



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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## **Psalms 48:1-14** **New Revised Standard Version** **February 10, 2019**

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, February 10**, is from **Psalms 48:1-14** (Some will only study Psalms 48:1-3, 9-14). **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

**(Psalms 48:1) A Song. A Psalm of the Korahites. Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God. His holy mountain,**

The Sons of Korah (also translated as Korathite and Korahite) were a family of Levites set over the song services at the tabernacle or tent of meeting by King David (see 1 Chronicles 6:31ff).

The city of our God is Jerusalem and His holy mountain in Mount Zion, the highest mountain in ancient Jerusalem upon which King David built a magnificent fortress. King David set up the tabernacle on Mount Moriah, upon which King Solomon built the temple. The Psalm first leads the people to praise the LORD (Jehovah or Yahweh) because of His greatness. Because of His greatness, worshipers are called to praise the LORD greatly (with all their heart, strength, and voice in song). Since the LORD resided in the tabernacle (and later King Solomon's temple) in Jerusalem, the city is called "the city of our God," where the people went to meet God. Because the LORD is holy and resided within the city, both Mount Zion and Mount Moriah were considered holy (set apart by God for pure worship and righteous use). No idols of ancient Egypt or their neighbors encouraged holy, loving, moral behavior; rather, these idols encouraged immoral behavior even during their worship, including the murder of their children in child sacrifice. Idols cannot express love and power for the benefit of those who worship them. The Israelites' history and knowledge of Yahweh, the true God, showed the Israelites that the LORD their God deserved all their praise, total devotion, and obedience to His commandments.

**(Psalms 48:2) beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King.**

As believers travelled from the far north and saw from a distance and drew closer to the north side of Jerusalem on Mount Zion, which was beautiful because of its elevation or situation on the mountain, they felt true joy. Those leading in worship also encouraged those singing to praise the LORD for His beautiful character and nature as their great King, Who resided within the city and Who had inspired the building of His city. In song, believers proclaimed that the LORD is the source of all true joy on earth, and at the return of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, everyone on earth will know that the LORD is the One who is the ultimate cause of all joy.

**(Psalms 48:3) Within its citadels God has shown himself a sure defense.**

Citadels are forts or castles with towers and walls. When believers saw the stronghold for protection that Jerusalem had become under the leadership of kings David and Solomon, they knew that the LORD had made all these fortifications possible; therefore, they praised the LORD for making himself known as a fortress. The Psalm inspired true worship and encouraged those singing to trust in the LORD as their fortress and not in the walls and towers that surrounded the city. The citadels were only outward expressions of the LORD's love for and protection of His people. Though Jerusalem was the city of the great King, they needed to trust in the presence and power of the LORD to save and protect them.

**(Psalms 48:4) Then the kings assembled, they came on together.**

The psalmist now moves from singing about the experiences of those who love and serve the LORD when they see Jerusalem to singing of the enemies of Israel and the LORD when they first see the city and its towers and walls. The kings assembled with their armies to conquer the city, until they saw Jerusalem with its citadels.

**(Psalms 48:5) As soon as they saw it, they were astounded; they were in panic, they took to flight;**

At various times reported in the Old Testament, the enemies of Israel came against the city of Jerusalem. Most memorably, perhaps, was the time the Babylonians destroyed the city and the temple in 586 BC and carried the Jews into captivity. But at the time the Psalmist composes this song, the grace of God and the Israelites' obedience to the LORD's commandments led the LORD to glorify Jerusalem in the eyes of their enemies so that they panicked and fled rather than attack Jerusalem. They fled in panic fearing a mighty army might come forth from the city, march against them, and destroy them. In the days of King Solomon, kings and queens from various nations came to marvel at the splendor of the city, the temple, and King Solomon's palace (as well as learn from his wisdom).

**(Psalms 48:6) trembling took hold of them there, pains as of a woman in labor,**

The psalmist now describes more graphically how these enemy kings and their armies panicked and fled. They trembled in fear from just seeing the city's defenses and the fact that most of them would probably die if they attacked the city. Their dread of attacking could only be compared to a mother who was about to give birth to her baby, and there was no joy set before them as there is for an expectant mother. In their past, the LORD had protected Jerusalem so well that the Israelites came to believe that no matter how they behaved that the appearance of their fortress city and the presence of their God in their temple would always protect them from their enemies. Therefore, they refused to heed the warnings of Jeremiah and the other prophets who called them to repent of their sins, warning that if they did not turn back to the LORD that the LORD would destroy their city and temple. Eventually, the LORD had to punish them for their disobedience.

**(Psalms 48:7) as when an east wind shatters the ships of Tarshish.**

Tarshish was probably in Spain. It was so far from Israel that Jonah tried to flee from the LORD to Tarshish. The psalmist tells us that the LORD and the appearance of Jerusalem's citadels sowed fear and scattered their enemies so thoroughly that the psalmist could only compare their defeat to an east wind shattering the ships of Tarshish in the Mediterranean Sea—probably many of them had heard stories about strong winds destroying

fleets of ships from Tarshish and other places.

