

# *Ponderings in the Psalms*

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The following is a Messianic Study on

## *Psalm 48*

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**Brit Chadashah**  
ברית חדשה

The *Pondering* studies were published in the Brit Chadashah Newsletter. Brit Chadashah (*New Covenant*) is a Messianic Fellowship in Sydney. Led by Paul Cohen a Jewish believer in Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). We meet together fortnightly for Bible studies from a Messianic Jewish Perspective. We are a unique fellowship made up of Jewish and Gentile people who are believers in Yeshua as the promised Messiah of Israel.

If you don't know Yeshua as your Messiah, we encourage you to search out the Scriptures for yourself. God promised in the book of Jeremiah, "*You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13). And we hope you will make contact with us so that we can share more about the Messiah, His life and ministry.

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# Pondering Psalm 48 God's City

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

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,  
In the City of our God, His holy mountain.

2 Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth,

Is Mount Zion *in* the far north,

The city of the great King.

3 God, in her palaces,

Has made Himself known as a stronghold.

4 For, lo, the kings assembled themselves,

They passed by together.

5 They saw *it*, then they were amazed;

They were terrified, they fled in alarm.

6 Panic seized them there,

Anguish, as of a woman in childbirth.

7 With the east wind

You break the ships of Tarshish.

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 her forever.

***Selah.***

9 We have thought on Your lovingkindness, O God,

In the midst of Your temple.

10 As is Your Name, O God,

So is Your praise to the ends of the earth;

Your right hand is full of righteousness.

11 Let Mount Zion be glad,

Let the daughters of Judah rejoice

Because of Your judgments.

12 Walk about Zion and go around her;

Count her towers;

13 Consider her ramparts;

Go through her palaces,

That you may tell *it* to the next generation.

14 For such is God,

Our God forever and ever;

He will guide us until death.

## **Genre**

Psalms 46, 47 and 48 are all linked because they speak of the Lord reigning from Zion over all the earth. As such it is called a Psalm of Zion.

- In Psalms 46 the LORD is in the midst of His city, He is our refuge and strength so that the people have confidence.
- In Psalms 47 the LORD reigns as the King of all the earth, He is Israel's protector.
- In Psalms 48 the LORD reigns in Zion, He makes her secure and the city reflects God's presence.

## Septuagint

The opening and closing verses in the Greek translation are different. “*A Psalm of praise for the sons of Korah on the second day of the week.*” It would seem from this that different Psalms were publicly chanted in the Second Temple on different days of the week. In the Greek translation we see this in Psalm 24 which was read on the first day, Psalm 94 on the fourth day of the week and Psalm 38 and 92 on the sabbath, and finally, Psalm 93 on the day before the sabbath.

This idea of daily Psalm reading is also reflected in the Mishnah Tamid 7.4 “The ... daily **psalm that the Levites would recite in the Temple. .... On the second day, they would recite** the psalm beginning: “A song; a psalm of the sons of Korah. **Great is the Lord and highly to be praised in the city of God, on His sacred mountain**” (Psalm 48).”

The Greek translation also differs in verse 14. It has “*He will be our guide forevermore,*” while the Hebrew has “*He will guide us until death.*” The Aramaic Targum has “*He will guide us in the days of our youth.*” The three versions differ but all indicate a truth, for the LORD will guide us from our youth until our death and even beyond that, forevermore.

## Location, Location, Location: Zion

This Psalm, one of the “*Songs of Zion,*” gives praise to the place where God dwells, the place which He has chosen, Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 12:5,11; Isaiah 14:32; Psalm 76:1-2, 78:68-69; 132:13). Zion is one of the mountains in Jerusalem, but it is synonymous with the whole city. Sadly, many Christians over the centuries have read the church into these Zion Psalms. They equate Zion with the redeemed of the church age. But there is no need to spiritualise this, or the many other passages of scripture that speak about Zion. It is best to take the Bible literally<sup>1</sup> and so Zion is the hill in the literal city of Jerusalem. There are parallels found in the prophets; for example, Jeremiah says that Jerusalem will be called “*the throne of the LORD*” (Jeremiah 3:17). There is also the description of Jerusalem in Zechariah 2:10-11, which echoes the promises of God dwelling in her midst (Zechariah 2:10-11), with the result that the people of Zion will rejoice (Zephaniah 3:14-17). These verses can and should be taken literally.

## Historical Context

Commentators disagree on whether or not this is an historical event or a description of the arrival of kings in the future. Who is the great king? Is it Solomon, Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:19,25,36) or Messiah? As there are connections between Psalms 46, 47 and 48, it is best (in my humble opinion) to see it as describing Messiah’s reign. As such the Psalm shows us a glimpse of the beauty of Jerusalem, when Messiah the LORD will dwell in her midst, reigning from there. Jerusalem will become the joy of the whole earth.

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<sup>1</sup> **Rules For Understanding Prophecy And Scripture** by Dr David L Cooper, the late founder and director of the Biblical Research Society.

**1. The Golden Rule of Interpretation:** When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicates clearly otherwise.

