

DEVOTION IN THE PSALMS

March 13, 2022 | Seeing and Hearing God's Reign

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

In your own words, write a definition of the city of God.

Read Psalm 48.

Ask God to open the eyes and ears of your heart to appreciate the city of God.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The city of God is established forever.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

We find joy and comfort in our citizenship in God's city.

MEDITATE

"As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God, which God will establish forever" (Psalm 48:8).

GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage's main point to your life.

Q: *What are some examples of world-renowned ancient and modern architecture?*

Q: *What makes people appreciate the beauty of these architectural accomplishments?*

One human desire transcending time and most cultures is the urge to build magnificent feats of architecture. In the ancient world, historians made lists cataloguing the Seven Wonders of the World, often included such wonders as the pyramids of Giza, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, and the Coliseum in Rome. More recent times have seen the planning and construction of the National Mall in Washington DC, the Louvre in Paris, and the Forbidden City in Beijing. One structure I am acquainted with that most people would not know of is the Lanyon building of the Queen's University Belfast. I lived in Belfast for more than a year and plodded around the campus nearly every day. Even toward the end of my time there, I still found myself gazing up at the Lanyon building and its beautiful gothic architecture, marveling at its intricacy. Its imposing form never escaped my notice.

These architectural feats and many others like them are stunning in their beauty and design, but they all pale in comparison to the beauty and magnificence of the city of God. Psalm 48 is an invitation to consider the wonder of the city of God. The psalmist was envisioning the city of Jerusalem, the capital of ancient Israel. The details of Psalm 48, however, show he was looking beyond it to an eschatological (end time) rendition of the city. We also look forward to the eschatological city of God and await its appearance on earth. In the meantime, we, like the psalmist, can only imagine what that city will be like. We can look at the architectural wonders around us and know they contain just a glimmer of the glory we will one day behold in full.

Q: *Why is the city of God filled with glory?*

Q: *How are your personal devotions helping you experience God's glory?*

APPLICATION POINT – As beautiful as the city of God will be, its true wonder will not be its architectural design, the materials it is constructed of, or its magnificent attention to detail. The true wonder of the city will be the glory of the God who fills it. The psalmist alluded to this throughout Psalm 48. This is an important principle to remember in every facet of our lives. Consider your devotional life, for instance. Even secular people can

appreciate the literary and philosophical beauty of the Bible. Hopefully, you are witnessing this too, but if you do not behold the glory of God as you read through the Bible, you are missing the best part. Secular people may take time to meditate, but their meditations fall far short of the glory we behold in prayer. As you focus on your devotional life this year, never forget the goal is to witness the glory of God at work in your life. No matter how helpful your personal devotions are, they will not provide the spiritual benefit you need apart from Him.

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+ Psalm 48 could be described as a “pivot psalm.” The pivot point is verse 8, which alludes to hearing and seeing the enduring glory of the city of God, as the psalm invites the reader to encounter the city of God through seeing and hearing.

1. SEEING

2. HEARING

GOING DEEPER

+ *This section will examine how the psalmist glorifies God through seeing and hearing of the wonder of His city.*

1. SEEING

▣ PSALM 48:3–5, 12–13A

Q: *Why did the nations assemble against the city of God?*

Q: *What defeated the assembly of nations in Psalm 48?*

The Psalms frequently depict the nations gathering to oppose God, His people, and His city. Such is the case in Psalm 48, but astonishingly, their opposition is foiled at the mere sight of the city of God (Psalm 48:5). Before a single arrow was shot, before a single blow was struck, this hostile mob of nations fell in trepidation. Simply seeing the glory of God resting upon His city was cause enough to give up. They did not concede God’s lordship, but they

recognized the battle was over before it even began.

❓: *In what ways does the certainty of God's ultimate victory encourage you in the Christian life?*

❓: *Do you struggle with a presumption of failure?*

APPLICATION POINT – Some people, such as myself, have a natural inclination to expect failure. We assume our efforts will not succeed, our team is outmatched, and our side will not win. I remember starting an intermural football season in college hoping my team would just be competitive. We won every game by at least twenty points, including the championship (which I thought we were sure to lose). The first time I submitted an article to an academic journal, I started by apologizing for taking the editor's time. I figured they would shortly send a memo declining my article. Instead, the editor thanked me for choosing his journal and accepted my article for publication. I share these examples to show there have been times I should have had at least a little optimism about what I was doing but didn't. I don't know why I lack confidence and expect to fail, regardless of the situation. I don't think it is a psychological ploy to lower my expectations in case of failure. It is a genuine outlook that seems to be engrained within me. To all my fellow pessimists, when it comes to God's battle against those who oppose Him, we never have to worry that God will not be up to the task! God's enemies flee at the mere sight of His presence. As long as we are found in Him (Ephesians 1:3–14), our salvation is secure, our eternity is certain, and our victory is won. We have no need to despair!

❓: *Why did the psalmist invite the reader to take a tour of the city of God?*

❓: *What city did the author have in mind when he described the city of God?*

In Psalm 48:12–13a, the psalmist invites us to take a tour of God's magnificent city. He wanted us to see firsthand what stopped the hostile nations in their tracks. The city's buildings and design were imposing. Once we behold the marvelous city and all its features, we will understand God's glory because the city is an expression of it.

