

Psalm 48

This is God – our God!

1. Look at the form of the Psalm

Ps. 48 goes round the four points of the compass – see reverse.

A *The greatness of God and the excellence of Zion* (vv. 1-3)

B *The assembled kings see and are filled with dread* (vv. 4-7)

C *The LORD of Hosts and the City of our God* (v. 8)

B' *The assembled people reflect and are filled with joy* (vv. 9-11)

A' *The defences of Zion and the stability of God* (vv. 12-14)

Verse 8 is the viewing platform from which we look N, E, S, W: “As we have heard, so we have seen; in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish her forever.”

This is the central message of the Psalm: the promise of God to establish Zion forever. This isn't a Psalm about God alone. And it's not a Psalm about Zion alone. It's a Psalm about God and his people – about God's good purpose for his people – about the union of God and his people.

2. Notice the allusions in the Psalm

The Psalmist is looking back through an historical deliverance to another historical deliverance, using the earlier deliverance to interpret the more recent one.

The Exodus-Conquest deliverance was *the* great picture of salvation for the Hebrew people. It was the mirror up to which other victories were held. It was the interpretative framework which the people used to understand God's other acts of deliverance. Compare:

- Psalm 48:4-6 and Exodus 15:14-16
- Psalm 48:8 and Exodus 15:17
- Psalm 48:9 and Exodus 15:13

In love God delivered his people out of Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land and gave them Zion as his dwelling place. And now the Psalmist stands in Zion – the temple is before his eyes – and he reflects on the fact that this is the consequence of God's unbroken covenant loyalty and that it communicates to him a vital connection to the Exodus-Conquest event.

3. Respond to the images in the Psalm

The Psalmist suggests this. In v. 9 he says, “We have thought on your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple.” The word translated “thought” means “to form an image in one's mind.”

He doesn't mean that we should conjure up our own images of God's love. God's love isn't an abstract quality that floats in the realm of ideas. God's love is his covenant loyalty which is embodied in real, concrete events and places:

- the Exodus-Conquest deliverance;
- and Zion, the place where God meets with his people – which is the purpose of the Exodus-Conquest deliverance.

And that, says the Psalmist, that is what we set before our minds eye:

- A high and beautiful mount where God lives – a place of joy – the city of the Great King.
- An act of deliverance by the Great King – an act that filled pagan kings with terror – but that also allowed the people of the Great King to pass over into their inheritance.
- An impregnable city surrounded by strong walls, and fortified with towers and strongholds.

But at this point the Psalmist says something we do not expect. We expect him to say, “This is Zion – this is the Church.” But instead: “This is God – our God!”

Calvin: “It was not that the godly should keep their eyes fixed on [the citadels of Jerusalem], but that by the aid of these outward things they should elevate their minds to the contemplation of the glory of God... From this we conclude, that whatever dignity or excellence shines forth in the Church, we are not to consider it otherwise than as the means of presenting God to our view, that we may magnify and praise him in his gifts.”

Goldingay: “It is not that the battlements demonstrate the strength of the city but that the battlements demonstrate the strength of the God who kept them intact. That is the message that needs to be conveyed to future generations as they face attack.”

