

From Strength to Strength
By Sharon W. Betters

Today's Treasure

They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion.
Psalm 84:7

The Israelites most likely started their trek toward Jerusalem with great anticipation, looking forward to not only corporate worship and experiencing God's presence more intimately, but also to reunite with friends and family. But for many of them, the journey would be hard. They could not get there without going through the Valley of Tears or the Valley of Baca. Baca refers to the "weeping tree" or balsam tree (2 Samuel 5:23). The trees "wept" sap or gum-like tears and grew in dry, arid regions. The early readers of this Psalm would immediately know the writer wanted to communicate the journey to Zion was difficult and dangerous. Pilgrims needed to prepare to suffer along the way.

Yet, we read they go from strength to strength. The word "strength" can be translated "company", i.e. they go from company to company. You can also translate it "from army to army".

Imagine you are on your way to a joyful family reunion, but it will take days of driving to get there. After a day of driving your kids repeatedly whine, "Are we there yet?" Your back hurts, you can barely keep your eyes open as you pass mile after mile of boring countryside. But you press on, because you know you will eventually connect with your sister's family with whom you will continue your trip. The minute you see her and her kids at a rest stop, your spirits revive and your energy increases. The next day you meet up with an elderly aunt and uncle you haven't seen in a year. They join your caravan. Though you are still tired, meeting up with loved ones refreshes your spirit and you can go on driving. You are going from "company to company".

Remember the story of Mary and Joseph losing Jesus? Why didn't they know sooner that he was missing? Because they assumed he was traveling with another "company" of relatives and friends. The Israelites gained strength from their covenant family that went beyond blood relatives. The pilgrims trekking through the Valley of Baca (or weeping) looked forward to meeting up with others traveling to Zion, knowing their strength would grow with each connection. Imagine the joy and anticipation growing stronger with each "meet up".

But there is more to these meet ups than simply adding to our joy.

LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

My friends, we are on a similar journey. The Valley of Baca or Weeping symbolizes our own journey toward Heaven. First, the Lord plants in our hearts a hunger for Him:

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.

Psalm 84:1

He equips us with His strength for the journey:

Blessed are those whose strength is in you.

Psalm 84:5a

He places in our hearts a map to our final destination, Heaven:

...in whose hearts are the highways to Zion.

Psalm 84:5b

He gives us fellow travelers, strategically placed along the way who not only encourage us to continue but walk with us:

....they go from strength to strength (or company to company or army to army)

Psalm 84:7

And He guarantees we will arrive at our destination:

...each one appears before God in Zion.

Psalm 84:7

But wait, there is more. As we have seen, strength to strength can also mean “army to army”. The purpose of armies is to protect the citizens of their country, even to the point of laying down their lives. Our fellow travelers are also armies, ready to travel along with us, to fight for us and to help carry us to ensure we reach our destination. Martin Luther describes our journey this way:

“This life, therefore, is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.”
— Martin Luther

Once we meet Jesus, God guarantees we will arrive safely Home and He supplies whatever we need to get there, transforming us into the likeness of Christ with each leg of the journey:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

1 Cor. 3:18

PRAYER

Father, may we trust you on this journey toward Heaven, having confidence that you are transforming us so that we reflect the beauty of your Son!