

Sing City

Psalm 48 May 25, 2025

New cities have been making headlines. Starbase, Texas is the new city designed for SpaceX's headquarters, future rocket launches, and dwellings for on-site workers.

EPIC City has also been in the news. It is a Muslim-centered planned community near Dallas, large enough for more than 1,000 homes plus schools, assisted living, athletic fields, and one of the state's largest mosques.¹

Starbase was just officially incorporated as a city five days ago. Things aren't going so well for EPIC City - a federal investigation has brought building and development to a halt for the time being.

Psalm 48 is about a magnificent city. A city full of beauty, strength, joy, brilliance and worship. The most magnificent thing about this city is its chief Resident: God Himself. *He* brings the splendor to this city which He designed, built, protects, and fills with gladness. His home reveals His greatness and His matchlessness. No competitor or attacker could ever rival the God of this city.

Psalm 48:1-2 - ¹The LORD is great and highly praised in the city of our God. His holy mountain, ²rising splendidly, is the joy of the whole earth. Mount Zion—the summit of Zaphon— is the city of the great King.

The song begins with the bottom line up front: The Lord is *great*. Great in everything He is. Great in power, great in love, great in beauty, great in patience, great in kindness.

Sports have their superstars - players who do amazing things on the court or field. Yet all of them have some area of weakness. Steph Curry was once asked in an interview, "Why can't Steph Curry dunk?" His answer was simple, "[You] can't be good at everything."²

But God is *great* at all He is. No area of failure or weakness. The city He dwells in fits His greatness. As we look at His dwelling place, it should make us more in awe of Him.

Now, when the Old Testament refers to Zion, it usually means the real, physical Jerusalem. But throughout this Psalm, there are hints that we're not just talking about a city built of wood and stone in the hills of Israel. The sons of Korah have in mind the true dwelling place of Yahweh.

They reference the height of the city, rising to the uttermost parts of the north. Physical Jerusalem is surrounded by higher mountains with better views.³ That's our first clue that this is a different city.

They say this city is the joy of the whole earth. That certainly does *not* describe current Jerusalem.

¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/texas/news/federal-probe-started-into-muslim-centered-community-epic-city-sen-cornyn-says/>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuOkS2tm89k>

³ James Johnston *The Psalms: Rejoice, the Lord Is King—Psalms 42 to 106*

They call Zion “the summit of Zaphon.” That doesn’t mean anything to us but it would to the ancient audience. In Canaanite belief, Zaphon was the home of Baal. Over time, it became a generic term for a sacred mountain.⁴ Think of how we use Mount Everest or Mount Rushmore descriptively.

In this song, Zion is the place where God dwells, especially in the ultimate sense. As Christians, we have a different experience when it comes to God’s dwelling place than Jewish singers in 1,000 B.C. did. We know that God dwells within our hearts - that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit - and we know that ultimately we will dwell in a New Jerusalem for all eternity. The city that Abraham faithfully looked forward to.

Cities become known for what goes on on their streets. Vegas is known for gambling, Detroit for cars. In high school history we learned Athens was known for philosophy, Corinth for commerce, Sparta for military training. The city of God is known for worship. It’s filled with *His* praises.

Zion is splendid and holy because *God* is splendid and holy. Without Him, the city is nothing. Think of most olympic cities. They’re only full of pageantry and glory and excitement as long as the games are there. Once the closing ceremonies are over, many of those cities fall into disrepair.

We look forward to the New Jerusalem which is absolutely perfect and glorious and eternal because *God* is there. Meanwhile, my life is an outpost of God’s presence, His promises, His holiness. So not only should my life *reflect* His attributes, but it should be full of worship of God - a prelude of praise before eternity’s symphony. An embassy of His joy and greatness.

Psalm 48:3 - ³ God is known as a stronghold in its citadels.

Stronghold means a palace, a haven, a refuge. We can hide ourselves in Him and that any corner of the world can be a place of joy and peace and safety because *He* is the refuge.

