

Psalm 48

A Song [and] Psalm for the sons of Korah.

Psalm 48: A good example of the Songs of Zion, the psalm describes the glory of the city of Jerusalem which has been delivered by God from her enemies. The city of God is praised (verse 1-3), and her attackers are defeated (verses 4-8). Therefore, her people praise the Lord for His loving-kindness (verses 9-14).

Verses 1-14: In Psalm 48 it often appears that Zion itself is the object of praise. While referring to Zion, this hymn of confidence (compare Psalms 46, 47), contains several checks and balances showing that it is ultimately God, who dwells in Zion, who is to be praised. Therefore, this perspective must be kept in mind as the lines of Psalm 48 flow back and forth with respective emphases on the city and the great God of that city. This psalm, sung with orchestral accompaniment, therefore contrast two different responses to the God of Zion and the Zion of God.

- I. Introduction (48:1-3).
- II. The Panic-Response of the Provokers of God (48:4-7).
 - A. The Chronicling of It (48:4-6);
 - B. The Cause of It (48:7).
- III. The Praise-Response of the People of God (48:8-14).
 - A. Their Celebration (48:8-13);
 - B. Their Conclusion (48:14).

Psalm 48:1 "Great [is] the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, [in] the mountain of his holiness."

The same that in the foregoing psalm is said to be gone, up to heaven with a shout, to sit on the throne of his holiness, to reign over the Heathen, and to be King over all the earth. Who is great, and the Son of the Highest; the great God and our Savior. Great in his person as God-man, God manifest in the flesh, his Father's fellow and equal. And in the perfections of his nature, being of great power, and of great wisdom, and of great faithfulness, and of strict holiness and justice. And of wonderful grace and goodness; great in his works of creation and providence. In his miraculous operations when on earth, and in the work of man's redemption and salvation. Great is he in all his offices, a great Prophet risen in Israel, a great High Priest over the house of God, a Savior, and a great one, and the great Shepherd of the sheep.

"And greatly to be praised": Worthy to be praised. In his own nature, he is worthy of adoration. In interposing to save the city from its foes, he has shown that he is worthy of exalted praise.

"In the city of our God": Jerusalem. In the city which he has chosen for his abode, and where his worship is celebrated (see the notes at Psalm 46:4). This praise was especially appropriate there.

- (a) Because it was a place set apart for his worship; and
- (b) Because he had now interposed to save it from threatened ruin.

"In the mountain of his holiness": As Mount Zion is called on account of the temple built upon it, and the worship of God in it. And a fit emblem it was of the church of Christ, which, as that is, is chosen and loved of God. And is his habitation, is impregnable and immovable, and consists of persons sanctified by God the Father, in the Son, and through the Spirit.

This Psalm is sung in our churches now. There is no question in my mind that God is great. We could look up all the adjectives for greatness in all the world, and yet they still would not be able to tell of the greatness of the Lord. I could begin praising Him because He saved me. To go back to the beginning, I would have to praise Him for making the heavens and the earth, and all the things in it. Then I would have to thank Him for creating me, and allowing me to live in His created world. You see, there would be no end to the things that I should praise Him for. Where should we praise Him? Everywhere. Even to look at all the beauties of nature could cause me to burst out in praise.

Psalm 48:2 "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, [is] mount Zion, [on] the sides of the north, the city of the great King."

"The joy of the whole earth" (compare the judgment context of Lam. 2:15).

"The north": "North" is an interpretive translation of a word term that occurs as a Semitic place name, i.e., "Zaphon". In Canaanite mythology Zaphon was an ancient Near Eastern equivalent to Mt. Olympus, the dwelling place of pagan gods. If this was the psalmist's intention in Psalm 48:2, the reference becomes a polemical description of the Lord; He is not only King of kings but also is God of all so-called gods.

"The city of the great King" (compare (Psalm 47:2 and Matt. 5:34-35). God Himself has always been the King of kings.

Zion and the city of the great King, symbolize the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a literal Zion however, and it is in Jerusalem, the great city of God. This, like most Scripture, is possibly literal, as well as spiritual. Jerusalem is a very special city. Those who have been blessed to have seen it know of its magnificence. As far as God is concerned, it is the center of the earth. Everything measures from Jerusalem in the Bible.

