

Waiting and Giving Thanks: Psalm 40:1-10

Our current lectionary readings in I Kings, the minor prophets, and Hebrews, coupled with Judaism's high holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur triggered my curiosity about *actual worship in the tabernacle and temple* (original and second). How do the Psalms, eventually the hymnbook of the Second Temple, inform us about and lead us in God-focused worship?

Our lectionary Psalm reading and praying reveals the importance of “waiting for God” and of “giving God thanks.” The Psalms show us how times of active, God-focused “waiting” lead to times of God-focused, public “thanking.”

1. Looking back at Psalms we read this week, reflect on these verses about “waiting.”

Psalm 37:34, 38:15, 39:7, and 40:1

What insights do you gain about your own “waiting” as you ponder these verses?

2. Think about the connection between “waiting” and “thanking.” What is the connection for you? Recall a time you have seen this connection in yourself or someone else.

Israel's worship festivals were clustered around 3 seasons in the year, spring early summer, and fall. These 3 seasons were special sabbaths when the Israelites were to go to Jerusalem to worship. Their pilgrimages culminated in entering the temple courts to praise/bless God and to give thanks to him. (Ps. 100:4, also see Psalm 42:4b for a personal memory).

People were glad to stop working and go to these celebrations (Psalm 122:1), times of singing, dancing, feasting, and also time for “giving thanks” to God and renewing spiritual commitments. ***These great festivals lasted for days on end, and day-in-and day-out there were worshippers meeting and doing the many things necessary for their spiritual needs***, including “giving thanks.”

For the faithful, these were prolonged times away from mundane activities and ordinary work with great music by massive choirs, messages from prophets, teaching by priests, dramatic reenactments of saving events, feasts, sacrifices and the scapegoat, priestly blessing (Number 6:24-26), and fellowship with others. For us, it would be like having three beautifully orchestrated retreats/revivals every year!

Also remember that an Israelite could enter the courts of the temple anytime to pray or praise, to hear teachings of the priests, to seek the LORD, to make

offerings or pay vows. The sanctuary was always open, priests always on duty, the altar always ablaze. “Spontaneous services” could happen at any time between the morning and evening oblations.

Perhaps the most common reason for Israelites to enter the sanctuary was to **give thanks** to God. (Ps. 122:4)

To **give thanks** involved the full sacrificial ritual culminating in the peace offering and meal, and that offering was explained to the assembled people by **public declaration of thanks to God**. They knew why they were eating.

3. In addition to the song of thanksgiving in **Psalms 40:1-10**, look back at “**giving thanks**” in other Psalms:

Psalms 22:21b-26, Psalm 50:12-15, 23; Psalm 66:13-20

All of the above songs of thanksgiving are called “declarative praise.” They are *todah* and *yadah*, a noun and a verb for *thanksgiving* and *giving thanks*.

The words “*todah*” and “*yadah*” indicate that this form of praise was a **public acknowledgment**, like a testimony that required a ritual to go with it. This was a “**sacrifice of thanksgiving**” given by an individual to a group to encourage everyone present, invite them to praise the Lord, and share the worshipper’s joy as well as the meal.

Read this quote from *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, Allen P. Ross’s book about biblical worship from the Garden to the New Creation:

The greatest opportunity for worshippers to express their faith in the midst of the congregation was through this public praise. Although such praise has been abandoned by most churches. (Footnote: No doubt individual praise was abandoned because it was abused and often time consuming. It was easier to replace it with a set time of singing than it was to teach people how to do it.) (Ross, pp. 272-273)

Ross goes on to explain how OT priests used the *pattern of the psalms of thanksgiving* to teach people how to “give thanks,” without self-promotion or unnecessary talk. In fact, this kind of individual praise, with a brief report of the dilemma that was faced, was the heart and soul of communal worship. “*Todah*” was offered to God in public, with the focus on the LORD so people would be drawn to him, encouraged to build one another up, and to share their praise and their food.

Where and when have you or others “given thanks” in public? How has “giving thanks” in public impacted your life in Christ? What thoughts and feelings does learning about the practice of *todah* trigger in you?