It is important to remember that while the psalmist may have had Jerusalem in mind as he described the city of God, he ultimately knew that the city of God transcends Jerusalem. The eschatological nature of the city is quite

apparent in how he described the nations amassing to oppose it and how they turned away at the mere sight of it. This point is crucial for understanding Psalm 48 because, however grand Jerusalem might have been in the day of the psalmist, the city had been destroyed in the past. Imagine the horrors the psalmist would have suffered when this happened if his words had been strictly tied to Jerusalem. Where Jerusalem was a fallible city, the city of God will never suffer defeat.

Q: *How does eschatology (study of the end times) give us hope for the present?*

Q: *Why should the glory of the city of God give us confidence in the Christian life?*

APPLICATION POINT – The psalmist’s point is wonderful, but since the city he was referring to is an eschatological city, we may legitimately wonder how effective his point is. How can we take confidence in being told to behold an eschatological city that remains in the future for us? The key is to look to the Scriptures. Paul described our present state as looking in a dim mirror, but we will see clearly when the future God has planned becomes a reality (1 Corinthians 13:12). When we see the beauty of modern architecture, we know it pales in comparison to what we will see in the future. We can take confidence in knowing the major figures of the Bible also had to trust in the beauty of the eschatological city they could not yet see. Abraham forsook his worldly country to seek a city whose designer and builder was God (Hebrews 11:8–10). When we seek the glories of the city of God instead of all this world has to offer, we can have confidence that we are following in the steps of Abraham. Finally, the Bible concludes by offering a description of the eschatological city of God (Revelation 21). John’s marvelous depiction of the city of God in human words will pale in comparison when we see the real thing. The Scriptures encourage us to look forward to seeing the city of God.

2. HEARING

■ **PSALM 48:1–2, 6–7, 9–11, 13B–14**

Q: *Who will delight in the city of God?*

Q: *What is the relationship between the city of God and His holy mountain?*

Psalm 48 begins with a report for us to hear concerning the beauty of the city of God. After calling attention to the city of God, the psalmist described a mountain. We are meant to identify the city of God with the mountain. The psalmist combined these images. Just as the city is associated with God, so is the mountain. That is why it is holy. The psalmist's message parallels Isaiah 2:1–5, which describes the nations steaming to the mountain of God, the highest of mountains. In Psalm 48:2, the city of God is described as a mountain that is beautiful in its elevation and is the joy of all the earth.

One final point to take from the beginning of this psalm concerns the reference to the far north. Mount Zion, where the temple was situated with Jerusalem, was in the southern part of the kingdom of Israel. Thus, this reference obviously does not refer to Zion specifically. The far north is frequently described as the throne room of those who oppose God (Isaiah 14:12–13; Ezekiel 38:6; 39:2). Thus, by alluding to Mount Zion in the far north, the psalmist was suggesting that Mount Zion's sphere of influence will one day cover even those who are hostile toward God. It is another way of saying their defeat is certain. The kings who assembled themselves against God would not succeed.

❖: *What implications does the word “holy” have for us when used to describe God’s mountain?*

❖: *How does the certain defeat of those who oppose God give us confidence today?*

APPLICATION POINT – The mountain of God is described as holy. It is the place where God's people will dwell with Him. This mountain's holiness comes from God, not us. Even our best attempts at holiness fall far short of what could be adequately described as holy. Isaiah 64:6 says our righteous deeds are like polluted garments to God. We could never attain a righteousness of our own through a personal commitment to holiness. Apart from Jesus Christ, no one would be allowed to set foot on God's holy mountain. Nevertheless, God's holy mountain does demand a commitment to personal holiness. The New Testament clearly indicates that the followers of Christ must prioritize a holy lifestyle (1 Thessalonians 4:1–7; 1 Peter 1:16). We must take sin seriously and flee its destructive reach. How do we do this? One way we can pursue holiness is modeled for us in this psalm. We can become captivated by the holiness of the city of God and the One who dwells there.

Notice that for the psalmist, the place of holiness coincides with the place of joy. Anyone can find joy on God's holy mountain. Despite the world's promises, sin offers no harbor for joy in this life. Furthermore, the joy found in holiness is not bound by culture or dependent on personal preference. All the earth will find joy on God's holy mountain.

Q: *Why is the “woman in labor” metaphor so effective at describing the anguish of those who plot against God?*

Q: *What metaphors could you create to describe the anguish of those who plot against God?*

Where songs of joy come from the city of God, cries of terror will come from the camps of those who plot against God’s city. The psalmist compared the anguish of the enemies of God with the anguish of a woman in labor. This is a common metaphor in the Old Testament used to describe those who are suffering God’s judgment (Isaiah 21:3; Jeremiah 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 49:24). The metaphor’s remarkable effectiveness stems from its ability to communicate across time and culture. The cries of anguish would ring in the ears of everyone who has ever been present for the birth of a child.