Psalm 48:3 "God is known in her palaces for a refuge."

"God ... in her palaces": Better, "God is in her (Zion's), citadels, or fortresses". The context points to the military connotation of this word.

The wonderful thing to me, is that I can call Him my God. God is our refuge "hiding place". These are the palaces that God has provided for His own.

Verses 4-7: This dramatic, poetic rapid-fire, historical rehearsal of events chronicles some serious threat to Jerusalem from a hostile coalition of forces. They had come arrogantly to destroy Jerusalem, the Zion of God; but the God of Zion surprisingly and powerfully devastated them.

Psalm 48:4 "For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together."

As the princes of the Philistines to seek for David, when in the strong hold of Zion (2 Sam. 5:17). As the Ethiopians in the time of Asa (2 Chron. 14:9). And the Moabites and Ammonites in the times of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:1). And the kings of Syria and Israel in the times of Ahaz (Isa. 7:1). And Sennacherib with his princes, who, in his esteem, were kings, in the times of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:17). Which are instances of the kings, of the nations' gathering together against Zion, the city of Jerusalem, and people of the Jews, who were typical of the church of Christ. And that without success, and to their own confusion and destruction. Though this seems to refer to the latter day of the Gospel dispensation, when all the kings of the earth, Pagan, Papal, and Mahometan (meaning belonging or relating to, either Muhammad or the religion, doctrines, institutions and practices that he established). They will be gathered together at the instigation of Satan, to the battle of the great day of the Lord God Almighty, in a place called Armageddon. Where they will be defeated by Christ the King of kings (Rev. 16:13). Jarchi and Kimchi interpret the passage of Gog and Magog gathering together to fight against Jerusalem, with which compare (Rev. 20:8).

"They passed by together": Either to the battle, as Jarchi explains it. Or they passed by Jerusalem, the city of our God, the church, without entering into it, or doing it any harm.

It appears that this was earthly kings, that come and go. We also know that the kings of this earth are for but a while. They are not to be compared with the King (Jesus Christ), of all the earth.

Psalm 48:5 "They saw [it, and] so they marveled; they were troubled, [and] hasted away."

Either the city or the power of God, as Aben Ezra; or as Jarchi. God himself going forth to fight against the nations. This refers to the power Christ will take to himself, and show forth, by reigning in his church, and protecting it. Which will not only be visible to the saints, but to the nations of the world. And to the brightness of Christ's coming in his spiritual reign, with the way of which antichrist will be destroyed (Rev. 11:17). And to the glorious state of the church, signified by the rising of the two witnesses, and their standing on their feet, and ascending to heaven, which will be seen by their enemies (Rev. 11:11). And to the destruction of Rome, the smoke of whose burning, the kings of the earth, that have committed fornication with her, will see and lament (Rev. 18:8).

"And so their marveled": At the glory of the church, the security of it, the power of Christ in it and over it, and at the destruction of mystical Babylon (see Isa. 52:14).

"They were troubled": As Herod and all Jerusalem were, upon hearing of the birth of Christ (Matt. 2:3). So these kings will be, upon seeing the coming and power of Christ in the latter day, the invincibility of his church, and their own immediate and utter ruin. This will be the time or

the howling of the shepherds, both civil and ecclesiastical, when all hands will be faint, and every man's heart will melt (Zech. 11:2).

"And hasted away": Fled for fear of the great King at the head of his armies, in the defense of his church and people. And as the kings of the earth also at the destruction of Rome will flee and stand afar off, for fear of her torment (Rev. 18:10).

These worldly people have come and seen, and they realize that they are not living up to these standards, and they haste away. It is so strange, but many times we realize our shortcomings when we see those who are living for God.

Psalm 48:6 "Fear took hold upon them there, [and] pain, as of a woman in travail."

That is, either when they came up to the city, and passed by it, and saw what they did. Or, as Kimchi observes, in the place where they thought to have made a great slaughter; that is, in Armageddon (Rev. 16:16). So, upon the slaughter of the seven thousand names of men, or men of name and renown, such as the kings here assembled, the remnant will be frightened (Rev. 11:13).

