

What is the Valley of Baca in the Bible?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Valley-of-Baca.html>

The Valley of Baca is mentioned in the Bible only once, in Psalm 84. Baca is rendered “weeping” in most translations: “What joy for those whose strength comes from the LORD, who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings” (Psalm 84:5-6, NLT).

The Hebrew word baca is related to bakah, which means “to weep.” Baca refers to a type of “weeping” tree; that is, one that drips resin or gum-like tears, such as a balsam, mulberry, or aspen tree. In 2 Samuel 5:23, bakaim is translated as “balsam trees” (ESV).

The Valley of Baca was probably a literal place located near Jerusalem. The Valley of Rephaim (2 Samuel 5:18) is a possible identification. The Valley of Rephaim is the site of one of David’s victories over the Philistines; the author of 2 Samuel notes that there were balsam trees there (verse 23). Another possibility is that the Valley of Baca is the Valley of Achor (Joshua 7:24), the place of Israel’s trouble where Achan was executed for bringing guilt upon the nation. In the psalmist’s day, pilgrims probably passed through this waterless valley on their way to Jerusalem to worship.

The psalmist uses the Valley of Baca symbolically to illustrate a difficult and sorrowful path in life. The name of the valley indicates a dry, arid region since this is where these types of weeping trees tend to grow. As people traveled to Jerusalem to worship, they would pass through this weary, “weeping” place, but their journey was worth it in the end:

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you,

in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

As they go through the Valley of Baca

they make it a place of springs;

the early rain also covers it with pools.

They go from strength to strength;

each one appears before God in Zion” (Psalm 84:5-7, ESV).

In the same way, those who experience sorrow in this life—and who doesn’t?—can find strength in their faith in God. With the Lord held in His rightful place, we can find that the Valley of Baca becomes a very different place. The journey of a faithful Christian through times of hardship is a step-by-step expedition “from strength to strength.”

In Psalm 84, the Valley of Baca helps illustrate the privilege and longing of all those who follow the Lord’s path in pilgrimage to Zion. These followers possess an intense longing to worship the Lord: “How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalm 84:1-2). They begin the path of pilgrimage strengthened by God Himself and then remain steadfast in their hearts (verse 5). They grow spiritually stronger as they continue to meet adversity with unshaken faith (verse 7). As these sojourners find their strength in God, they are able to persevere through calamity, sorrow, and severe trials. And in the end, they find grace. Their Valley of Baca turns into springs of blessing and pools of refreshment.