4. Pass on the meaning of the Psalm

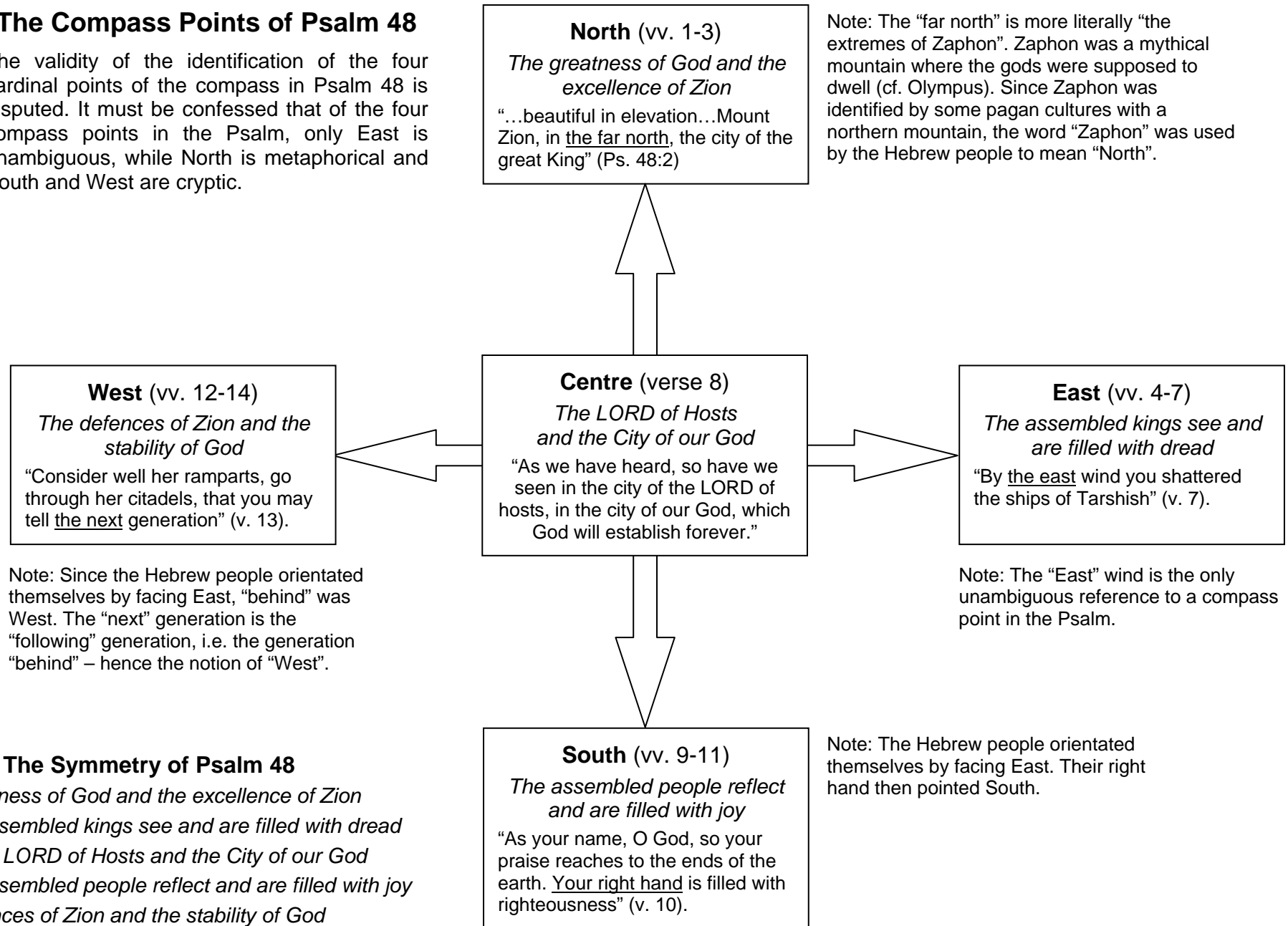
The meaning of the Psalm is that we should admire and rejoice in the union of God and the Church: “As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish her forever. Selah”

The union of God and the Church is the purpose of redemption. Revelation gives us a vision of the Church in union with God: a bride in all her finery – and she shines with the glory of God, because God himself dwells with her and in her.

- Be sure you have a high view of the Church.
- Don't be disturbed by the opponents of the Church.
- Pass on the message to your children.

The Compass Points of Psalm 48

The validity of the identification of the four cardinal points of the compass in Psalm 48 is disputed. It must be confessed that of the four compass points in the Psalm, only East is unambiguous, while North is metaphorical and South and West are cryptic.



The Symmetry of Psalm 48

- A *The greatness of God and the excellence of Zion*
- B *The assembled kings see and are filled with dread*
- C *The LORD of Hosts and the City of our God*
- B' *The assembled people reflect and are filled with joy*
- A' *The defences of Zion and the stability of God*