"And pain, as of a woman in travail": This figure is made use of elsewhere, when the destruction of Babylon and the coming of Christ are spoken of (see Isa. 13:8).

The fear that overcame them was fear of being found out. The world has no one to look to for encouragement. They fear the things that might come upon them. This type of fear is more like terror. The following Scripture is a very good example of that type of fear.

Luke 21:26 "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken."

This pain they felt was pain of guilt.

Psalm 48:7 "Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind."

"The ships of Tarshish": A notable Mediterranean port of uncertain location (compare Jonah 1:3), possibly Spain.

"Tarshish", also mentioned in the Book of Jonah (1:3; 4:2; Isa. 66:19), could be Tartessus in southwest Spain (see note on 72:8-11). The place was reputed in biblical times for its fleet (Isa. 23:14; 60:9; Ezek. 27:25). The ability to wreck a great fleet with the "wind" was a demonstration of God's power.

Psalm 48:8 "As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. Selah."

The predictions of the prophets have been verified by the events. Or, we have had late and fresh experience of such wonderful works of God, as before we only heard of by the report of our fathers.

"In the city of the Lord of hosts": Of the hosts of heaven and earth, of all armies above and below; and therefore the church must be safe under his protection.

"In the city of our God": The covenant God of his people. Wherefore, as the former title declares his power, this shows his love and affection, and both together secure the happiness of the saints. Wherefore it follows,

"God will establish it for ever": Not only particular believers, of which the church consists, are established on the foundation, Christ; but the church itself is built on him, the Rock against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.

Psalm 48:9 "We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple."

We have reflected on, or meditated on. The word used here literally means "to compare, or to liken." And this idea is perhaps always implied when it is used in the sense of thinking on, or meditating on. Perhaps the meaning here is, that they had "compared" in their own minds what they had heard from their fathers with what they had now seen. They had called all these things up to their remembrance, and had compared the one with the other.

"In the midst of thy temple": See the notes at (Psalm 5:7). The allusion here most probably is to the "temple," properly so called, as these transactions are supposed to have occurred after the building of the temple by Solomon. The expression here also would make it probable that the psalm was composed after the defeat and overthrow of the armies referred to. In order that it might be used in the temple in celebrating the deliverance.

We see believers thinking back on the lovingkindness of God. The temple is just a place that causes them to remember God. When we all meet together in church and begin to think on God, the first thing that comes to mind is His grace and mercy toward us. Perhaps that is why many churches go in for the beautiful surroundings to worship in. Beauty brings on thoughts of God.

Psalm 48:10 "According to thy name, O God, so [is] thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness."

That is, as he himself is in the perfections of his nature, which are displayed in the works of his hands, throughout the whole creation. So is or ought his praise to be. Or rather, as in the latter day his name will be great in all the earth (Mal. 1:11). So will his praise be; and as his name will be One (Zech. 14:9). He will be one Lord, there will be one faith and one baptism. His worship, word, and ordinances, will be uniformly observed and attended to; so will be his praise. All the saints will unite together in giving glory to him: he, and he alone, shall be exalted. Moreover, his Gospel is his name (Acts 9:15). And that in the latter day will be preached to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people (Rev. 14:6). And multitudes, both of Jews and Gentiles, will be

converted. And from the uttermost parts of the earth will be heard songs of praise and glory unto him (Isa. 24:15).

"Thy right hand is full of righteousness": That is, of righteous actions, by which thou discovers thy truth, justice, and holiness. In destroying the wicked and incorrigible enemies of thy people, and in fulfilling thy promises made to thy church.

We have already mentioned in this study, how at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. We also found out that it was not just in the earth, but in heaven and in the deep as well. This just means that along with the bowing of the knee in reverence, is the praise. Every person will praise God. There will even be praises and adoration in heaven. Thy right hand is Jesus Christ. He is righteousness.

Psalm 48:11 "Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments."

God's righteous purpose will bring triumph to His people when their enemies wrongly oppress them or when they themselves are the means of judgment on God's enemies.

"Let the daughters of Judah": This phrase would refer to the surrounding cities and villages.

