

Fact Sheet for **“Heart Highways to God”**
Psalm 84

Pastor Bob Singer
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We’re going to be looking at Psalm 84 today. This Psalm has many references to the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, but the temple is not the main focus of the Psalm as we will see. The psalmist’s focus is on what the real longing of our hearts should be.

ESV Psalm 84 Superscription

***To the choirmaster: according to The Gittith.
A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.***

We looked at Psalms 42 & 43 last week. Psalm 42 also mentions the Sons of Korah in its superscription. The Sons of Korah were members of a Levitical choir appointed by King David to serve as Temple singers (1 Chronicles 6:31-32). Psalm 84 may even be a companion to Psalms 42 & 43 which themselves expressed a longing to participate once again in ministry at the temple in Jerusalem, a ministry the psalmist had been separated from. This Psalm pictures a heart pilgrimage to that temple.

**¹ How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!**

**² My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.**

But notice... the “living God” is actually the psalmist’s true longing, not the temple itself. A preoccupation with the temple, but not with God, would be hollow (see Jeremiah 7:4 and context). Instead, the deep longing of the psalmist here is for God.

**³ Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.**

Think about this for a moment. The courtyards of the temple were open to the sky, and the eaves of the temple would have provided good nesting places for birds. Even the sparrow and the swallow found homes at the temple. The psalmist here is expressing a longing to be likewise close to God. Remember that in the Holy of Holies there was the Ark of the Covenant. On top of that Ark was the mercy seat with two cherubim with their wings extended toward each other. God’s presence, God’s glory, dwelt between those cherubim. To be near to the temple was to be near to God Himself. The song we have has the line “I sing beneath the shadow of Your wings.” That line likely has this imagery inspired from verse 3.

**⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! *Selah***

The word “blessed” or “happy” is mentioned three times in this Psalm... once wistfully (here), once resolutely (verse 5), and once in deep contentment (verse 12). Psalms 42:4 & 43:4 provide a similar glimpse of this wistful delight here. On the other hand Amos 8:4-6 expresses an opposite longing. Also, the psalmist is making this mind’s eye pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the temple.

**⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.**

“Blessed” is used here with the sense of resoluteness. These “highways (*plural*) to Zion” are in the heart, not on the ground.

**6 As they go through the Valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.**

These heart highways are seen as going through the “Valley of Baca”. “Baca” is the singular of the word translated “balsam trees” in 2 Samuel 5:23. These trees thrive in dry places. These heart highways to Zion, these times of our longing for God, can transform periods of our dryness into well-watered times of blessing. *Some versions have the word “blessings” instead of “pools”. In Hebrew both of these words have the same consonants. And the Septuagint does translate this word as “blessings”. By the way, it is an entirely different Hebrew word, from an entirely different root, than the word “blessed” that appears three times in this Psalm.*

**7 They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion.**

As we travel these heart highways our strength builds. Refusing to be hindered by adverse circumstances the psalmist keeps his focus on the goal of coming into the presence of the Lord. (*Compare Isaiah 40:31.*) The last line of verse 7 pictures arriving at the temple is this heart pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem. Next we have the only petition in this Psalm. Having arrived in his mind’s eye at the temple, the psalmist gives voice to his prayer.

**8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah***
**9 Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed!**

The king was the protector of the nation. As the king went, so went the nation. But you can almost hear future echoes of God’s foremost anointed one, Jesus Christ, in this verse. In the final three verses of this Psalm the psalmist again puts voice to his own heart.

**10 For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my
God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.**

Again, the psalmist’s focus is not on the physical temple. That is just the imagery he uses. His focus is on what transpires in our hearts.

**11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.**
**12 O LORD of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you!**

And the word “blessed” here is used with the sense of a deep contentment by the psalmist.

As we meditate on this Psalm we must ask ourselves, “What do my own heart highways lead? Who do I focus on? Do I have that same heart yearning for God that this psalmist had? If I do, the decisions of my life will show it. If I don’t, the decisions of my life will show it. Are you where you want to be with God, or are there changes you need to make? Why not embark on some new heart highways today?”