

STUDIES IN PSALMS
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. It would be well here to quote the wise words of W. G. Scroggie as to the two views of the Kingdom: "Two distinct views are taken by students of the Scriptures of the Messianic Kingdom. One is, that it is now in progress of realization in the world through the Church; and the other is, that it is to be realized in the future in the world through restored Israel. In the one view, it is entirely spiritual, and in the other, it is also temporal. The Scriptures and the course of events must decide which of these is the right view. (*Ibid.* p. 268) It is not difficult to determine which view is held by Rotherham. What is your view?
2. There *will* be a time when all people will recognize the sovereign rule of God. There *will* be a time when all nations (—or at least some out of each) will clap their hands for joy at this rule and reign of God?—When will this be?
3. Despite whatever reading we give this—(or what commentator we read) this psalm does sound like the universal triumph and rule of God—how?—when?
4. Is there some way in which this psalm could be given a spiritual application to the church today?
5. Will the church of our Lord ever conquer all nations to the extent here described? Discuss.

PSALM 48

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Jehovah Worthy to be Praised in his Holy City, whose History rebounds to the Honour of her Shepherd-King, who will yet Lead Israel against Death.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, Jehovah's Greatness in his Holy City calls forth Praise for Himself and World-wide Gladness at the Elevation of his Earthly Dwelling. Stanza II., vers. 3-7, The Deliverance of His City Dramatically Described. Stanza III., vers. 9-11, A Thoughtful Recognition of the Leading

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Characteristics of Jehovah's Dealings with His People. Stanza IV., vers. 12-14, A Challenge to Verify the Story and Note its Great Lesson.

(Lm.) A Song—A Psalm.

- 1 Great and highly to be praised in the city is our God,
- 2 His holy mountain is beautiful for elevation the joy of all
the earth.
Mount Zion on the northern ridge¹ is the city of a king,
- 3 Jehovah hath striven² in her citadels hath let himself be
known as a lofty retreat.³
- 4 For lo! the kings met by appointment—crossed over together,
- 5 They themselves saw—forthwith were amazed—dismayed—
alarmed;
- 6 Trembling seized them there—anguish as of a woman in
travail;⁴
- 8 “As we had heard so have we seen⁵—Jehovah establisheth
her to the ages.”
- 9 We have pondered O God thy kindness in the midst of thy
temple,
- 10 As is thy name O God so is thy praise to the ends of the
earth:
- 11 With righteousness is filled thy right hand let Mount Zion
be glad,
Let the daughters of Judah exult because of thine acts of
vindication.
- 12 Go about Zion and encircle her, count her towers,—
- 13 Apply your heart to her rampart distinguish her citadels;
That ye may tell to the generations following:—
- 14 That such a God is our God to the ages and beyond,
He will lead us against death!

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician. (CMm.) For the sons of korah.

1. “The temple being on the north-eastern corner or back of Mount Zion”—Br.

2. So, taking *rb* as Heb. verb.

3. Nearly thus Br. The chief departures from the M.T. are different groupings of the Heb. words, securing a better balance of clauses and lines.

4. M.T. adds, as ver. 7: “With an east wind thou shatterest the ships of Tarshish.” Doubtful, as interrupting the sense! unless as a marginal note.

5. M.T. again adds: “In the city of Jehovah of hosts, in the city of our God.” Yet seems to stand interruptingly in the midst of what otherwise commends itself as the speech of the panic-stricken kings.

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PARAPHRASE

PSALM 48

How great is the Lord! How much we should praise Him. He lives upon Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

2 What a glorious sight! See Mount Zion rising north of the city¹ high above the plains for all to see—Mount Zion, joy of all the earth, the residence of the great King.

3 God Himself is the defender of Jerusalem.²

4 The kings of the earth have arrived together to inspect the city.

5 They marvel at the sight and hurry home again,

6 Afraid of what they have seen; they are filled with panic like a woman in travail!

7 For God destroys the mightiest warships with a breath of wind!

8 We have heard of the city's glory—the city of our God, the Commander of the armies of heaven. And now we see it for ourselves! God has established Jerusalem forever.

9 Lord, here in Your Temple we meditate upon Your kindness and Your love.

10 Your name is known throughout the earth, O God. You are praised everywhere for the salvation³ You have scattered throughout the world.

11 O Jerusalem,⁴ rejoice! O people of Judah, rejoice! For God will see to it that you are finally treated fairly.

12 Go, inspect the city! Walk around and count her many towers!

13 Note her walls and tour her palaces, so that you can tell your children!

14 For this great God is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide until we die.

EXPOSITION

As critically revised above, this psalm as a whole does not seem of very difficult interpretation. It naturally follows the previous psalm, by detaining the reader's thoughts on *the palace*

1. Literally, "on the sides of the north."

2. Literally, "God has made Himself known in her palaces for a high tower."

3. Literally, "Your right hand is filled with righteousness."

4. Literally, "Mount Zion."

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where "the nobles gather themselves together with the people of the God of Abraham"; and this naturalness reacts, so as to account for the informal way in which it is here first named as "the city." But being now *the joy of all the earth*, it is to be expected that "the nobles" should delight to visit her, and when they approach should be struck with her *beauty*, though chiefly attracted by her King. Moreover, the fourth line of this fourth stanza, at once forges for itself a link with Ps. 46. Jehovah had indeed *striven in her citadels* by the "devastations he had wrought in the earth" from thence, thereby proving himself *a lofty retreat* for his beleaguered people.

