

Psalm 48

Title: The Glory of Zion and the God of Zion

Author and Date: The Sons of Korah

Key Verses: Psalm 48:2, 11

Type: Praise

Outline

- A. The glory of Zion – the city of God (verses 1-8).
- B. The God of Zion – the God of the city (verses 9-14).

Notes

Title: “A Song; a Psalm of the sons of Korah.” See the notes on Psalm 42. The following psalms have something similar to this title: Psalm 42, 44-49, 84-85, and 87-88.

Summary: Psalm 48 praises God (verses 1 and 10) for his greatness and presence in the midst of Zion “the city of our God”. In the first part of the psalm, the glory of Zion is described (the city of God). Jerusalem is beautiful and a refuge (verses 2-3). When kings come against Jerusalem, God defends her (verses 4-7). God will establish her forever (verse 8). In the last part of the psalm, the God of Zion is described (the God of the city). God displays his loving-kindness, righteous judgments, and he will guide his people all the way to death (verses 9-14).

Psalm 46, 47, and 48 form a trilogy of thought concerning the greatness of God. Note the following repeated ideas: “refuge” (46:1, 7, 11; 48:3), “city of God” (46:4; 48:1, 8), “Most High” (46:4; 47:2), “in the midst” (46:5; 48:3), “nations” (46:6; 47:3, 8), “Jehovah of hosts” (46:7, 11; 48:8), “greatly” (47:9; 48:1), “exalted” (46:10; 47:9), and “great King” (47:2; 48:2).

Verse 1: For “greatly to be praised”, see Psalm 96:4 and 145:3. The “city of our God” (see also verse 8) is Zion (verses 2, 11, and 12) or Jerusalem. It is where the temple is located (verse 9). For various descriptions of Zion, see Psalm 9:11; 14:7; 43:3; 74:2; 78:68; and 87:2.

Verse 2: Jerusalem is “beautiful in elevation” as it rises 2,620 feet above sea level. The “sides of the north” may be a reference to the northern part of the city of Jerusalem. The city was typically approached from the north because there were valleys on the east (Kidron), south (Hinnom), and west (Gihon) of the city. The “city of the great King” is used by Jesus in Matthew 5:35.

Verse 3: Jerusalem is indeed a mighty fortress, but it is God who ultimately defends it (Psa. 46:5).

Verses 4-6: These verses may be talking about kings who come up against Jerusalem in battle and are defeated by God (see the summary notes in Psalm 46 and 47). The pain of a “woman in travail” (verse 6) is the pain of childbirth.

Verse 7: When they come against Jerusalem, the invading kings (verses 4-6) are shattered like merchant ships in a violent storm. The “east wind” is symbolic of divine judgment (Jer. 18:17; Ezek. 27:25-26). The exact location of Tarshish is unknown, but it is thought to be on the coast of modern-day Spain (1 K. 10:22; Jonah 1:3; etc.).

Verse 8: What Israel had “heard” from their ancestors concerning God, they now “see” (experience) for themselves. Note the “we” here and in verse 9, and the “our” in verse 14. Both the psalmist and Israel (or the inhabitants of Jerusalem) are singing this psalm together. “God will establish it forever” is conditioned upon Israel’s faithfulness. When Israel became unfaithful to God, the city fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. (2 K. 25) and again to the Romans in A.D. 70 (Mt. 24). For “Selah,” see the notes on Psalm 3.

Verse 11: The “daughters of Judah” are the cities of Judah that surround Jerusalem.

Questions

1. Who is to be praised, how is he to be praised, and where is he to be praised (verse 1)?

2. What is beautiful and the “joy of the whole earth” (verse 2)?

3. Where has God made himself known (verse 3)?

4. What happens to the kings when they pass by and see Jerusalem (verses 4-6)?

5. What does God break (verse 7)?

6. What will God establish for ever (verse 8)?

7. What do the psalmist and Israel think about and where do they think it (verse 9)?

8. What is God's right hand full of (verse 10)?

9. Why are Zion and the daughters of Judah to rejoice (verse 11)?

10. What does the psalmist encourage the reader to do and why (verses 12-13)?

11. What will God be to Israel (verse 14)?

Applications for Today

1. God is great so he should be praised greatly (verse 1). What kind of joy (Psa. 28:7) and thanks (Psa. 109:30) is to be given to God?

2. God dwells among his people in Zion (verses 1 and 8). It is good to “walk about” Zion and consider her description (verses 12-13). Where does the Christian have his citizenship (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22-23; Rev. 21:10ff; Phil. 3:20)?

3. The place of worship is the place to think about and contemplate the loving-kindness of God (verse 9). What is the purpose of the Lord’s supper (Lk. 22:19-20)?

4. What we hear concerning God, we experience ourselves, then we think about it, and pass it on to others (verses 8, 9, and 13). What was the problem in the days of the Judges (Judg. 2:10-14)? What does Paul tell Timothy to do (2 Tim. 2:1-2)?

5. God is our guide even unto death (verse 14). Where does Jesus guide faithful Christians (Rev. 7:17)?