

ADDRESS ON PSALM 48 by Rev Paul Wilson for Sunday 4th OCTOBER'20 (in note form)

This psalm is attributed to the sons of Korah: Of all of the psalms in the Bible, eleven are credited with being composed by the sons of Korah. These beautiful psalms express praise, in a spirit of great gratitude and humility, to an awesome & mighty God. They also express a longing for fellowship with God and deep devotion. These poetic songs include Psalms 42, 44-49, 84, 85, 87 & 88. You will recall that Psalm 42v1 contains the lovely expression, "As the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God." And Psalm 84v1 begins with the beautiful line, "How lovely is your dwelling place, O God."

Psalm 48 is a good example of what are called the 'Songs of Zion', Psalm 137 – which begins 'By the waters of Babylon ...' – being another classic example & a more soulful one than this psalm before us today. For Psalm 48 is a psalm of delight rather than a psalm of lament. It describes the splendour & security of the city of Jerusalem which has been delivered by God from all her enemies. Her people rejoice in their God & praise the Lord for His loving-kindness. And this psalm has resonated down through the ages with those who wish Jerusalem to prosper & who pray for her peace. The very mention of this city stirs the hearts of God's people. The Jewish Passover concludes with the aspiration 'Next year in Jerusalem!'

Psalm 48 communicates tremendous confidence in God focussed on His presence in Jerusalem

IN THIS PSALM JERUSALEM IS PORTRAYED AS THE SUBJECT OF:

God's gracious favour/ God's glorious purposes/God's amazing protection/God's eternal promises

THE INTERCHANGEABLE TERMS 'ZION' & 'JERUSALEM':

The first instance of the word Zion in the Bible is in 2 Samuel which states: 'David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David' (2 Samuel 5v7). We can gather from this and other similar verses where the 2 names occur side by side (1 Kings 8v1; 1 Chronicles 11v5; 2 Chronicles 5v2) that Zion and the City of David are meant to be synonymous. The Davidic Covenant, which prophesies the greatness of Solomon's rule, also prophesies that David's house & kingdom, based in Jerusalem, will last forever (2 Samuel 7 vs12-16).

We will in turn examine what this means for us today.

As one commentator points out, 'When Zion is mentioned in subsequent passages, it carries a spiritual, eternal meaning—just as King David was a temporal version of the eternal King, Jesus Christ, the "city of David" was a temporal shadow of the eternal and spiritual city, Zion, where Christ will reign'.

In Psalm 137 Zion is contrasted with Babylon, the place of exile (v1) where their captors taunted them, saying "sing us one of the songs of Zion!" (v3). Just as Zion is both a real and a spiritual place, Babylon is its opposite: a real place that has a symbolic, spiritual counterpart as the persecutor of God's people and a city of evil (Revelation 18). There are differing views about what constitutes the physical Mount Zion. It has been identified as a hill just outside of Jerusalem's wall; it has been associated with the Temple Mount located within the city & the entire land of Israel has also been referred to as Mount Zion.

In Scripture Zion is called "the perfection of beauty" (Psalm 50:2). Ultimately, from the biblical perspective, Zion is the spiritual and future eternal Jerusalem. It is the place from which 'the Lord has commanded the blessing, even life forevermore' (Psalm 133:3).

Let's work our way through this striking psalm –

V1 Psalm 48 begins with a declaration of God's greatness & praise-worthiness. His glory is seen in this city He has singled out & chosen as His earthly dwelling, as emphasized also in the psalm we considered last time: Psalm 46v4. And, here in Psalm 48 Zion is described as His holy mountain – untainted & radiant.

V2 The magnificence of Jerusalem is unfurled – but this no ordinary travelogue. For its glory & a beauty are expressed in its loftiness & grandeur as the seat of the greatest of all kings & the One above all other gods

V3 God is seen as her Protector: He is patrols her citadels & has shown Himself to be her strong defence. His presence within this special city, rather than the thickness of its walls, impressive as they may be, makes it an invincible stronghold. This is a continuation of the confidence expressed in Psalm 46v5.

