

# "Great Is the LORD"

## Psalm 48

The first word of this psalm sets the stage for what follows – "Great..." The fact that this adjective is first (both in Hebrew and English), although not uncommon, underscores the supreme majesty of the LORD, setting the tone for the celebration by the psalmist of the greatness of God and His watchful care over His people (in this case, Israel in Jerusalem).

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### I. GREAT IN POSITION – VS. 1-2

#### A. Position of praise

*"Great is the LORD, and greatly to praised in the city of our God..."*

1. The greatness of God is strengthened in the second line of the parallelism used here – if He is great then He is to be "greatly" praised for that greatness.
2. "In the city of our God..."
  - a) In Old Testament times, the dwelling place of the Lord was seen in the Temple at Jerusalem – "the city of our God."
  - b) In New Testament times, His presence is seen both corporately in the church, as well as individually in believers.
  - c) In eternity past and future, His presence is seen on the throne in heaven.

#### B. Position of holiness

*"In the mountain of his holiness"*

1. Wherever God's presence is, it is a holy, set apart, sanctified place.

Zechariah 8:3

<sup>3</sup> Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.

2. This points back to the previous psalm and verse 8 – *"the throne of his holiness."*

### C. Position of elevation – vs. 2

1. The Hebrew word for "situation" (יָנַח)
  - a) Only used here in the Hebrew Old Testament and carries the idea of elevation – literally means elevated in height or an elevated site.
  - b) A note on the English word "situation." According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) it meant:
    - (1) The way in which something is situated; its position, site, or location.
    - (2) The local or geographical position of a building, town, fortress, etc., especially in terms of natural advantages.
  - c) It's speaking of the city of Jerusalem, and more specifically "Mount Zion," where the Temple was located, and therefore, the presence of God.
    - (1) "The city of our God" in verse one is Jerusalem as a whole, which ties the greatness of God to the corporate covenant He had with His people as a nation.

(2) "The mountain of his holiness" in verse one is "Mount Zion" in verse two, specifically connecting the greatness of God to His absolute holiness.

2. This elevation points to the truth of God's majesty and His visibility.

a) The city of God was meant to be seen – that's what made it special and unique in biblical times.

Matthew 5:14

<sup>14</sup> Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

b) "Beautiful for situation" – His beauty, His wonder, His majesty is to be seen, not hidden in obscurity.

Isaiah 45:22

<sup>22</sup> Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else.

Micah 7:7

<sup>7</sup> Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.

John 3:13-16

<sup>13</sup> And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven. <sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: <sup>15</sup> That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

3. As believers "in Christ," we are seated *"together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"* (Eph. 2:6). We are elevated to a place of beauty because of Him.
4. Just as Jerusalem, "the city of our God," and "mount Zion" were elevated above the surrounding landscape, so too must our lives as believers rise above the chaos and wickedness of the world around us to show through our lives the holiness of God.

#### Colossians 3:1-2

<sup>1</sup> If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

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## II. GREAT IN PROTECTION – VS. 3

### A. Protection because of His position – "God is known in her palaces"

1. "Is known" (נָתַן – the Niphal form of the verb נָתַן) suggests established reputation.
2. "Her palaces"
  - a) The female pronoun points back to "city" in verse two – speaks of Jerusalem.
  - b) "Palaces" (אַרְמוֹן) – this points back to the word "situation" in verse two, and speaks of the elevation of the city, especially the Temple and king's palace and is focused on the fortress and protection that the walls of these palaces provided.

### B. Protection because He provides a place of safety – "for a refuge"

1. The word for “refuge” (מִשְׁגֵּב) builds upon the principle established in the word “situation” in verse two. It has the meaning of being high or exalted as a stronghold or fortress would have, often placed on a high cliff that was naturally defensible.
2. *“God is known...for a refuge”* – the greatness of Zion was not the “palaces” that were there but was the fact that God was known there. He had proven Himself as a place of safety, of refuge.

So is Christ that place of refuge – we come to Him and are eternally secure.

John 10:28-29

<sup>28</sup> And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand.

Hebrews 6:18

<sup>18</sup> That by two immutable things, in which *it* was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

3. There's an application we can make from this verse: just as the strength of “the city of the great King” (Jerusalem) was in God's presence there, so can the church be seen as being strong so long as it depends on Him rather than on programs (no matter how good and effective they may be), on numbers, or on financial resources.

