

PSALMS

Chapter 84

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! ²My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. ³Even 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. ⁴Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise! *Selah* ⁵Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. ⁶As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. ⁷They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion. ⁸O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah* ⁹Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed! ¹⁰For 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. ¹¹For 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. ¹²O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!

Ps 84 A prayer of longing for the house of the Lord. In tone and perspective it stands close to Ps 42 and may reflect similar circumstances. If so, the author (presumably a Levite who normally functioned in the temple service), now barred from access to God's house (perhaps when Sennacherib was ravaging Judah; see 2Ki 18:13–16), gives voice to his longing for the sweet nearness to God in his temple that he had known in the past. Reference to God and his temple and to the “blessedness” (see vv. 4–5, 12) of those having free access to both dominates the psalm and highlights its central themes. (CSB)

The psalm has three main divisions (vv. 1–4, 5–7, 8–11) and a conclusion (v. 12). In the Hebrew text, a six-line unit precedes and follows a three-line reflection on the blessedness of those free to make pilgrimage to Zion. Each of these six-line divisions contains three references to the “LORD,” while the seventh reference (symbolizing completeness or perfection) appears in the conclusion. (CSB)

References to “dwelling places” (plural, v 1), “courts” (v 2), and “altars” (v 3) might suggest that this psalm was written fairly late, and the psalmist could be referencing God's dwelling both in the Jerusalem temple and in the tabernacle that preceded it. This is the prayer of someone separated from the sanctuary, longing to stand within its precincts in God's presence (v 2). The unknown reason for the separation makes the psalm more universal, aptly prayed by shut-ins, prisoners, travelers, Sunday workers, and all who have been temporarily separated from congregational worship. *choirmaster*. See p 993. *Gittith*. See Ps 8 intro. *Sons of Korah*. See Ps 42 intro.

Format: Vv 1–2, longing for the temple; vv 3–4, the blessed dwell there; vv 5–7, travel to Zion; v 8, appeal for God to hear; v 9, appeal for God to see; vv 10–12, God's temple courts are blessed. (TLSB)

84:1–4 A confession of deep longing for the house of the Lord. (CSB)

84:1 *lovely*. The traditional rendering of the Hebrew here, but perhaps better translated “beloved” or “loved.” (CSB)

Not merely beautiful, but dear to the psalmist's heart. (TLSB)

The point is that the sanctuary is not simply a place that looks lovely or is aesthetically pleasing; rather, it is a place that is greatly loved by the faithful because it is the dwelling place of their sovereign Lord. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

dwelling place. Lit, "dwelling places." (TLSB)

It could be plural in reference to the numerous facilities and furnishings that make up the sanctuary, but is more likely a plural of amplification – the great tabernacle. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

84:2 *longs* – It appears that war or some other circumstances are making it impossible for the psalmist to join in the pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the religious festivals. (PBC)

He is consumed with the desire to be there. This kind of language emphasizes both the glory of the place and the personal need to be there. The verb "longs" is only used a few times, but it has the meaning of longing after something or greatly desiring it (see Gen. 31:30; Job 14:15; Ps. 17:12). (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

faints – It is used in Isaiah 15:6 for grass withering away. The psalmist describes his spirit as pining away with his great longing to be within the Lord's presence. The indication is that something is temporarily preventing him from being there (as in Ps. 42) because the longing is wearing him out. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

courts. Of the temple (see v. 10; 2Ki 21:5; 23:11–12). (CSB)

my heart and flesh. My whole being (see 73:26). (CSB)

84:3 The psalmist is jealous of the small birds that have such unhindered access to the temple and the altar. They are able even to build their nests there for their young—the place where Israel was to have communion with God. (CSB)

If lowly birds are privileged to be staying in the sanctuary, how much more the people who remain there. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

84:4 *who dwell in your house.* Not only priests and Levites, but all those who dwell with the Lord in spiritual fellowship are gathered in the sanctuary. (TLSB)

Selah – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. "The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers" (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

84:5–7 The joyful blessedness of those who are free to make pilgrimage to Zion—they too the psalmist envies. (CSB)

84:5 *those whose strength is in you.* Those who have come to know the Lord as their deliverer and the sustainer of their lives. (CSB)

whose heart are the highways to Zion. They have memorized the route; they travel through life by faith and trust in God (cf 116:9). (TLSB)

84:6 *As they go.* On their way to the temple. (CSB)

Baca. Means either “weeping” or “balsam trees” (common in arid valleys). The place is unknown and may be figurative (see 23:4) for arid stretches the pilgrims had to traverse. (CSB)

Also translated “valley of tears”; it is not known whether this is a literal place or a symbolic place, similar to Luther’s “valley of sorrow” (SC, Seventh Petition, p xxxix). (TLSB)

place of springs. The joyful expectations of the pilgrims transform the difficult ways into places of refreshment. (CSB)

