

Psalm 48 ¹

"Israel's Worship of Yahweh Elohim as the Eternal Guardian of Beautiful Zion, His City!"

A Song; a Psalm of the sons of Korah.²

A1 THE DESCRIPTION OF YAHWEH ELOHIM AS KING, GUARDING HIS BEAUTIFUL CITY 48:1-8

B1 The Greatness of Yahweh in His City 48:1

C1 {1} Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,

C2 In the **city** of our God, His holy **mountain**.

B2 The Beauty of the City 48:2

C1 {2} Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, Is Mount **Zion** in the far north,³

C2 The **city** of the great King.

¹ Psalm 48: Keil and Delitzsch (K & D) (*Commentary on the Old Testament*) believe the background of this psalm is the successful defeat of the combined forces of the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites in the days of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah (2 Chron. 20:1-30). Under this view, the worship of God in the temple in Ps 48:9 refers to the nation-wide prayer meeting prior to the battle described in 2 Chron. 20:3-19. In any event, Ps 48 oozes Zionism. Mount Zion is named in 48:2, 11, and Zion in 48:12; there are two references to the city ('*iyrr*) of our God in 48:1 and 8, one reference to the city ('*iyrr*) of the LORD (Yahweh) of hosts (troops) in 48:8, and one reference to the city (*qiryah*) of the great King, a reference to God Himself (Elohim) as the reigning Monarch, in 48:2-3.

Vern Steiner of Miqra Institute believes that the Psalms in general and this Psalm in particular, within a cluster of "God as King" psalms (45-48), are eschatological. He sees no need to find historical referents. He takes the view, for example, of "the growing consensus that Tarshish [v. 8] is completely unknown in the ancient world (some propose simply 'the open seas')." At this point in my study I find it difficult to remove all thought of historical referents. I do agree with Steiner, however, that the ultimate fulfillment of this psalm can only be eschatological. See the Addendum for a discussion of the Zionistic theme of Psalm 48.

The words in bold in the text of this psalm are the emphasis of the author highlighting themes found in this psalm.

² Superscription - Sons of Korah: Psalms 42-49, 84-85, and 87-88 are psalms of Korah, featuring a disproportionate use of Elohim as God's name. See note on Psalm 42 Superscription. In Psalm 48 God is designated as Yahweh twice, as Elohim eight times.

³ 48:2 - far north: Though the NIV leaves the word untranslated (*Zaphon*) (*tsaphown* 6828), almost universally it is translated north, even by the NIV elsewhere. Here it means that the temple and Mount Zion were located on the north side (technically northeastern side) of the city of Jerusalem as it existed at the time of writing.

B3 Elohim as a Stronghold Guarding His City 48:3-8

- C1 The Manifestation of Elohim as a Stronghold: {3} God, in her **palaces**,
Has made Himself known as a stronghold. 48:3
- C2 The Proof of Elohim as a Stronghold: The Terrified Retreat of the
Invading Kings 48:4-7
- D1 The attack of the alliance 48:4
- E1 The alliance of the kings: {4} For, lo, the kings assembled
themselves,
- E2 The advance of their armies: They passed by together.
- D2 The terrified retreat of the kings 48:5-6
- E1 The amazement of the armies: {5} They saw *it*, then they
were amazed;
- E2 The terrified flight of the armies: They were terrified, they
fled in alarm.
- E3 The anguished panic of the armies: {6} Panic seized them
there, Anguish, as of a woman in childbirth.
- D3 The defeat of their navy: {7} With the east wind You break the
ships of Tarshish.⁴ 48:7

⁴ 48:7 - ships of Tarshish: The poet is aware of God's powerful smashing of ships from Tarshish with an east wind. This historical event serves as an illustration of God's smashing the armies arrayed against Israel in this psalm. Keil & Delitzsch (K & D), identify this maritime disaster with "the destruction of the merchant fleet fitted out by Jehoshaphat in conjunction with Ahaziah, king of Israel (1 Kings 22:49; 2 Chron. 20:36 sq.)." The problem with that conclusion is that the event described damaged Judah, whereas in this psalm, only good accrues to Judah. Whether that event is the historical referent or not, the point is, as K & D go on to say, "that God's omnipotence is irresistible," as the combined forces against Judah found out. As it stands, the text asserts either that the invading kings were backed by a naval attack from the coast, or else that, on another occasion, a navy set on invading Israel was destroyed by God. K & D argue for a metaphorical reference to the navy, as does Allen Ross (*TBKC*). I prefer to view it as a literal naval attack. If that is true, there is no known allusion to this event in the rest of Scripture.

Vern Steiner, Miqra Institute, cited above in footnote 1, believes there is no historical referent, that Tarshish remains unidentified, and may only refer to the "open seas" (cf. Jonah 4:2, cf. 1:3). However, the words of the next verse (48:8), that the people have actually witnessed God's intervention is described thus: "As we have heard, so have we seen" I prefer to believe that there *is* a historical referent, albeit unidentified elsewhere in Scripture. If not, there is certainly a time when a navy will attack Israel and will be miraculously destroyed by God, who protects Jerusalem. Again, I agree with Steiner that the final fulfillment of this psalm is eschatological, that is, in the future.

