



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 48

Bishop Youssef



# Introduction

- The title of this Psalm is *A Song. A Psalm of the sons of Korah*
- As it was mentioned in the previous Psalms, these *sons of Korah* were Levites, from the family of Kohath
- By David's time, they served in the musical aspect of the temple worship (2 Chronicles 20:19)
- This Psalm is connected to the previous two Psalms and may refer to the Jews returned from captivity
- They are Psalms of praise
- Psalm 46 presents God our refuge, Psalm 47 presents God our King, and Psalm 48 tell us about God in His great city



# Introduction

- The occasion on which the Psalm was composed is unascertained
- However, some think it is about the defeat of the Philistines by David, 2 Samuel 5:20
- The mention of the ships of Tarshish makes some think that the Psalm was written in connection with the overthrow of Ammon, Moab, and Edom in the reign of Jehoshaphat, 2 Chronicles 20:19,25,36
- And some think the Psalm celebrates the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib in the times of Hezekiah, 2 Kings 19:34



# Introduction

- The Psalm celebrates the glory of Zion and her safety under the care of her Divine protector which is the type of the Christian Church
- It is one of the Psalms of Zion, of the Church, used to praise the Great God and His city, filled with His glory
- The Psalmist calls her *The city of the Great King*, a title referred to by the Lord Christ in His sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:35)
- His presence in it is the secret of her glory (1-2), “her refuge” (3-8), her joy, her praise, her righteousness, and her testimony (9-14)



# Introduction

## Psalm Outline

- The City of the Great King 48:1-3
- The Confusion and Defeat of Zion's Enemies 48:4-8
- The City of God is Exulted 48:9-11
- The City of God is Protected 48:12-14

# The City of the Great King

## 48:1-3



- The psalmist began by describing the greatness of God and His worthiness to be praised
- He is high and exalted; He is of great power and glory
- He is greatness itself, *“Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable.”* (Psalm 145:3)
- No one can understand or grasp how great God really is
- St. John Chrysostom says, “While they say Great, they do not go so far as to say how great, no one knows that, after all – hence he added as well, and highly to be praised. There is no limit, you see, to His greatness.”

# The City of the Great King

## 48:1-3



- It is necessary to praise Him and sing to Him alone for His infinite and incomprehensible greatness of His being
- And where in particular is the Lord worthy to be praised? In Jerusalem
- He connected this praise with a place, Jerusalem, described as *the city of our God, in His holy mountain*
- In the city which He has chosen for His dwelling and where His worship is celebrated, and God was present with His people
- St. John Chrysostom says that the reason of saying *In the city of our God* was to indicate that His greatness and glory were demonstrated through His marvelous work for His people

# The City of the Great King

## 48:1-3



- The psalmist certainly had the literal, historic city of Jerusalem in mind, but he saw, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the perfect city of Jerusalem, the city of God, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12,21:2)
- The two aspects do not cancel each other out; but compliment each other
- *In His holy mountain*, As Mount Zion is called which here and throughout the Psalm (verses 2,11,12) denotes the whole city, not merely one of the hills on which it was built
- In that mountain which He has long ago set apart for the place of His worship



# The City of the Great King

## 48:1-3



- The church of God is a mountain for elevation
- According to St. Isaac the Syrian, she is also called “His Holy Mountain”, on account of her being well established in faith, which no temptation could shake
- It refers, as well, to her exalted doctrines and life
- The names Zion, and Mount Zion were sometimes given to the entire city, Isaiah 2:2-3
- *Beautiful in elevation*, He began to describe the city of God, the city of Jerusalem
- In Israel, the city of Jerusalem is set on a high place

# The City of the Great King

## 48:1-3



- From most places in Israel, when you travel to Jerusalem, you go up to the city
- The elevation of the church is her beauty
- The more she is above the world the more beautiful she is
- Certainly, the church of God, though rejected, humiliated, and persecuted by the world, is the true joy and hope of the world
- It was so especially when Christ, whose birth near it was matter of great joy to all people
- When He who is the “*Desire of All Nations*” (*Haggai 2:7*) was in it

# The City of the Great King

## 48:1-3



- The Gospel went out from it unto the whole world and brought joy wherever it came
- The psalmist described it as *on the sides of the north* meaning it is so small and hidden by the huge mountains
- And also, because the Assyrians who used to fight against the Jews, came from the North
- Yet, although attacked from people of the North, yet she remained *The city of the Great King*
- But some say the psalmist meant to describe it poetically for being well-known, important, elevated, and distinguished, as the ancients believed the north to be the highest part of the earth

# The City of the Great King

## 48:1-3



- *The city of the great King*, Ultimately, this is what makes Jerusalem wonderful
- There are cities with better natural resources and more natural beauty
- Yet there is only one *city of the great King*, the King of kings
- What really made Jerusalem beautiful, was the presence of God in her midst
- The first two verses talked about how the Lord and Mount Zion are praiseworthy
- But what is the connection between the two?