**2. The Law of the Context:** A Text apart from its Context is a Pretext. A verse can only mean what it means in its context and must not be taken out of its context.

## Names

Zion צִיּוֹן (Tzion) occurs three times in this psalm, and 154 times in the Tanach (Older Testament). It is not just a name of the stronghold Jebus during the Canaanite period (Joshua 18:28-1 Chronicles 11:5). For after David conquered the city (2 Samuel 5:7; 1 Chronicles 11:5) and made it the capital of Israel, it became known as Zion, the City of David (1 Kings 8:1; 2 Chronicles 5:2). Solomon, his son, expanded Jerusalem (see map) towards the north. He then built the temple for the LORD on 'Mount Moriah' and so it was the theological centre for the Jewish people. From these connections we see that Zion is not just the physical stronghold, not just a mountain, but the whole city of Jerusalem, and the city where God resided in His temple.

The kings are the representatives of the nations: Micah 4:1-3, Isaiah 2:2-3 “*Now it will come about that in the last days The mountain of the house of the Lord Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths.’ For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*”

**Selah**

## Commentary

This psalm has two segments, verses 1-8 and 9-14, separated by the word Selah.

### Verses 1-8

**Verse 1** The psalmist starts with the declaration that the LORD is great and ought to be worshipped in the *holy mountain*, which is Zion. That makes sense for where the temple stood was where God’s presence was amongst his people. And it was the LORD who had chosen Jerusalem and so it is *the city of our God*.

### Verses 2–3

The beauty of the elevation could be seen when the Temple was built (1 Kings 7), for Mount Zion could be seen from the city of David, which was located below it.

Most translations have it located in the north (tzaphon), but not so the NIV: “*Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion.*” Zaphon was a holy mountain at the time of the Canaanites, probably because a temple of Baal was located there. Although Israel did worship the Baals of the nations from time to time, the psalmist comes straight to the point: it is about God’s presence in Zion, He is a *stronghold* to the city.

### Verses 4–7 The attacking nations

The kings here are the kings of Psalm 2, who will stand in defiance of God and His Anointed. When God speaks to them in His wrath they will be trembling *like a woman in childbirth*. And although they will think that they can rely on their own strength, the *ships of Tarshish*, God will breathe upon them with an *east wind* and destroy them. It is unclear where the historical location of Tarshish was, whether it was the city of Tarshish in modern-day Turkey or the Phoenician colony in Spain. These ships represented a part of the naval and merchant ships of the kings (1 Kings 10:22; Jeremiah 10:9; Ezekiel 27:25).

## Verse 8

The psalmist and the faithful recognise that the city is under God's protection, He is the LORD of the armies. This then comes with the promise "God will establish her forever." This was true while Israel was faithful, but sadly you and I know from history that this did not often happen, but with the promise of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Jeremiah 32:28-42; Romans 11:26-27), this will come true. We *heard* and have *seen*: heard relates to the story of the exodus from Egypt, a story that had been retold (Exodus 10:2, 13:8-9, 14; Deuteronomy 4:9, 6:20-22). And we have *seen*, possibly relates to the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib (2 Kings 18-19; Isaiah 36-37), when God delivered King Hezekiah and Jerusalem from Sennacherib, the king of Assyria.

**Selah.**

## 48:9–11 God's unfailing love

We have meditated on the *chesed*, God's Covenantal faithfulness. The word *chesed* is translated as mercy and lovingkindness, and that is all true, but this word is always connected to covenant (Deuteronomy 7:7-11). It reflects God's faithfulness to His promises and Covenants and His faithfulness to His people.

"When used of God, *chesed* denotes in general 'the Divine Love condescending to His creatures, more especially to sinners, in unmerited kindness' (Franz Delitzsch as quoted in the Int. Standard Bible Encyclopedia).

Your Name, is not just the Name YHWH, but also denotes God's reputation, His character. This can and should be celebrated to the ends of the earth, for He has worked *righteousness*. He made them *righteous* but also brings in justice to the enemies (verse 11 and Isaiah 33:5). Upon this, the psalmist meditates in the temple, a place reflecting God's *chesed*. Therefore, let all rejoice Zion, those in the capital and the villages and the countryside (*the daughters of Judah*).

## 48:12–14 Consider Zion

In the closing verses the psalmist invites the rulers, and by extension the nations, you and me, the readers, to come to Jerusalem and walk about and consider *Zion*, what a beautiful city Zion is. And while this was true under Solomon and Herod and even today, the true beauty will come out in the Messianic kingdom. Physical and spiritual descriptions are found in Ezekiel 48:35, Isaiah 2:2, 24:23, 33:5, 60:11; Zechariah 14:9-10; Psalm 2:6, 110:2. We who have been considering Zion are instructed to tell the next generation, for this is God's plan and He is our God and He will guide us (Isaiah 58:11,) from youth to death and even in the resurrection forever.

*May the Lord give us much strength and grace as we study together  
Blessings in Messiah  
Sue and Paul*