

PSALM 48

This psalm, as the two former, is a triumphant song; some think it was penned on occasion of Jehoshaphat's victory (2 Chronicles 20), others of Sennacherib's defeat, when his army laid siege to Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time; but, for aught I know, it might be penned by David upon occasion of some eminent victory obtained in his time; yet not so calculated for that but that it might serve any other similar occasion in aftertimes, and be applicable also to the glories of the gospel church, of which Jerusalem was a type, especially when it shall come to be a church triumphant, the "heavenly Jerusalem" (~~see~~ Hebrews 12:22), "the Jerusalem which is above," ~~see~~ Galatians 4:26. Jerusalem is here praised,

- I.** For its relation to God (v. 1, 2).
- II.** For God's care of it (v. 3).
- III.** For the terror it strikes upon its enemies (v. 4-7).
- IV.** For the pleasure it gives to its friends, who delight to think,
 - 1.** Of what God has done, does, and will do for it (v. 3).
 - 2.** Of the gracious discoveries he makes of himself in and for that holy city (v. 9, 10).
 - 3.** Of the effectual provision which is made for its safety (v. 11-13).
 - 4.** Of the assurance we have of the perpetuity of God's covenant with the children of Zion (v. 14). In singing this psalm we must be affected with the privilege we have as members of the gospel church, and must express and excite our sincere good-will to all its interests.

~~see~~ PSALM 48:1-7

THE BEAUTY AND STRENGTH OF ZION

A song and psalm for the sons of Korah.

The psalmist is designing to praise Jerusalem and to set forth the grandeur of that city; but he begins with the praises of God and his greatness (v. 1),

and ends with the praises of God and his goodness, v. 14. For, whatever is the subject of our praises, God must be both the Alpha and Omega of them. And, particularly, whatever is said to the honour of the church must redound to the honour of the church's God.

What is here said to the honour of Jerusalem is,

I. That the King of heaven owns it: it is *the city of our God* (v. 1), which he chose out of all the cities of Israel to put his name there. Of Zion he said kinder things than ever he said of place upon earth. *This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it,* ^{<412>}Psalm 132:13, 14. It is *the city of the great King* (v. 2), the King of all the earth, who is pleased to declare himself in a special manner present there. This our Saviour quotes to prove that to swear by Jerusalem is profanely to swear by God himself (^{<415>}Matthew 5:35), *for it is the city of the great King, who has chosen it for the special residence of his grace, as heaven is of his glory.*

1. It is enlightened with the knowledge of God. *In Judah God is known, and his name is great*, but especially in Jerusalem, the head-quarters of the priests, whose lips were to keep this knowledge. In Jerusalem *God is great* (v. 1) who in other places was made little of, was made nothing of. Happy the kingdom, the city, the family, the heart, in which God is great, in which he is uppermost, in which he is all. There *God is known* (v. 3) and where he is known he will be great; none contemn God but those that are ignorant of him.

2. It is devoted to the honour of God. It is therefore called *the mountain of his holiness*, for *holiness to the Lord* is written upon it and all the furniture of it, ^{<394>}Zechariah 14:20, 21. This is the privilege of the church of Christ, that it is *a holy nation, a peculiar people*; Jerusalem, the type of it, is called *the holy city*, bad as it was (^{<415>}Matthew 27:53), till that was set up, but never after.

3. It is the place appointed for the solemn service and worship of God; there he is greatly praised, and *greatly to be praised*, v. 1. Note, The clearer discoveries are made to us of God and his greatness the more it is expected that we should abound in his praises. Those that from all parts of the country brought their offerings to Jerusalem had reason to be thankful that God would not only permit them thus to attend him, but promise to accept them, and meet them with a blessing, and reckon himself praised and honoured by their services. Herein Jerusalem typified the gospel

church; for what little tribute of praise God has from this earth arises from that church upon earth, which is therefore his tabernacle among men.

4. It is taken under his special protection (v. 3): He is *known for a refuge*; that is, he has approved himself such a one, and as such a one he is there applied to by his worshippers. Those that know him will *trust in him, and seek to him*, ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾Psalm 9:10. God was known, not only in the streets, but even in the palaces of Jerusalem, for a refuge; the great men had recourse to God and acquaintance with him. And then religion was likely to flourish in the city when it reigned in the palaces.

5. Upon all these accounts, Jerusalem, and especially Mount Zion, on which the temple was built, were universally beloved and admired — *beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth*, v. 2. The situation must needs be every way agreeable, when Infinite Wisdom chose it for the place of the sanctuary; and that which made it beautiful was that it was the mountain of holiness, for there is a beauty in holiness. This earth is, by sin, covered with deformity, and therefore justly might that spot of ground which was thus beautified with holiness he called *the joy of the whole earth*, that is, what the whole earth had reason to rejoice in, that God would thus in very deed dwell with man upon the earth. Mount Zion was on the north side of Jerusalem, and so was a shelter to the city from the cold and bleak winds that blew from that quarter; or, if fair weather was expected out of the north, they were thus directed to look Zion-ward for it.