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### III. GREAT IN POWER – VS. 4-8

#### A. Power that chases the enemy away – vs. 4-5

1. There would have been an historical event that the psalmist is referencing here but it could fit numerous events recorded in Scripture so no speculation can be given with any confidence.
2. What can be said is that when the enemies of Israel came to the city ("*it*" in verse five) and saw the "palaces," the fortress that stood on the hill, "*they marveled; they were troubled, and hasted away.*"
3. The greatness of our God does not depend on our strength – His mere presence (in the position of strength on Mount Zion) was sufficient to cause the enemies to "haste away."

## **B. Power that induced fear in the enemy – vs. 6**

1. "*Fear*" (הַפֶּחַד) – not the common word translated "fear" in the Hebrew. This one is translated as "trembling" 3 of the 5 times it is used, demonstrating the type of fear they felt. It was an internal fear that paralyzed them.
2. "*Took hold upon them*" (חָזַק בָּם) – this implies a sudden, forceful grip.
3. "*There*" – pointing to Mount Zion, the place of God's position, protection, and power.
4. "*As of a woman in travail*" – Hebrew metaphor for extreme distress; an uncontrollable anguish.

## **C. Power that moves creation against the enemy – vs. 7**

This verse is a statement of the power of God to break (literally, to shatter) some of the most

formidable crafts of the time, which symbolize human achievement and power. The image of God's power over the elements ("east wind") demonstrates that no matter what man brings against God or His people, it will not stand.

Mark 4:39-41

<sup>39</sup> And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, **Peace, be still**. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. <sup>40</sup> And he said unto them, **Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?** <sup>41</sup> And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

**D. Power confirmed by His fulfilled promises – vs. 8**

1. Promises given in the past regarding God's protection of Jerusalem.

*"As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God..."*

➤ "What has been told us, or handed down by tradition, in regard to the strength and safety of the city – what our fathers have told us respecting its sacredness and its being under the protection of God – we have found to be true. It has been shown that God is its protector; that he dwells in the midst of it; that it is safe from the assaults of man; that it is permanent and abiding. All that had ever been said of the city in this respect had been found, in this trial when the kings assembled against it, to be true." (Barnes)

2. Promise of future protection – *"God will establish it for ever. Selah."*

- The word translated “will establish” (יְכַוְנֶנּוּ) is from a rare Hebrew stem – Polel – that intensifies the meaning. God isn’t just going to allow Zion to stand – He will personally and powerfully set it in place with permanence and purpose. What God sets in place, no enemy can unsettle.

This promise of future establishment is applied, not just to Jerusalem and the Millennial Kingdom but is also spoken of regarding the believer and the church.

Matthew 16:18

<sup>18</sup> And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

1 Peter 5:10

<sup>10</sup> But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

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#### IV. GREAT IN PROVISION – VS. 9-14

##### A. Provision of lovingkindness – vs. 9

The word for “lovingkindness” (חֶסֶד) is more than simple kindness (as we would be to a stranger in need), and it’s more than love (as we would a family member) – it’s a steadfast love or “covenantal love” that remains loyal, loving, and faithful to someone even when they fail us, even if that relationship costs us dearly. This is the idea behind our marriage vows today.

- “We have meditated deeply on Your faithful, covenant love – the love that keeps its promises, that doesn’t abandon us, that acts on

our behalf even when we don't deserve it."  
(according to Claude AI)

## **B. Provision of righteousness – vs. 10**

God's righteousness – both what He is and what He has provided to us through Christ today – is because of who He is: *"According to thy name, O God..."*

## **C. Provision of judgments – vs. 11**

1. This word (מִשְׁפָּט) isn't speaking of condemnation or punishment but rather the wisdom to establish justice and righteous order.
2. The psalmist is calling on the people to praise God for His "judgments" – not just His punishment for sin and wickedness, but the call is to rejoice in God's work of establishing justice and principles by which He shows His lovingkindness and righteousness.

## **D. Provision of guidance for our life – vs. 12-14**

1. Guidance begins with remembering God's faithful guidance of His people in the past – vs. 12-13a.
2. This reminder of who God is and all that He has done (think: the Bible) must be taught to the next generation: *"that ye may tell it to the generation following"* (vs. 13b).
3. Remembering who God is and what He has done will help us stay focused on His will for our lives as long as we live.

Conclusion: "Great is the LORD" – great in position, great in protection, great in power, and great in provision. Not only must we remember these truths; we must teach them "to the generation following." If we don't, who will?