

Week 9 – Psalm 84

A Psalm of Zion

Psalm 84:1-4 – A Pilgrim's Yearning

- The Psalm expresses a pilgrim's deep longing to be in the Temple courts worshipping the Lord.
- The psalmist declares "How lovely" or "How dearly loved" (REB) is God's dwelling place (v 1).
- The language is relational and mimics the language found in a love song.
 - o His soul yearns for the courts of the Lord to the point of fainting.
 - o His heart and flesh cry out for the Lord as a lover would for the beloved.
- The Psalmist recalls with envy the birds that nest near the altar of the Lord, his King and God (v 3). He likely has in mind the altar for burnt offerings at the front of the temple (Exodus 27:1-8) and the smaller altar for incense before the holy of holies (Exodus 30:1-10).
- If the birds are blessed to dwell in the house of the Lord, how much more so the priests and temple officials. In the Psalmist's mind, they are always praising the Lord, something he wishes that he could do (v 4).

Psalm 84:5-7 – Blessed is the Pilgrim on the way to the Temple

- Pilgrims on the way to the temple also experience their own kind of blessing.
 - o The Hebrew is literally translated "in whose heart are the roads." Some translations add "roads to Zion!" but Zion is not in the Hebrew.
 - o Some scholars draw a connection to a related word that involves singing to suggest the implied picture is that of pilgrims singing as they journey toward Jerusalem.
- They draw their strength for the journey from the Lord (v 5).
 - o The Psalm reminds us that at the heart of eternal life is the worship of the Lord.
 - o Worship may be the means by which God makes us lie down in green pastures and leads us beside quiet waters.
 - o The church has heard in these words an assurance of eternal life.
- The journey contains difficulties, but God provides (v 6).
 - o The Valley of Baca is an unknown place, but may mean, "The Valley of Weeping" or an arid place without water.
 - o God provides springs and sends early rains to fill the land with pools of water.
 - o The word for "pools" sounds like the word for "blessings."
- As the pilgrims journey, their strength grows until they appear before God in Zion.
 - o The word for strength is a different one than verse 5 and can mean a wall.
 - o The REB takes this to mean the pilgrims have reached Jerusalem and are moving from the outer wall of the Temple courts to the inner.

Psalm 84:8-9 – A Prayer for God's Anointed.

- Having reached the Temple, the pilgrims lift up a prayer to the "LORD God Almighty."
- The prayer is for God to look with favor upon "our shield...your anointed one" (v 9).
 - o This is likely a prayer for the king.

A Song for Every Season: A Study on the Psalms

- It is a reminder that in Israel's life a pilgrimage to the Temple was not a private religious experience.
- The congregation was the nation and the nation's concerns, and her leader, would be in the forefront of the congregation's prayers.

Psalm 84:10-12 – A Longing Fulfilled

- The Psalm concludes with the psalmist delighting in his time in the Temple declaring that one day in the Temple is better than a thousand anywhere else (v 10).
- The Psalmist continues that he would rather be a doorkeeper at the Temple than live in the tents of the wicked.
 - It could be translated, “stand at the threshold of my God” (NASB).
 - The image is to be one of humility vs. opulence. Tents could be rather grand things in the ancient world.
 - He's saying, “I'd rather live on the edge of the Temple grounds than enjoy the rich spoils of the wicked.”
- The Psalmists adoration of the Temple is not to be misunderstood as a replacement for the love of God. The Psalmist loves the Temple because it is the Lord's dwelling place.
- He heaps praise on God calling him “a sun and a shield” (v 11), symbols of provision and protection.
 - God bestows favor/grace and honor/glory upon his children.
 - God is generous. He does not withhold a single good thing from those whose walk is blameless or who “walk with integrity” (NASB).
- The Psalm concludes with a final beatitude addressed to God, himself – “Blessed is the one who trusts in you” (v12).
 - Both the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the pilgrimage we make through life requires trust in the Lord.
 - Those who trust in the Lord will discover God's blessing on both the journey and the journey's end.

Other Psalms that celebrate the life of worship in the Temple

- Psalm 27 – David requests to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life.
- Psalm 42 – The Psalmist remembers longingly of the days gone by when he “used to go to the house of the Lord.”
- Psalm 122 – The Psalmist rejoices with those who say, “Let us go to the house of the LORD.”
- Psalm 137 – An exile remembers Zion and laments the Babylonian captivity.

Sources

- Davidson, Robert, *The Vitality of Worship* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1998).
- Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 1: Psalms 1-41, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2006).
- May, James L., *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville KY: John Knox, 1994).