II. That the kings of the earth were afraid of it. That God was known in their palaces for a refuge they had had a late instance, and a very remarkable one. Whatever it was,

1. They had had but too much occasion to fear their enemies; for *the kings were assembled*, v. 4. The neighbouring princes were confederate against Jerusalem; their heads and horns, their policies and powers, were combined for its ruin; they were assembled with all their forces; they passed, advanced, and marched on together, not doubting but they should soon make themselves masters of that city which should have been the joy, but was the envy of the whole earth.

2. God made their enemies to fear them. The very sight of Jerusalem struck them into a consternation and gave check to their fury, as the sight of the tents of Jacob frightened Balaam from his purpose to curse Israel (⁽¹⁰¹⁾Numbers 24:2): *They saw it and marvelled, and hasted away*, v. 5. Not

Veni, vidi, vici — *I came, I saw, I conquered*; but, on the contrary, *Veni vidi victus sum* — *I came, I saw, I was defeated*. Not that there was any thing to be seen in Jerusalem that was so very formidable; but the sight of it brought to mind what they had heard concerning the special presence of God in that city and the divine protection it was under, and God impressed such terrors on their minds thereby as made them retire with precipitation. Though they were kings, though they were many in confederacy, yet they knew themselves an unequal match for Omnipotence, and therefore *fear came upon them, and pain*, v. 6. Note, God can dispirit the stoutest of his church's enemies, and soon put those in pain that live at ease. The fright they were in upon the sight of Jerusalem is here compared to the throes of a woman in travail, which are sharp and grievous, which sometimes come suddenly (~~SIB~~ 1 Thessalonians 5:3), which cannot be avoided, and which are effects of sin and the curse. The defeat hereby given to their designs upon Jerusalem is compared to the dreadful work made with a fleet of ships by a violent storm, when some are split, others shattered, all dispersed (v. 7): *Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind*; effects at sea lie thus exposed. The terrors of God are compared to an east wind (~~SZI~~ Job 27:20, 21); these shall put them into confusion, and break all their measures. *Who knows the power of God's anger?*

~~DBB~~ PSALM 48:8-14

THE BEAUTY AND STRENGTH OF ZION

We have here the good use and improvement which the people of God are taught to make of his late glorious and gracious appearances for them against their enemies, that they might work for their good.

I. Let our faith in the word of God be hereby confirmed. If we compare what God has done with what he has spoken, we shall find that, as *we have heard*, so *have we seen* (v. 8), and what we have seen obliges us to believe what we have heard.

1. “As we have heard done in former providences, in the days of old, so have we seen done in our own days.” Note, God's latter appearances for his people against his and their enemies are consonant to his former appearances, and should put us in mind of them.

2. “As we have heard in the promise and prediction, so have we seen in the performance and accomplishment. We have heard that God is the Lord of hosts, and that Jerusalem is the city of our God, is dear to him, is his particular care; and now we have seen it; we have seen the power of our God; we have seen his goodness; we have seen his care and concern for us, that he is a *wall of fire round about Jerusalem and the glory in the midst of her.*” Note, In the great things that God has done, and is doing, for his church, it is good to take notice of the fulfilling of the scriptures; and this would help us the better to understand both the providence itself and the scripture that is fulfilled in it.

II. Let our hope of the stability and perpetuity of the church be hereby encouraged. “From what we have seen, compared with what we have heard, in the city of our God, we may conclude that God will establish it for ever.” This was not fulfilled in Jerusalem (that city was long since destroyed, and all its glory laid in the dust), but has its accomplishment in the gospel church. We are sure that that shall be established for ever; it is built upon a rock, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it, ^{<163>}Matthew 16:18. God himself has undertaken the establishment of it; it is the Lord that has founded Zion, ^{<243>}Isaiah 14:32. And what we have seen, compared with what we have heard, may encourage us to hope in that promise of God upon which the church is built.

III. Let our minds be hereby filled with good thoughts of God. “From what we have heard, and seen, and hope for, we may take occasion to think much of God's loving-kindness, whenever we meet *in the midst of his temple,*” v. 9. All the streams of mercy that flow down to us must be traced up to the fountain of God's lovingkindness. It is not owing to any merit of ours, but purely to his mercy, and the peculiar favour he bears to his people. This therefore we must think of with delight, think of frequently and fixedly. What subject can we dwell upon more noble, more pleasant, more profitable? We must have God's lovingkindness always before our eyes (^{<133>}Psalm 26:3), especially when we attend upon him in his temple. When we enjoy the benefit of public ordinances undisturbed, when we meet in his temple and there is none to make us afraid, we should take occasion thence to think of his lovingkindness.

IV. Let us give to God the glory of the great things which he has done for us, and mention them to his honour (v. 10): “*According to thy name, O God! so is thy praise,* not only in Jerusalem, but to the ends of the earth.”