Mount Zion is symbolic of the church. There is much rejoicing in the church of the Lord Jesus at this. I believe this is speaking of physical and spiritual Israel rejoicing at the judgements of the Lord. All who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be judged righteous, because we have put on the righteousness of Christ.

Psalm 48:12 "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof."

Admire, i.e., O Israelites, your glorious city, which God has preserved for you intact. Walk around it and view it on every side; observe its strength and beauty. Nay, count its towers, and see how many they are, that ye may form a true estimate of its defenses, which render it well-nigh impregnable. Such a survey would "tend to the glorifying of the God of Israel, and to the strengthening of their faith".

This is a glorious walk around the church to take another look at the wonderful workings of the Lord in the church. The towers of the church point a finger to heaven. Perhaps, this is saying, inspect and see if it still points to heaven and God.

Psalm 48:13 "Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell [it] to the generation following."

Such as the free favor of God in Christ. Which is not only as a shield, but as a bulwark to the church. His everlasting love, electing grace, the covenant of grace, with its blessings and promises, all which are more immovable than rocks and mountains. And especially the power of God, which surrounds his church, as the mountains did Jerusalem. And by which they are kept and preserved as in a garrison (Psalm 125:2). Also salvation by Christ; his righteousness,

sacrifice, and satisfaction, which God has appointed for walls and bulwarks. And which make the city and the church, a strong and impregnable one (Isa. 26:1).

"Consider her palaces": For Jehovah, Father, Son, and Spirit, have their dwelling places in Zion. And here, besides apostles, prophets, evangelists, and ordinary ministers of the word, who are rulers and officers set in the first place, every saint is a prince and a king. And has a place and a name here, better than that of sons and daughters of the greatest potentate on earth. Every dwelling place in Mount Zion is a palace.

"That ye may tell it to the generation following": That is, the beauty and glory, strength and safety of the church. And even all that is spoken of her in this psalm, as well as what follows. This is the end proposed by taking a turn round Zion, and making the above observations on it.

Bulwarks in the verse above, means entrenchment. This was built to protect. Notice the protection around the church that you might tell it to future generations.

Psalm 48:14 "For this God [is] our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide [even] unto death."

“This God”: Other options for translating the Hebrew text of this line are:

- (1) “For this God is our God”; or
- (2) “For this is God, our God”.

Who is spoken of throughout the whole psalm as greatly to be praised, as well as is known in Zion, as the stability, security, and protection of her. This is said as pointing unto him as if visible, as Christ is God manifest in the flesh. Now in Gospel times, to which this psalm belongs; as distinguishing him from all others. From the gods of the Gentiles, rejected by the people of God. As claiming an interest in him as their covenant God. As exulting in the view of such relation to him; as suggesting how happy they were on this account; and especially since this relation will always continue. Being founded in an everlasting covenant, and arising from the unchangeable love of God.

"He will be our guide, even unto death": The Lord orders the steps of the righteous, holds them by the right hand, and guides them with his counsel and in judgment. Christ, the great Shepherd of the flock, feeds them, as the antitype of David, according to the integrity of his heart, and guides them by the skillfulness of his hands. He guides their feet in the ways of peace, life, and salvation, by himself. He leads them into green pastures, beside the still waters, and unto fountains of living waters. The Spirit of the Lord leads them to the fullness of Christ; guides them into all truth, as it is in him; directs them into his and his Father's love, and leads them on to the land of uprightness.

This is the real God. We must never forget who God is. He never changes, and our belief in Him must never change either. He will walk with us even unto death. The Light of my blessed Lord Jesus shall guide my steps all the way. I love Him and depend on Him as my friend and comforter, even unto the end.

Psalm 48 Questions

1. How did the author express just how great God is?
2. What do Zion and the city of our great King symbolize?
3. From what city does everything in the Bible measure?
4. What is a refuge?
5. Why did they haste away after seeing the city?
6. What was their fear compared to in verse 6?
7. Why do some churches have beautiful surroundings?
8. According to thy _____, O God so is thy praise.
9. Who is Righteousness?
10. Why will all who believe in Christ be judged righteous?