

“City of God”

Psalm 87

This is titled, “A Psalm or Song for the sons of Korah.” As pointed out before, the “sons of Korah” were temple singers (1 Chron. 6:31-38).

This is known as a “Zion psalm” — focused on Jerusalem as God’s chosen dwelling.

The theme of the psalm is not about military victory, personal lament, or national crises, as many psalms are. It is about the glory of Zion because of God’s presence and God’s people.

The key emphasis of the psalm is that God founds the city (v. 1); God loves the city (v. 2); and God fills the city (vv. 4-6).

I. THE FOUNDATION OF THE CITY (VV. 1-3)

A. The divine establishment (v. 1)

“His foundation is in the holy mountains.”

1. Before the psalm names Zion, it declares that it has a foundation — and that foundation is not accidental, but divinely placed in the holy mountains.

Isaiah 14:32

³² What shall *one* then answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.

Psalm 48:1-2

¹ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, *in* the mountain of his holiness. ² Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, *is* mount Zion, *on* the sides of the north, the city of the

| great King.

2. This word for “foundation” (נִסְדָּד) only occurs in Psalm 87 (the verb form occurs three times in Zechariah – 4:9; 8:9; 12:1). It conveys something firmly established, securely laid.
3. “Holy mountains” — plural likely referring to the hill complex of Jerusalem (Zion/Moriah).
 - a) This isn’t just a place in general — it is a sanctified place.
 - b) It is chosen by God, set apart for His presence, and distinguished from all other lands.

| Zechariah 2:12

¹² And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again.

- c) God still has a “set-apart people” today.

| 1 Peter 2:9

⁹ But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

B. The divine affection (v. 2)

1. “Loveth” (אָהַב) — covenantal love, deliberate choice.

| Psalm 132:13–14

¹³ For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired *it* for his habitation. ¹⁴ This *is* my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.

2. "Gates" — place of authority, commerce, and judgment. Represents the public life of the city.

C. The declared glory (v. 3)

1. "Glorious" (גִּיָּוִר) — weighty, honorable, significant.
2. "City of God" — not just a geographical location, but it is the dwelling of God among men.

Psalm 46:4

⁴ *There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.*

Hebrews 11:10

¹⁰ For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

3. Zion's glory is not in itself — it's in what God says about it.

II. THE FOREIGNERS OF THE CITY (VV. 4-5)

A. The unexpected inclusion (v. 4)

1. "Rahab" — is the symbolic name for Egypt (Is. 51:9 cf. with 30:7).

Psalm 89:10

¹⁰ Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm.

2. "Babylon... Philistia... Tyre... Ethiopia..." — these are historical enemies, pagan nations, and outsiders to the covenant.

3. Yet, God says, "This *man* is born there."

a) This is language of citizenship

(1) "Born" (נָּוּ) — passive form (caused to be born) — this is not physical birth; it is legal recognition of citizenship.

(2) Your birthplace determined your identity, allegiance, and privileges.

(3) This is full legal belonging — not outsider status.

b) It is language of divine recognition — "I will make mention..." (v. 4); "The LORD shall count..." (v. 6)

c) It is language of reversal

These were people who were once enemies, once excluded, but are now counted as natives of Zion.

Isaiah 19:25

²⁵ Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed *be* Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.

Ephesians 2:12–13

¹² That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

B. The divine identification (v. 5)

1. There's an emphasis on repetition that shows personal belonging.

2. "The highest himself shall establish her"

a) "Shall establish" (נִבְנֶה) — firmly establish.

b) God not only builds the city — He builds its population.

III. THE REGISTRY OF THE CITY (V. 6)

God records the citizens.

A. The divine record

1. "Writeth up" (כָּתַב) — to inscribe, record officially.

2. This is imagery of a citizenship roll or a royal registry.

Exodus 32:32

³² Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.

Luke 10:20

²⁰ Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

Revelation 20:12

¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

B. The personal recognition — "this *man* was born there"

This is repeated again, for the third time, for

emphasis. Every individual matters.

- Salvation is not anonymous — God knows and records His people.

IV. THE FESTIVITY OF THE CITY (v. 7)

God fills the city with joy.

A. The unified celebration

“Singers” and “players” — these are worshippers together, expressing joy outwardly.

B. The ultimate source

“All my springs are in thee”

1. “Springs” (מַיִם חַיִּים) — fountains; speaks of the sources of life.
2. This means every blessing, every joy, every source of life comes from Zion because God is there.

Psalm 36:9

⁹ For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.

John 4:14

¹⁴ But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

Revelation 22:1

¹ And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

- The joy of the city flows from the presence of God.

Conclusion:

This psalm reminds us that God has a city — not built by man, but founded by Himself. And the glory of that city is not in its walls, but in its people — people whom God Himself has counted as belonging there.

The wonder of the psalm is this: those who were once far off, strangers and enemies, are now spoken of as if they had always belonged — “This man was born there.”

Today, God is still doing that very work — taking sinners, giving them new life, writing their names among His people, and giving them a place that they could never claim on their own. The question is not whether you admire the city — but whether you belong to it.