# The City of the Great King

## 48:1-3



- That is what the psalmist begins to unfold in verse 3
- It's this that the Lord protects Mount Zion
- He is the *refuge* or fortress of this special place on earth
- God is our *refuge* in distress, and *He is known*, to His people
- We know nothing else as our refuge
- The city was built with towers and castles, but its true strength and true fortress was God Himself dwelling with His people
- Though we are made kings, and our houses are palaces, yet we have no confidence in ourselves, but trust in the Lord Protector

# The City of the Great King

## 48:1-3



- The trust of the new Jerusalem, like that of the old, is not in man, or in the arm of flesh, but in God, who dwells in her midst
- St. John Chrysostom comments, “Then, to show how she is the city of the great King, he adds, He is known in her palaces, demonstrating His great providence, that He saves her in every possible way, not only caring for her as a whole but displaying His providence in the case of each house. You see, while He is known to us also apart from this, to our enemies on the other hand He showed His might.”

# The Confusion and Defeat of Zion's Enemies 48:4-8



- It begins in verse 4 with the threatening danger of foreign kings who are ready to attack and destroy God's holy city
- *the kings*, The neighboring princes joined against Jerusalem
- Some suppose they are the kings of Ammon, Moab, and Edom, who attacked Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:25)
- Others, the princes of Sennacherib
- And others referring the Psalm to the time of Ahaz, understand them to be Pekah and Rezin (2 Kings 15:37)
- The kings and rulers *assembled* together, they are advancing and came to fight against Jerusalem

# The Confusion and Defeat of Zion's Enemies 48:4-8



- But seeing the power of God against them, *they marveled*, were troubled, and had pain as a woman in labor
- What did these terrifying kings see that terrified them so much?
- Perhaps the sight of the city, with its walls and towers was enough for them
- They recognized that the place was too strong to be attacked with any prospect of success
- So, these mighty kings are now humiliated to the emotional state of a woman in the midst of delivering a baby - which is to say that they are not at all as frightening as they first appeared to be



# The Confusion and Defeat of Zion's Enemies 48:4-8



- Arrogance is transformed into fragility and weakness, power into failure and defeat
- St. John Chrysostom says, “ It is clear that instead of the war being conducted in terms of human logic, it was God whose tactics directed the fighting, who not only depressed the enemies’ spirits but also shook their resolve by causing distress in their ranks and prompting an unspeakable fear in them. It was the same as if a great fleet had assembled and unfavorable wind came upon them and smashed the ships, sank the triremes and instilled instant disorder.”

# The Confusion and Defeat of Zion's Enemies 48:4-8



- According to St. Ambrose, the woman in labor is the soul who is shaped through the work of the Word; as long as she is still in labor, she suffers pains; but, once she gives birth to a child, she rejoices
- The expression in verse 7 must be used metaphorically of a great and violent destruction done by the arm of God upon Israel's enemies
- It is a symbol of the evil that attacks the splendor of the city of God
- That is how it is with those who fight against the church of Christ

# The Confusion and Defeat of Zion's Enemies 48:4-8



- The last word is not in the hands of evil, but of good; God triumphs over hostile powers, even when they seem great and invincible
- *As we have heard*, We should be aware of the great things He has done in the past ages and pray with faith for great works to be done in our own time, *so we have seen*
- As it has been heard, from the promises and prophecies delivered out from time to time, that God will be among His church and people and will be their protection
- He will destroy all His and their enemies; so, it has been seen that these have been fulfilled in all ages

# The Confusion and Defeat of Zion's Enemies 48:4-8



- And in the latter day their accomplishment will be full and manifest to all
- We heard the promise, and we have seen the fulfilment
- Having seen with our own eyes Jerusalem thus delivered, we come to the conclusion that *God will establish it for ever*
- St. John Chrysostom comments on *As we have heard* and says, "That is to say, what we saw in words, he is saying, we have seen in deeds, the victories, the triumphs of God, His care, His surprising marvels. After all, God did not ever cease performing them. And so, it belongs to Him both to free from dangers and to guide towards knowledge of God."