This truth is made known again and again in Scripture. David in the cave. Paul and Silas in a dungeon. The children of Israel on the shore of the Red Sea. Daniel in the lions’ den. All were safe in the Lord their refuge. They did not need a *physical* palace, they had a heavenly haven.

Psalm 48:4-7 - ⁴ Look! The kings assembled; they advanced together. ⁵ They looked and froze with fear; they fled in terror. ⁶ Trembling seized them there, agony like that of a woman in labor, ⁷ as you wrecked the ships of Tarshish with the east wind.

One day all the kings and all the nations *will* flow to Zion to worship the Lord and learn from Him.⁵ But not yet. That is part of the coming Kingdom.

⁴ John Goldingay *Psalms, Volume 2: Psalm 42-89*

⁵ Isaiah 2:2-4

Today, the nations of the world still rebel against God. They rage against Him. Here we see it depicted: Despite the splendor, despite the greatness and the glory and the goodness, they come to attack and destroy. But they never make it to the siege - God brings the fight to them. They assemble in this conspiracy and the Lord heads them off in the waters, wiping out their navies.

They looked and were frozen in fear. Why? Because they realized they could not defeat the Lord. And they had not been welcomed into the city as His friends and children. They were driven out.

In contrast, what does the Lord say to His people? Do *not* fear. Isaiah 41 says, "The LORD your God, who holds your right hand, says to you, "Do not fear, I will help you.""⁶ We run *to* Him, not *from* Him.

Psalm 48:8 - ⁸ Just as we heard, so we have seen in the city of the LORD of Armies, in the city of our God; God will establish it forever. Selah

God is not the *only* inhabitant of this city. The sons of Korah sing as though they have seen it from the inside! So how can *I* become a citizen of this incredible city? Is there a wait list or what?

In the 1990's, the Disney Corporation developed a city in Florida named Celebration. Interest was so high Disney had to use a lottery system when selling the first batch of picture-perfect homes.⁷

Do we have to win a lottery? How do we get to God's city? That question is asked in Psalm 24.

Psalm 24:3-6 - Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not appealed to what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who inquire of him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Those who seek the Lord and receive salvation from Him, who receive His gift of righteousness, are who are welcomed to dwell with Him in His glorious city *forever*. Hebrews tells us we come to this city through Jesus Christ Who brings us into covenant with the living God.⁸

Disney didn't make it forever. In fact, they didn't even make it 10 years before they sold off Celebration. By 2016 there was more trouble in paradise. Residents brought a civil suit saying their roofs leaked, balconies were separating from the sides of buildings, and a host of other problems.⁹

Nothing like that happens in Zion. God will establish it forever. No leaks. No moths. No rust.

Psalm 48:9 - ⁹ God, within your temple, we contemplate your faithful love.

⁶ Isaiah 41:13

⁷ <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/travel/the-creepy-history-of-disneys-perfect-town/LZL2V5BPKMWEZVLSWPDQEDRF3M/>

⁸ Hebrews 12:22-24

⁹ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/leaks-and-mold-are-ruining-the-disney-magic-in-celebration-florida-1479249246>

We've heard it asked, "How can you think of food at a time like this?" Well, how could the sons of Korah sing of *love* when a war was going on outside? The Bible is clear that contemplation of God's *hesed*, agape love should fill our minds day and night - *especially* when we gather together.

Sometimes churches make the mistake of either making our Christian faith all about what *you* do for God or how God can make you *feel* good in this life. God *does* call us to do things and He *does* care about our problems. But before we consider our feelings or doings, we must emphasize the love of God. Focus your attention on the magnitude of His love. That God so *loved* the world. That *nothing* could ever separate us from His love. That this love has been shed abroad - poured out in *our* hearts and changes the whole trajectory and experience of human life for those who walk in it.

