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Psalm 48: A Song. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.

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Psalm 48
A Song. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.
(RSV)

- ¹ Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised
in the city of our God!
His holy mountain, ² beautiful in elevation,
is the joy of all the earth,
Mount Zion, in the far north,
the city of the great King.
- ³ Within her citadels God
has shown himself a sure defense.
- ⁴ For lo, the kings assembled,
they came on together.
- ⁵ As soon as they saw it, they were astounded,
they were in panic, they took to flight;
- ⁶ trembling took hold of them there,
anguish as of a woman in travail.
- ⁷ By the east wind thou didst shatter
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,
which God establishes for ever.
- ⁹ We have thought on thy steadfast love, O God,
in the midst of thy temple.
- ¹⁰ As thy name, O God,
so thy praise reaches to the ends of the earth.
Thy right hand is filled with victory;
- ¹¹ let Mount Zion be glad!
Let the daughters of Judah rejoice
because of thy judgments!
- ¹² Walk about Zion, go round about her,
number her towers,
- ¹³ consider well her ramparts,
go through her citadels;
that you may tell the next generation
- ¹⁴ that this is God,
our God for ever and ever.
He will be our guide for ever.

Selah

Psalm 48 praises the beauty and the strength of Zion, the city of Jerusalem, the place where Yahweh lives as King of his People Israel. The Psalm opens with praise to Yahweh as the God who lives in Jerusalem (verses 1-3). Enemy kings with their armies attacked Jerusalem but were defeated (verses 4-7). Hence God's People are called upon to praise God for his rule (verses 8-11), and to find out for themselves how strong the city is, how mighty God is (verses 12-14).

Perhaps this Psalm was composed after the Assyrian conqueror Sennacherib failed in his quest to capture Jerusalem in 701 B.C. (read 2 Kings 19; 2 Chronicles 32; Isaiah 37). But Jerusalem did fall to Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., and again to the Roman general Titus in 70 A.D. This invites a "long-term future" reading of this Psalm; it does not so much describe the present reality as it anticipates the final reality when God shall have become the undisputed Sovereign of the universe, when all enemies are defeated and none shall be able to rise against him.

In reply to Peter's great confession of faith in Jesus as the Christ and as the Son of the living God, Jesus promised to build his Church upon that foundation, with the added promise that not even the gates of hell would be able successfully to rise in opposition to (read Matthew 16:16-18). The fact that the earthly Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. helped the early Christians to see that the praise of the Old Testament Jerusalem/Mt. Zion/the Temple now belong to the new dwelling of God in the flesh of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, and his Body, the Church. But even so, Christians will pray this Psalm and think of the Church, not so much as it is now, but as it shall be in the End when God shall have silenced all opposition, and shall reign victorious Lord of all – as he promised.

Prayer to accompany Psalm 48:

Father, the body of your risen Son is the Temple not made by human hands and the bulwark of the new Jerusalem. Make this holy city, built of living stones, so shine with spiritual radiance, that it may show your greatness in the sight of all nations; for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.