- C3 The Reason for Yahweh Elohim as a Stronghold -- IT IS HIS CITY! 48:8
- D1 The Israelis' eyewitness accounts of God's protection: {8} As we have heard, so have we seen
- D2 It is the city belonging to Yahweh of Troops! In the **city**⁵ of the LORD of hosts,⁶
- D3 It is the city belonging to Israel's Elohim! in the **city** of our God;
- D4 Elohim's eternal establishment of His city! God will establish her forever. [Selah]

A2 THE WORSHIP OF ELOHIM GUARDING MOUNT ZION 48:9-14

B1 Praise for Elohim's Character 48:9-10

- C1 The Wonder of Elohim's Loyal Love: {9} We have thought on Your lovingkindness, O God, In the midst of Your **temple**. 48:9
- C2 The Universal Praiseworthiness of Elohim's Name: {10} As is Your name, O God, So is Your praise to the ends of the earth; 48:10a
- C3 The Righteousness of Elohim's Right Hand: Your right hand is full of righteousness. 48:10b

B2 Joy on Mount Zion Because of Elohim's Judgments 48:11

- C1 The Call to Rejoice: {11} Let Mount **Zion** be glad, Let the daughters of Judah rejoice
- C2 The Reason to Rejoice: Because of Your judgments.

B3 Appreciation of the Beauty and Impregnability of Zion 48:12-13

- C1 {12} Walk about **Zion** and go around her; Count her **towers**; 48:12
- C2 {13} Consider her **ramparts**; Go through her **palaces**, That you may tell *it* to the next generation. 48:13

⁵ 48:8 - city ... city ... her: The Heb. word for city (*'iyir* - 5892), here describing Jerusalem, is feminine. So also is the Gr. word for city (*polis* - 4172), describing the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21-22. This grammatical perception of cities as being feminine is Providentially arranged, for the holy (feminine) city of New Jerusalem is seen by John as coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2). [This is, incidentally, in sharp contrast with the feminine city of Babylon (Rev. 17:1-6), described as a great prostitute (17:1) on whose forehead was written her name, "a mystery, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Rev. 17:5), whom God destroys with a vengeance (Rev. 18).] The eternal city, the New Jerusalem, is the eternal abode of God (Rev. 21:3), of the bride of Christ (the Church) (Rev. 21:2, 9-10, cf. 19:6-9 and 21:14) and the nation of Israel (referred to in the O. T. as the then faithless bride of God -- Jer. 3; Ezek. 16, who will one day be faithful -- Hos. 3, cf. Rev. 21:12), and serves as the eternal capital city of the New Earth, inhabited by the nations (Gentiles), who bring their wealth as glory into the perfect city (Rev. 21:24-27; 22:1-4).

⁶ 48:8 - LORD of hosts: Lit., Yahweh of Troops. As Allen P. Ross (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*) notes, Yahweh's troops are terrestrial (Israel's armies) but also celestial (God's angels)!

B4 The Eternal Guidance of Elohim 48:14

C1 {14} For such is God, Our God forever and ever;

C2 He will guide us until death.

ADDENDUM

The ongoing conflict between the so-called Palestinians (most of whom, prior to the Six-Day War in June, 1967, would have considered themselves expatriots from Egypt and Jordan) and Israel is a holy war. Aside from the sentiment voiced in the catch-cry of the 1950's, "throwing the Jews into the sea,"⁷ the "Palestinian" leadership's ultimate desire is to conquer and control Jerusalem. Arabs and liberals around the world despise Zionism. Unfortunately, even most Jewish people today are willing to submit to the rules of Islamic Jihad and pay the Jihadist tax of "Land for Peace." That Israeli policy of appeasement and (dhimmi) self-subjugation to Islam will never work for the Israelis, for Islam's ultimate objective is to conquer the world. In my understanding of prophetic Scripture, Islam will nearly succeed (Revelation 17).

The "Final Status" of the Holy Land will not, however, be determined by the United Nations, nor by the United States, nor by Arabs nor by Israel alone. As Psalm 48 proclaims, Zion is the City of God, not man! It is the City of Yahweh / Elohim, and He will determine its fate! God's plans for Israel and Judah and for Jerusalem and His covenant with David are as inviolable as His covenant with the day and the night (Jeremiah 33:14-26).

Some time in the future, God and a finally-believing Israel will win this war (Zechariah 12-14) for this is not the city of the "Palestinians". It is the "city of Yahweh of Troops", "the city of our Elohim", "the city of the great King". Jerusalem, never mentioned by name in Ps 48, is the city of God, not of man. Every attempt by the United Nations or the United States, including President George W. Bush, a self-pronounced Christian, to set up a "Palestinian" nation in Israel or to strip Israel of sovereignty over Jerusalem will ultimately fail because this city is not the Gentiles' to own or govern -- it is Yahweh's city, it is Elohim's city. However, just as Jesus predicted, "Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).

It is no accident that God's final condescension to man will be His eternal fellowship with man in the great city, the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22). There the saved of both Israel and the Nations, including the "Palestinians" will enjoy fellowship with each other and their God eternally (Rev. 21:2-4, 10-14, 24-27; 22:2-5). The book of Revelation closes with an invitation to each and all, whether Jew or Gentile, "Palestinian" or American or Asian or European or African, whether Hindu or Muslim or Buddhist or atheist or agnostic or Christian in name only, to come and submit to Jesus the Great King, who died and arose for the sins of all, that all who depend on Him may have eternal life: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost" (Rev. 22:17; compare John 1:11-13; 3:16-18; Romans 5:8-10; 1 Corinthians 15:1-5).

⁷ See <http://www.danielpipes.org/article/324>

EXPANDED ANALYSIS OF PSALM 48

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