Q: *Why does the Old Testament focus on the pain of labor instead of the joy of a newborn baby?*

Q: *How does the resurrection bring joy to a hopeless world?*

APPLICATION POINT – When the Old Testament used a woman in labor to describe God’s judgment of the wicked, the authors did not describe the scene after birth. The emphasis is on the pain of labor. Remarkably, Jesus used this same metaphor to describe the agony the disciples would suffer at His death (John 16:16–24). But He did not follow the Old Testament pattern of confining the metaphor to the time of labor. Instead, He brought it to completion with the joy a woman experiences at the birth of the child (John 16:21). When He rose from the dead, the anguish the disciples felt at His death was replaced by the joy of His resurrection. This is the power of Jesus Christ and His resurrection. Before, there was only sorrow and no hope for those under the condemnation of sin. Now, there is joy to be found at the end of sorrow. The wrath of God was fully satisfied in Jesus. Everyone who hopes in His death and resurrection can find forgiveness of sin and the unspeakable joy of a new life with God.

Q: *What is the most common reason given for offering God praise?*

Q: *In Psalm 48, what was God's weapon against those who plotted against Him?*

Those who trust in God will hear His praises echoing all the way to the ends of the earth. The cause of God's praise may perhaps take us by surprise. We might expect the deliverance of His people to be the source of His worldwide praise, but if it is, it is pushed to the background in this instance. The psalmist identified God's judgments as the cause of His worldwide praise. God will hold those who oppose Him accountable for their rebellion against Him, and this is a reason to praise Him. Another surprise for the reader concerns God's instrument of judgment. We might expect to find some sort of a weapon or rod in God's right hand, but the psalmist says His right hand is filled with righteousness (Psalm 48:10). God's righteousness demands the judgment of those who refuse to yield to His rule, and His judgment will be acknowledged as good and just by the praise of His people.

Q: *Why should you be suspicious of antiauthoritarians?*

Q: *How have you seen power exercised well and exercised poorly?*

APPLICATION POINT – We recoil against the idea of power. In the minds of many, the existence of power signals corruption, and the exercise of power can only accomplish oppressive and evil purposes. Power and corruption often do go hand in hand, but to suggest the solution is to overthrow all authority structures in favor of the absence of all authority is ludicrous and even more dangerous. This psalm reminds us that the exercise of power does not always stem from corruption. The key is righteousness. God righteously exercises His power in judgment and receives our praise as a result. The righteous exercise of power is good for human flourishing. This is an important principle for Christians in powerful positions to recognize. God has put you in the position you are in to display His glory in how you exercise authority. Righteous character results in a good exercise of power. Whether you are in a supervisor-employee relationship, parent-child relationship, or any other position in which you are given authority, you have the responsibility to exercise it in a manner that is consistent with the righteous character of God. This is another reason we must seek holiness in character through the grace found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Q: *What is the goal of our witnessing the splendor of the city of God?*

Q: *Given the psalmist's commitment to tell the coming generations, why did Israel continue to slide into idolatry and rebellion?*

Psalm 48 is intended to create an enduring message that will be heard in the next generation and beyond. As the audience marveled at God's glory, justice, righteous character, judgment, and grace, they were charged to pass along what they saw and heard to the generation that followed (Psalm 48:13). This ensured that the earth would retain an enduring witness to the glory and goodness of God.

Q: *What steps can you take to pass along your faith to the next generation?*

Q: *Why is it important to pass the faith along to the next generation?*

APPLICATION POINT – Psalm 48 invites us to see and hear the glories of who God is and what He has done so that we may help those who come after us see and hear God as well. Parents have to recognize what a responsibility this psalm places upon them. You cannot just hope your children will witness your faith and know to follow your lead. You are called to intentionally pass your faith along. This means showing your children how to live as a follower of Christ and verbalizing the message of the gospel and how it influences every part of your life. Church members are called to pass along the faith to the children and youth in the church. Studies have shown that mere church attendance has almost zero influence on whether teenagers will attend church and confess their faith into their twenties and beyond. We cannot assume that young people will believe in Christ just because they are coming to church. They are just as likely not to. Similar studies have shown that youth who formed relationships with three to four adults in a church were more than twice as likely to remain in church throughout young adulthood. The key to passing along our faith to the next generation is investing in the lives of young people. If we are going to be obedient to Psalm 48:13, we have to actively pass along our faith.

NEXT STEPS

Psalm 48 invites us to see and hear of the glory of the city of God. The city's glory comes from God Himself. This week, consider one way in which you could help others do each of these things. How can you help others see the glory of God? This may require an act of service or a public display of your commitment to God. How can you help others hear the glory of God? Tell someone how your faith in God has influenced your life and ask how He could make a difference in their life.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

God, the mere sight of you leads the nations to terror. Help me treat you with an authentic reverence that will show the world your glory.

Jesus, apart from you, I would have no hope of being a citizen in God's holy city. Thank you for the sacrifice you made on my behalf.

Father, help me to hear and see the beauty of your glory in your Word and in my life.

God, help me pass along the good news of the gospel of Jesus to the next generation.