance with God's will. So let me get this straight.

Sure. The temple was a place of worship, a place of connection with God, a symbol of divine power and a center of learning. Exactly.

That's a, that's a pretty impressive resume for, for one building. It really is. And to make things even richer.

Okay. We have King David. Right.

Who Dr. Walkie says played a pivotal role in transforming the whole worship experience at the temple. He compares David to, uh, a Renaissance man, someone with talents in so many different areas. Right.

A musician, a poet, a warrior, a king. Exactly. Talk about a multi-talented individual.

He even compares David to Mozart. He had this incredible gift for music and poetry. Right.

And he used those gifts to elevate the temple worship to make it even more elaborate and engaging. So imagine this. Okay.

The temple becomes a stage for the Psalms. Yes. With David composing the music and shaping the entire performance.

Exactly. He takes the existing mosaic rituals and adds this, this incredible layer of artistry and emotional depth. Wow.

It must've been an absolutely breathtaking experience. I wish we could go back in time and witness it firsthand. I know.

Right. And all of this brings us back to that idea of the sacred and the profane, right? Exactly. The temple was a space set apart, distinct from the ordinary world outside its walls.

You're getting it. The temple was designed to create a clear division between the holy and the everyday. Right.

Remember when we talked about the etymology of the word profane? Yes. Yes. It literally means before the temple.

Right. So anything outside the temple walls was considered to be in the realm of the ordinary, the mundane. Yeah.

The non-sacred. So stepping into the temple was like crossing a threshold into a different dimension. It was.

A holy sphere. Yes. Set apart from the busyness and distractions of everyday life.

That's the idea. And the Psalms often reflect this contrast. They do.

The sacred versus the profane, the eternal versus the temporal. Perfection versus imperfection, holiness versus sin. It's like a constant reminder that you're entering a special place.

Right. Set apart for communion with God. Now I'm starting to see how understanding this concept of the temple as a model of heaven sheds light on the different types of song.

Exactly. It's like having a secret decoder ring. Right.

For the Psalms. Dr. Waltke breaks down the Psalms into different categories. Okay. Based on how they might have been used within the temple setting. So tell me, what are some of these categories? I'm ready to crack the code. Well, there are the Psalms of Zion.

They celebrate the beauty and significance of the temple itself. Okay. Think of Psalm 48, for example.

Okay. It paints this vivid picture of Jerusalem, the city of God, as a place of strength, beauty, and joy. I can almost hear the music swelling as the people sing praises to the temple.

What, what other types of Psalms are there? There are the Songs of Entrance, which, uh, explore the question of who is worthy to enter God's presence. Interesting. Psalm 15 is a great example of this.

Okay. It lays out the moral and spiritual qualities required. Yeah.

To stand before the Holy God. It's like a checklist for those approaching the temple. Do you have clean hands? A pure heart? Yes.

Are you speaking the truth? A powerful reminder that entering God's presence is a serious matter. It is. Not to be taken lightly.

You're absolutely right. And then you have the Psalms that were linked to specific rituals or festivals. Yeah.

For example, there's Psalm 92 for the Sabbath. A song of joy and praise for God's creation and his covenant faithfulness. And then there's, uh, Psalm 81, which was recited during the, uh, New Moon Festival, a time of renewal and celebration.

It's, it's amazing to think that each of these Psalms had its own unique place and purpose within the temple worship. It is. What other categories did Dr. Waltke mention? Well, there were Psalms that were likely recited during the New Moon Festival.

There were Psalms that were recited during the New Moon Festival. And then there are the Psalms of thanksgiving and offerings like Psalm 96 and 107, which emphasize gratitude for God's blessings and the act of offering back to him a portion of what he has given. It's like a, like a beautiful cycle of giving and receiving.

It is. God pours out his blessings. Yeah.

And the people respond with gratitude and offerings, acknowledging that everything good comes from him. Precisely. And we can't forget the prophetic oracles.

Prophetic oracles. Those messages delivered in the temple that challenged the people's complacency and called them back to faithfulness. Like, like Psalm 50, right? That powerful message of rebuke delivered within the sacred space of the temple.

Exactly. It's a reminder that even in a place of worship, there's still room for confrontation and a call to repentance. Exactly.

And then you have the processional Psalms, which describe the pilgrimages to Jerusalem, the journeys people would take from all over Israel to worship at the temple. Imagine the crowds of pilgrims marching toward the city, singing these Psalms of praise and anticipation as they draw closer to the holy place. It must've been an electrifying experience.

Psalm 68 paints a vivid picture of this procession. It does. With its descriptions of banners, trumpets, and dancing.

Exactly. You can almost feel the energy and excitement. Right.

And, and how can we forget the, the songs of ascent? Songs of ascent. Those, those beautiful Psalms, some during those pilgrimages. Psalm 122 perfectly captures the longing and joy of approaching Jerusalem.