This naturally brings on the second stanza, the extreme graphic beauty of which, of course, every eye can see. It should, however, be remarked in all candour, that the scene there depicted is highly idealised—that is, assuming that the reference is to the historical fact of the miraculous overthrow of the hosts of Sennacherib. For though the proud Assyrian monarch might call his "generals kings," it scarcely follows that a Hebrew bard would so name them, unless he were being guided to make his language fit a later and larger scene. It looks very much as though those *ships of Tarshish* had brought the confederate kings to the holy land, in which case the panic into which they are thrown is the more readily understood. In passing, it may be noted they do not "hasten away," as some render the last word in ver. 5; for they cannot get away, but are arrested on the spot—*there!* as the poet graphically declares. They have just time in their *anguish* to gasp out that opposition to the holy city is hopeless. All of which may excuse the conclusion that this wonderful picture of consternation is as much prophetic as it is historic.

After the storm comes the calm: after the shrieks of anguish comes the voice of praise. Worshipers in the temple have quiet and impulse to *ponder* well the mighty doings of their God. Jehovah has fulfilled *his name* so undeniably in the sight of all nations as to call forth *praise to the ends of the earth*. This again imparts a prophetic tone to words which, though poetically justifiable as suggested by the Assyrian overthrow, are large enough to prompt comparison with predictions yet unfulfilled. The *righteousness* with which Jehovah's *right hand is filled* being *vindictory*, gives cause why *Mount Zion should be glad* and the *daughters, or cities, of Judah should exult*.

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The time being now one of peace, with no enemy near to threaten, dwellers in Zion, and visitors with them, can deliberately *go about Zion, count her towers*, and, recalling her chequered history, can learn the lessons of the past and hand them on to the future: language singularly inappropriate had it been spoken of a heavenly Zion, rather fantastic if referred to ecclesiastical Zions, but very forcibly rooting itself in the past, as a mould of the chief ideas suggested, if connected with the thrilling events which signalled the reign of King Hezekiah. Death, as a king of terrors, gazed both on the nation and, by a special and concurrent providence, on her king—Israel's God as a Shepherd led both king and people through the valley against the monster—and he fled, overcome! Of course not, then, finally; for Hezekiah died afterwards, and the nation has been invaded and carried into captivity since. But in little—in shadow—in outline—in prophecy—Jehovah *led them against death!* Significant words. They will find an echo in the very next psalm; or rather perhaps a clearer note will there be struck; and if Isaiah wrote this psalm, then about this time he is elsewhere renewing the theme (Isa. 25:6-9, 26:19).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. It is almost essential that the reader have several commentaries on the Psalms to give him more than one viewpoint—We respect and admire Rotherham's scholarship and exposition, but then there is C. H. Spurgeon who says of this Psalm: "It would be idle dogmatically to attribute this song to any one event of Jewish history. Its author and date are unknown. It records the withdrawal of certain confederate kings from Jerusalem, their courage failing them before striking a blow. The mention of the ships of Tarshish may allow us to conjecture that the Psalm was written in connection with the overthrow of Ammon, Moab, and Edom in the reign of Jehoshaphat; and if the reader will turn to II Chron. XX., and note especially verses 19, 25, and 36, he will probably accept the suggestion. Verses 1, 2, 3, are in honour of the Lord and the city dedicated to his worship. From 4-8 the song records the confusion of Zion's foes, ascribing all the praise to God; 9, 10, 11 extolling Zion, and avowing Jehovah to be her God for evermore."

PSALM FORTY-EIGHT AND FORTY-NINE

2. If we do not consider Mount Zion as the church, how shall we apply verses 1 through 3? Discuss possibilities, but forget not: when there is no application of the scripture text to the heart of the reader there is no eternal value in it!
3. How shall we represent "the kings of the earth" who came to inspect the city? Please be specific—an idle thoughtless answer is a refusal to take the interest in God's Word it deserves!
4. Will this idealized picture of the triumph of the city of our God ever become a reality? Has it already occurred?
5. If we were to consider Mount Zion as the church, verses 12 through 14 might suggest a very careful walk through the pages of the New Testament. How do you apply these verses?

P S A L M 49

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Death and Redemption: Oppressed Saints Comforted
and Oppressors Rebuked.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-6, An Introduction, consisting of the Proem and the Problem. Stanza II., vers. 7-12, Answer first, Personality more Precious than Possessions. Stanza III., vers. 13-20, Answer second: The Unrelieved future of the Oppressor in Contrast with the Redeemed Future of the Psalmist. The *Refrain* Charges Home the Byword.

(Lm.) Psalm.

- 1 Hear ye this all ye peoples,
give ear all ye dwellers in this passing world;¹
- 2 Both sons of the low and sons of the high,
together both rich and needy.
- 3 My mouth shall speak forth wisdom,
and the soft utterance of my heart be understanding:
- 4 I will bend to a by-word² my ear,
I will open on the lyre mine enigma:—³

1. Or: "age"—"aion not kosmos"—O.G.

2. See vers. 12 and 20. "An aphorism"—Del.

3. Or: "hard question," "riddle": Sep. "problem."