The sons of Korah took God's love seriously. Not in passing, but with passion. One commentary writes, *"Their meditation was more than a devotional reading. They took comfort in, rejoiced in, and made offerings in gratitude to the revelation of God's perfections."*¹⁰

Psalm 48:10-11 - ¹⁰ Like your name, God, so your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with justice. ¹¹ Mount Zion is glad. Judah's villages rejoice because of your judgments.

Usually civic pride doesn't spread very far outside the city. We don't care that much about what's going on in Bogota or Bruges. But God's greatness is so great that the celebration of His goodness and love and power and grace spread through the whole earth.

We become participants in praise from our outposts here in Hanford, in Lemoore, or wherever God sends us. We spread the rejoicing - not only praising the great deeds He has done, but *also* praising and elevating His holy way of life.

God's people rejoice over His judgments. That word means His decisions, His standards, His ordinances.¹¹ Today, very few people celebrate the HOA, but God's mode of life is not something to be mad at or annoyed by. The guidelines He gives do *not* take anything away from us. They *enrich* our lives and spare us from many of the terrible consequences of sin. When we walk His path, within His boundaries, it leads to *life*. To satisfaction. To lasting purpose and eternal reward.

Psalm 48:12-14 - ¹² Go around Zion, encircle it; count its towers, ¹³ note its ramparts; tour its citadels so that you can tell a future generation: ¹⁴ "This God, our God forever and ever—he will always lead us."

The sons of Korah challenge us to take a good look. Examine God's work carefully. Check it out from every angle. We'll find there is no flaw. *But*, it is only great if God is there. *He* is the focus, *He* is the reason, *He* is the cause, *He* is the hero.

¹⁰ Frank Gaebelin, Willem VanGemern, Allen Ross, J. Stafford Wright, and Dennis Kinlaw. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs. Vol. 5.*

¹¹ *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries : Updated Edition*

As we build things, as we fight battles, as we live life through choices and actions, we must always remember that “Unless the LORD builds a house, its builders labor over it in vain - unless the LORD watches over a city, the watchman stays alert in vain.”¹² God must be the leader. He must be infusing the life and the work with His love and His grace and His holiness and His transformation.

This message and the story of God’s love and power must be passed “from one generation to another until the end of time.”¹³ Your children need to know God is real. Real in history. Real in *your* life. Real in *their* future. He is proven real as we yield to Him and walk with Him and He is able to accomplish His perfect work in and through us. He is proven real as we allow Him to be our guide and our refuge. As we walk by faith He will always lead us. Leading us into victory, into service, into transformation according to His design and by His accomplishment.

Where is He guiding us? He guides us into truth. He guides us on the way we should go in a world that is often difficult and confusing to navigate. Ultimately, He guides us to *this* Psalm 48 city. The New Jerusalem in His forever Kingdom. That’s where Christians are going. Revelation ends with a tour of the heavenly city very reminiscent of these last verses. The most glorious place, the place where God dwells and where He has a prepared a place for *us* to dwell forever with Him.

We keep hearing about ideas for new cities that governments are planning. Smart cities, 15 minute cities. IBM defines Smart cities as “an urban area where technology and data collection help improve quality of life.”¹⁴ Not sure I want to hear about urban quality of life from a company who helped collect the data the Nazis needed for their “final solution.”

15 minute cities sound more like prisons than utopias. I don’t really want to live in Starbase, Texas or EPIC City. Ironically, both of those communities are in what we sometimes refer to as “God’s country.” But man’s best cities all still have graveyards and garbage dumps.

There is a perfect city, inhabited by a perfect God. I don’t have to fight my way in, cheat my way in, win a spot through a lottery. I’ve been *invited* in, and so have you. His faithful love has made it possible and so I know that I am a citizen there, on my way home.

What about you? Have you accepted the invitation? If you haven’t, you can right now. If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

And if you have received that invitation, remember that your life is a prelude to the praise of eternity. Your life is an outpost of *this* great God and His great city. Fill the borders of your life with His joy and His praise and His love until you make it home, too.

¹² Psalm 127:1

¹³ Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

¹⁴ <https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/smart-city>