The pools of the Valley of Baca are symbols of spiritual blessing because the Hebrew word for “pools” sounds like the word for “blessing.” (PBC)

Deelitzsch offers a spiritual interpretation: “The arid steppe becomes resplendent with a flowery festive garment (Is. 35:1), not to outward appearance, but to them spiritually, in a manner none the less true and real.” (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

early rains. The gentle early showers that are harbingers of the later spring rains (see Joel 2:23). (CSB)

pools. Whether the Hebrew for this word refers to “blessings” or whether it refers to “pools,” it is likely that both are intended. By God’s benevolent care over his pilgrims, the vale of weeping (or balsam trees), already transformed by the glad hearts of the expectant wayfarers, is turned into a valley of praise (see 2Ch 20:26). God’s saints on their hopeful way to Zion experience anew the bountiful hand of God as their ancestors did on their way through the Desert of Sinai to the promised land (see 78:15–16; 105:41; 114:8)—and as their descendants would on their return to Zion from Babylonian exile (see Isa 41:17–20; 43:19–20; 49:10). (CSB)

84:7 *from strength to strength.* Whatever the toils and hardships of the journey (see Isa 40:31). (CSB)

The word “strength” is different now (s.v. Ps. 49:1) it includes the idea of their abilities with the general significance of strength. Every step of the way the pilgrims renew their strength and proceed with greater confidence until they appear before God in Zion. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

appears before God – God keeps careful track of each of His beloved people (cf 34:15; Mt 10:29–31). (TLSB)

84:8–11 A prayer for the king, and its motivation: Only as God blesses the king in Jerusalem will the psalmist once more realize his great desire to return to his accustomed service in the temple (CSB)

84:8 *LORD God of hosts ... God of Jacob.* That is, LORD God Almighty, the God of Jacob. (CSB)

Jacob. A synonym for Israel (see Ge 32:28). (CSB)

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84:9 *our shield.* The king in Jerusalem. (CSB)

The Messiah. God Himself is our shield (cf v 11), and the psalmist asks God to look upon “our shield.” This prayer asks the Father to look on His people graciously, for the sake of the Son. The Son’s righteousness shields our unrighteousness before the Father (cf Gal 3:27) because He has been anointed by the Father for the work of salvation. (TLSB)

anointed. God’s earthly regent over his people (from David’s line). (CSB)

84:10 *in your courts* – During the OT the full joy of worshiping God was possible only in one city and in one building because the sacrifices could be offered only in the temple of Jerusalem. Today our worship is not limited to any one place. We are free to worship God anywhere. Nevertheless, our churches hold a special place in our hearts. There we have been baptized, confirmed and married. There we have witnessed these events in the lives of our loved one. There we have heard words of comfort at the death of family members and friends. From those pulpits we have heard God’s word. At that altar we have received Christ’ body and blood, which was given and shed for our forgiveness. It is true that we can worship God anywhere, but may we never, through our own negligence or indifference, deprive ourselves of the joy of joining fellow believers in God’s house. (PBC)

A lowly place in salvation is much better than a lavish life ending in eternal condemnation. Cf Mt 5:3, 5. (TLSB)

doorkeeper. Probably the psalmist’s normal (and humble) service at the temple (see 2Ki 22:4). (CSB)

The text is a little more specific: “I choose waiting at the threshold of the house of my God more than dwelling in the tents of the wickedness.” The expression “waiting at the threshold: is a word that occurs only here. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

dwell in the tents of the wicked. Share in the life of those who do not honor the God of Zion. (CSB)

84:11 *sun.* The glorious source of the light of life. (CSB)

No good ... withhold. God faithfully provides His people with everything they need. Cf Php 1:6; 4:19. (TLSB)

who walk uprightly. The Lord made it clear that, if Abram was to receive God's promised and covenanted benefits, he must be God's faithful and obedient servant. His faith must be accompanied by the "obedience that comes from faith." (CSB)

84:12 In this verse there is confidence and contentment. If the Lord withholds no good thing from those who trust him, he will surely not withhold the best thing of all – the joy of worshiping in his presence. (PBC)

Ps 84 Someone who has been separated from the sanctuary, where God is rightly worshiped, now longs to return. Many homebound and shut-in Christians long for worship in God's house, yearning for the days they were strong enough to go. Meanwhile, many other Christians, especially those in the height of their strength, neglect the worship of the Lord to their own detriment. God gives strength to His people (vv 5–7) through the hearing of His Word, specifically through His Gospel promises of salvation on account of Christ. • Teach me to love the hearing of Your Word, O Lord, and the reception of Your gifts, that I may carry them to those in need. When I am separated from Your congregation, stir my desire to return again according to Your mercy. Amen. (TLSB)