Vs4-7 The truth of verse 3 of Psalm 48, is demonstrated by what has happened to those various enemies who have conspired to mount an attack on Jerusalem. The very sight of this city & undoubtedly the astounding news that God the Almighty was dwelling in it, provoked horror & disarray even before these adversaries mobilised their siege instruments or lifted a bow or spear. They simply fled in a traumatized state & were obliterated. Perhaps echoing what had occurred in the history of Jerusalem up to that time.

The princes of the Philistines mobilised against David, when he was sheltering in the strong hold of Zion (2 Samuel 5:17). The Moabites and Ammonites marshalled against God's people in the times of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:1). Sennacherib, with his princes, assembled their forces in menacing array in the times of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:17f/ 2Chronicles 32). All threatened Jerusalem without success, and to their own confusion and destruction. Jesus is recorded in Luke 21 as foretelling that Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies prior to the coming again of the Son of Man who will bring a mighty & glorious deliverance. The book of Revelation reinforces this scenario explicitly describing a time when the armies of nations will surround Jerusalem & meet with ultimate annihilation. The Lord God of hosts, the God of heaven's armies, the King of kings & Lord of Lords stands guard over Jerusalem. And He stands watch over us as our Shield & Defender.

V8 Not only have the authors of this psalm heard the amazing reports of this city's deliverance, they themselves have studied its past & they have in their own day witnessed this reality too. They can verify the truth of these wonderful divine acts & deeds. They have spoken to the inhabitants & historians; they have checked the oral & written records for themselves. The very walls testify! And from personal experience they know this to be city of the Lord Almighty, the city of their totally-trustworthy & invincible God, & therein lies its long-term security! Are we also delving into the past record of God's faithfulness? Are we bearing witness to how He has come to our aid?

V9 Entering the temple of God the authors of this psalm ponder His unfailing love. In God's house everything falls into place. Likewise, in Psalm 73 (see vs3,16&17) the psalmist Asaph renews his perspective of trust in God. He realises afresh that God will call the wicked to account & will sort injustices out & he is reassured once again of the loving presence of God who can strengthen & guide him. Have we had such an experience of God transforming our outlook as we worship with His people in His house; lifting us from despair & giving us fresh hope?

V10 God's praises are not confined to this temple but extend throughout the entire earth. Revelation paints a very clear picture of saints from every nation, tribe, language & people declaring God's praises! His righteousness & His righteous acts fuel this praise. His faithfulness, truth, justice & holiness are celebrated by those who know & love Him. See again Psalm 45v4 & Isaiah's description of the character & priorities of the promised 'Branch from Jesse' (Isaiah 11 vs1-5) & the 'Servant of the Lord' (Isaiah 42 vs1-4).

V11 Rejoicing characterizes this city & gladness envelopes the surrounding villages of Judah which rely on Jerusalem's stability. The security & prosperity of both is guaranteed because of God's triumph over their enemies & because of His just decisions.

Vs12&13 The readers are invited to admire & tour Jerusalem, their glorious & unrivalled city; to circumnavigate its walls, taking in the wonder of its fortifications, counting its towers & carefully recording everything. This is in order that the next generation can be adequately informed about its glory & strength &, above all, of the God who dwells here. We too have an obligation to tell those coming after us of the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, as Psalm 78 also emphasises.

V14 These are not detached or remote truths but highly relevant to the original readers & to us as well. For truly the God who is seen as dwelling in & defending this unique city is also our God. His commitment to us is equally close & unshakeable. He will watch over us too & guide us with His mighty hand. He will take us safely to His eternal Kingdom; to the heavenly Mount Zion, to the new Jerusalem!

As we often sing: *'Solid joys & lasting treasure none but Zion's children know'**.

[From the hymn 'Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God']