Right. The city of God. It's like the Psalmist can already see the temple in the distance, and his heart leaps with joy.

He cries out, I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord. Right. It's a, it's a beautiful expression of, of spiritual yearning.

It really is. And, and when you imagine these Psalms being sung within the context of the temple, they, they take on a whole new dimension. It's like the temple itself provides the key to unlocking their deeper meaning and emotional power.

Exactly. But Dr. Waltke doesn't just focus on the words of the Psalms. Right.

He also draws our attention to the sacred objects mentioned in them. The things that were part of the temple experience. Right.

He talks about the altar where sacrifices were offered. Yes. The cup used in rituals.

The banners that proclaimed God's presence. Right. Even then, the musical instruments used in worship.

And let's not forget Psalm 150. Oh yeah. Which is a glorious celebration of all those musical instruments.

Trumpets, lutes, harps, tambourines, cymbals. Wow. It's like the grand finale of the Psalms.

Right. With the whole orchestra coming in to praise the Lord. You can almost hear the music echoing through the temple courts.

Yeah. Filling the air with joy and celebration. And all of this reinforces the idea that the temple wasn't just a building.

Yeah. It was a microcosm of the universe. Right.

A reflection of the divine order. A model of heaven itself.

So the temple wasn't just a place where people went to worship. Right. It was a, it was a representation of the cosmos.

Yeah. A, a glimpse into the heart of God's reality. Exactly.

Even the personnel reflected this cosmic order. What do you mean by that? Well, you had the priests and the Levites who served as intermediaries between God and the people. You, you had the king who represented God's authority on earth.

I see. You, you had the army. Yeah.

Which protected the people and defended God's honor. It's like, like each group had its own role to play in this, in this grand cosmic drama. Yeah.

Reflecting the order and harmony of God's creation. Precisely. And then you even had the, uh, God-fearers.

God-fearers. Those, uh, those Gentiles who were drawn to the, the worship of the, the one true God. So even, even those who weren't ethnically Jewish.

Right. Were welcomed into this, this community of faith. They were.

Drawn by the power and beauty of what they experienced in the temple. Exactly. It was a place where people from all walks of life.

Yeah. Could come together to worship the one true God. It's mind-blowing to think about how much meaning and symbolism were packed into every aspect of the temple.

Right. And its rituals. It's like peeling back layer after layer of meaning.

But, but this is all making me wonder. Yeah. If the temple was such a central part of the Israelite faith.

Right. What, what does its destruction mean for us today? How do we approach the Psalms without that physical space to ground our understanding? That is a great question. We, we don't have a physical temple to go to anymore.

So how, how do we connect with the songs in the same way? Well, if we can see the temple as a physical representation of heaven, a model of that ultimate reality, it challenges us to think about how we approach worship today. Even though we don't have a designated building, what are the ways that we create sacred space in our lives? I love that. It's not about replicating the temple exactly, but about capturing the essence of the sacred.

Right. Think about it. The temple was designed to inspire awe.

Yeah. Reverence. A sense of being in the presence of something much greater than ourselves.

Exactly. How, how can we cultivate those same feelings in, in our modern context? Maybe it's, it's less about the, the external, the, the physical building and, and more about the internal, the, the posture of our hearts. I see.

What, what if we each become a sort of walking temple carrying that sense of the sacred within us, wherever we go? Wow. That's, that's beautiful. It's like saying that holiness isn't confined to a particular place or time.

Yeah. It's, it's something we cultivate within ourselves. A way of seeing the world, a way of relating to God that infuses every, every aspect of our lives.

And as you continue exploring the Psalms, I encourage you to keep this temple context in mind. Choose a Psalm, any Psalm. And as you read it, try to imagine yourself standing in the temple courts.

Picture the grandeur of the architecture. Hear the music swirling around you. Smell the incense, feel the weight of history and tradition.

How does that change your experience of the Psalm? What, what new layers of meaning emerge? I'm, I'm definitely going to try that. I love the idea of bringing the Psalms to life by imagining them in their original setting. It's like stepping back in time and experiencing them with fresh ears and eyes.

And remember the Psalms aren't just, um, ancient relics from a bygone era. They're living words, pulsating with raw emotion, timeless wisdom, and spiritual depth. Right.

Let them speak to your heart. Okay. Challenge you.

Yeah. Comfort you. Guide you on your own unique, uh, spiritual journey.

I don't know about you, but I'm, I'm feeling incredibly inspired to revisit the Psalms with this newfound understanding. Good. Thanks for taking us on this deep dive.

It's been my pleasure. Until next time, keep exploring. Okay.

Keep questioning. Yeah. Keep seeking that deeper connection with the divine.

Right. And remember you don't need a physical temple to experience the sacred. You carry it within you.