**(Psalms 48:8) 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 forever. [Selah]**

This verse of praise is neither a prophecy nor a promise from the LORD that no matter how immoral they became or how much they rebelled against the LORD that the LORD would forever defend the Israelites from their enemies to preserve His city and His temple. In this verse, “the LORD of hosts” means “the LORD of an army of angels.” The LORD, the great King, had the ability to defend His city and temple from all His enemies; unless He needed to destroy Jerusalem and His temple to discipline His people. The Israelites needed to turn to, trust in, and obey the LORD instead of trusting in the protection of the wonderful city and temple God had given them. Since the Judeans did not learn from the LORD’s destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel for its idolatry despite their prophets’ warnings, they ignored the dire predictions of their own prophets and refused to repent; therefore, the LORD used the Babylonians as His servants to destroy their city and temple.

The word “Selah” is used 71 times in the Old Testament and possibly means “Forever” as an exclamation by the leaders and people to affirm a truth, or it may be a term that was used for directing those singing the psalm.

**(Psalms 48:9) We ponder your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple.**

The psalmist now turns from describing the magnificent city of Jerusalem—that revealed the glory of God—to thoughts about Solomon’s temple. The temple services, where the people could meet with and pray to the LORD, along with its sacrifices and assurances of forgiveness and peace with God, demonstrated the steadfast love of God. When the people entered the temple gates and the courts of the temple (the people could not enter the holy places reserved for the priests), they thought of God’s blessings and steadfast love, which unhappily they began to take for granted.

**(Psalms 48:10) Your name, O God, like your praise, reaches to the ends of the earth. Your right hand is filled with victory.**

The name of the LORD (the power and greatness of Israel’s God) was known in all Egypt after the Exodus and by all of Israel’s neighbors after King David finally subdued them. Therefore, Israel’s enemies feared both Israel’s God and King Solomon’s well-equipped army. Israel’s praise of the LORD, their amazement at the LORD’s deeds, and stories about Israel’s almighty God and His wonderful works in history had reached Israel’s neighbors and even those far beyond Israel’s borders (that the psalmist described as “the ends of the earth”). The LORD had worked among Abraham and his descendants

because the LORD's "right hand" (meaning "the power of God") was used only for righteous (right, holy, loving, just) purposes. When God defeated Israel's enemies or disciplined Israel for their rebellion, He always did what was deserved, good, and right.

**(Psalms 48:11) Let Mount Zion be glad, let the towns of Judah rejoice because of your judgments.**

The psalmist wanted all Jerusalem (Mount Zion) to be glad when people entered the city to meet at the temple and worship the LORD. Because the psalmist spoke of Judah, it seems by this time Israel had been divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, with only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin composing the southern kingdom and remaining loyal to the house of David. "Daughters of Judah" has been interpreted to mean the small cities and towns that composed the southern kingdom, but the psalmist may very well have meant the actual daughters of the Judeans. The psalmist wanted people to rejoice not only because of the beauty of Jerusalem and King Solomon's temple that revealed some of the LORD's glory, but primarily rejoice in God's moral (holy, loving, just, righteous, gracious, forgiving) character that served as the basis for all of the LORD's judgments and should motivate people to obey the LORD.

**(Psalms 48:12) Walk about Zion, go all around it, count its towers,**

In his psalm of praise, the psalmist returned to the beauty and the security offered by Zion, the City of Jerusalem, with its walls and towers. The song encouraged worshipers to praise the LORD from whom all blessings flow, but too soon they began to take pride in building a such marvelous city.

**(Psalms 48:13) consider well its ramparts; go through its citadels, that you may tell the next generation**

Unfortunately, as some of the Judeans repeatedly sang this Psalm, they began to trust increasingly in what their eyes beheld as an unassailable, invincible fortress that would always protect them, rather than focus on the LORD, on thanking the LORD, on serving the LORD, and on praising the LORD in the beauty of holiness. They forgot that only the LORD can give true security. Interestingly, they would only need to tell the next generation about the beauty of Jerusalem and the temple if the next generation would not be able to see it for themselves.

**(Psalms 48:14) that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will be our guide forever.**

In my opinion, the King James Version translation of this verse is to be preferred to the ESV and the NRSV translations. The KJV reads: "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death." From Psalm 48, we learn something about the LORD who created and gave the beautiful city of Jerusalem and the

temple to His people. The LORD has made himself known by what He has done, and because of His judgments He is worthy of praise. The LORD is the great King. The LORD is holy and righteous. The LORD manifests steadfast love in all He does. Because of the attributes and character of the LORD that the psalmist declares, the LORD is worthy of great praise. The LORD is and will always be God forever and ever. The Psalmist wanted all the worshipers to proclaim that God would guide them forever (if only they would serve the LORD exclusively and submit themselves to obeying His commands and following His guidance).

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Whose city is located on Mount Zion and what is its name? Describe some characteristics of this owner as revealed in Psalm 48?
2. Describe the city on Mount Zion.
3. How does the psalmist say the LORD has made himself known? What does that mean to you?
4. What did the kings do when they assembled at Mount Zion?
5. Where did the Israelites think of the steadfast love of God? What are some of the ways God showed His steadfast love to the Israelites?

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