By the late signal deliverance of Jerusalem God had made himself a name; that is, he had gloriously discovered his wisdom, power, and goodness, and made all the nations about sensible of it; and *so was his praise*; that is, some in all parts would be found giving glory to him accordingly. As far as his name goes his praise will go, at least it should go, and, at length, it shall go, when all the ends of the world shall praise him, ^{<1227>}Psalm 22:27; ^{<1115>}Revelation 11:15. Some, by his *name*, understand especially that glorious name of his, *the Lord of hosts*; according to that name, so is his praise; for all the creatures, even to the ends of the earth, are under his command. But his people must, in a special manner, acknowledge his justice in all he does for them. "*Righteousness fills thy right hand*;" that is, all the operations of thy power are consonant to the eternal rules of equity.

V. Let all the members of the church in particular take to themselves the comfort of what God does for his church in general (v. 11): "*Let Mount Zion rejoice, the priests and Levites that attend the sanctuary, and then let all the daughters of Judah, the country towns, and the inhabitants of them, be glad: let the women in their songs and dances, as usual on occasion of public joys, celebrate with thankfulness the great salvation which God has wrought for us.*" Note, When we have given God the praise we may then take the pleasure of the extraordinary deliverances of the church, and *be glad because of God's judgments* (that is, the operations of his providence), all which we may see wrought in wisdom (therefore called *judgments*) and working for the good of his church.

VI. Let us diligently observe the instances and evidences of the church's beauty, strength, and safety, and faithfully transmit our observations to those that shall come after us (v. 12, 13): *Walk about Zion*. Some think this refers to the ceremony of the triumph; let those who are employed in that solemnity walk round the walls (as they did, ^{<1123>}Nehemiah 12:31), singing and praising God. In doing this let *them tell the towers and mark well the bulwarks*,

1. That they might magnify the late wonderful deliverance God had wrought for them. Let them observe, with wonder, that the towers and bulwarks are all in their full strength and none of them damaged, the palaces in their beauty and none of them blemished; there is not the least damage done to the city by the kings that were assembled against it (v. 4): *Tell this to the generation following*, as a wonderful instance of God's care

of his holy city, that the enemies should not only not ruin or destroy it, but not so much as hurt or deface it.

2. That they might fortify themselves against the fear of the like threatening danger another time. And so,

(1.) We may understand it literally of Jerusalem, and the strong-hold of Zion. Let the daughters of Judah see the towers and bulwarks of Zion, with a pleasure equal to the terror with which the kings their enemies saw them, v. 5. Jerusalem was generally looked upon as an impregnable place, as appears, ^{<3012>}Lamentations 4:12. *All the inhabitants of the world would not have believed that an enemy should enter the gates of Jerusalem; nor could they have entered if the inhabitants had not sinned away their defence. Set your heart to her bulwarks.* This intimates that the principal bulwarks of Zion were not the objects of sense, which they might set their eye upon, but the objects of faith, which they must set their hearts upon. It was well enough fortified indeed both by nature and art; but its bulwarks that were mostly to be relied upon were the special presence of God in it, the beauty of holiness he had put upon it, and the promises he had made concerning it. “Consider Jerusalem's strength, and tell it to the generations to come, that they may do nothing to weaken it, and that, if at any time it be in distress, they may not basely surrender it to the enemy as not tenable.” Calvin observes here that when they are directed to transmit to posterity a particular account of the towers, and bulwarks, and palaces of Jerusalem, it is intimated that in process of time they would all be destroyed and remain no longer to be seen; for, otherwise, what need was thee to preserve the description and history of them? When the disciples were admiring the buildings of the temple their Master told them that in a little time one stone of it should not be *left upon another*, ^{<1211>}Matthew 24:1, 2. Therefore,

(2.) This must certainly be applied to the gospel church, that Mount Zion, ^{<3122>}Hebrews 12:22. “Consider the towers, and bulwarks, and palaces of that, that you may be invited and encouraged to join yourselves to it and embark in it. See it founded on Christ, the rock fortified by the divine power, guarded by him that neither slumbers nor sleeps. See what precious ordinances are its palaces, what precious promises are its bulwarks; tell this to the generation following, that they may with purpose of heart espouse its interests and cleave to it.”

VII. Let us triumph in God, and in the assurances we have of his everlasting lovingkindness, v. 14. Tell this to the generation following; transmit this truth as a sacred deposit to your posterity, That *this God*, who has now done such great things for us, *is our God for ever and ever*; he is constant and unchangeable in his love to us and care for us.

1. If God be our God, he is ours for ever, not only through all the ages of time, but to eternity; for it is the everlasting blessedness of glorified saints that *God himself will be with them and will be their God*, ⁽⁶¹³⁾ Revelation 21:3.

2. If he be our God, *he will be our guide*, our faithful constant guide, to show us our way and to lead us in it; he will be so, *even unto death*, which will be the period of our way, and will bring us to our rest. He will lead and keep us even to the last. He will be our guide *above* death (so some); he will so guide us as to set us above the reach of death, so that it shall not be able to do us any real hurt. He will be our guide *beyond* death (so others); he will conduct us safely to a happiness on the other side death, to a life in which there shall be no more death. If we take the Lord for our God, he will conduct and convey us safely to death, through death, and beyond death — down to death and up again to glory.