# The City of God is Exulted

## 48:9-11



- He previously said, *We heard, ... and we saw*; Now he says, *We have thought*
- He testifies before the people, to confirm that the Lord Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever
- He who worked in the past, works in the present, and will remain working forever
- The thought turns from a focus on the strength and majesty of God to a consideration of His covenant love, *lovingkindness*
- Being at the temple led the psalmist to reflect and meditate on the lovingkindness of God

# The City of God is Exulted

## 48:9-11



- While they offered their thanksgivings in the Temple courts; they meditated on God's love and realized it to themselves as manifested in this new deliverance
- In the immediate presence of God, men learn the true significance of events, "*Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end.*" (Psalm 73:17)
- The faithful one celebrates his thanksgiving to God in the church
- God's name is filled with majesty and greatness; so is His *praise*
- His praiseworthy character is shown in His *righteousness* and *judgments*

# The City of God is Exulted

## 48:9-11



- A just and honest view of God's character and doings will lead people to praise Him as far as His name is known
- St. John Chrysostom says, "The Psalmist says, He performs deeds so great and wonderful, so lofty and glorious. In other words, You give evidence of care not in keeping with the measure of the beneficiaries, nor in keeping with Your dignity, but in keeping with Your greatness. The praise, therefore – that is, the honor coming from the deeds – caused the achievements to be well received. They were performed in Palestine, but on account of their greatness and importance they had influenced on the very ends of the earth, and those at a distance learned of them."

# The City of God is Exulted

## 48:9-11



- Events so remarkable, and so suited to show that God was a just, a powerful, and a merciful Being, would claim universal praise and adoration
- Mount Zion is evidently used here to designate the city, the city of God - the holy city and the church in general
- Let there be a choir of joyful thanks over the land, not only in Jerusalem, but in every city of Judah
- Because of God's judgments
- Because He has vindicated His people and executed judgment on their enemies



# The City of God is Protected

## 48:12-14



- In these last two verses the city itself fades from view and we see God alone
- Now the Psalmist is inviting the inhabitants of the city to walk around it, as though in a procession to testify to God's work with them, view the city on every side; observe its strength and beauty and how it had escaped all danger
- The Lord Himself is the *tower* of His people, high and strong, which secures and defends them from all their enemies
- In verse 13 the psalmist is asking to consider most attentively how strong are her walls, how safely her inhabitants are well-established and its power to defend itself

# The City of God is Protected

## 48:12-14



- That you may be able to give a correct account of it to the next age to inspire them with a belief that God is the protector of the city
- Christ is not only the shield, but a *bulwark* to the church
- The church is built on a strong foundation, and she is His church
- She is able to resist all the assaults of Satan because of her being directly under the divine protection, she has nothing to fear
- The power of God surrounds His church, as the mountains did Jerusalem

# The City of God is Protected

## 48:12-14



- It is the duty of those who enjoy the blessings of salvation to share and tell others about the amazing divine work
- And to talk about the high bulwarks set by the Spirit of God, where the believers would take refuge against the attacks of the enemy
- To put their trust in the power in Christ Jesus and to enjoy her *palaces*, God's gifts through His church
- Our Lord is a God who has proved Himself the defender of His city and people and will continue to be the same for ever
- The same God that builds and beautifies Jerusalem is *our God forever and ever and will be our guide even to death*

# The City of God is Protected

## 48:12-14



- St. Augustine says, “‘This is God, even our God.’ For how long? ‘For ever and ever: He shall rule us for ever.’ If He is our God, He is also our King. He protects us, being our God, lest we die; He rules us, being our King, lest we fall. But by ruling us He does not break us; for whom He rules not, He breaks. ‘Thou shalt rule them,’ saith He, ‘with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ But there are whom He rules not; these He spares not, as a potter’s vessel dashing them in pieces. By Him then let us wish to be ruled and delivered, ‘for He is our God for ever and ever, and He shall rule us for ever.’”

# Discussion



- The psalmist describes Jerusalem in various ways in verses 1-3. What images do these different descriptions give us of the Jerusalem the psalmist has in mind?
- Does the psalmist tell us why God is great and greatly to be praised? Where? What reasons does the psalmist give?
- In verse 9, the psalmist ponders God's steadfast love in midst of the temple in Jerusalem. Why? What is the connection between a worship space and the experience of God's love?



# Discussion

- In vv12-14, the psalmist proposes a walking tour of Jerusalem, as a way to “tell the next generation” about the identity of God. Why? What will that tour tell them – or us – about God?
- What makes this Psalm so comforting to the church?
- How does this Psalm teach us to worship God?
- How do we apply this Psalm?