

Psalm 122: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Psalm 122, a song of ascents, of David. I was glad when they said to me, Let us go to the house of the Lord. Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, built as a city that is bound firmly together, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel to give thanks to the name of the Lord.

Their thrones for judgment were set, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May they be secure who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.

For my brothers' and companions' sake, I will say, Peace be within you. For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. Psalm 122 is a pilgrim psalm. It's a song of ascent associated with the journey up to Jerusalem for worship.

Israelites were expected to go up to worship in Jerusalem for three major festivals, Unleavened Bread or Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. The psalm begins and ends with references to the psalmist and his companions, I and R, going up to the house of the Lord, which is mentioned in both places.

[1 : 16] The centre is flanked by descriptions of the city of Jerusalem, and at the heart of the short psalm are the thrones of judgment, connected with the house of David. Alternatively, the psalm can be divided into an opening statement in verse 1, followed by two short sections in verses 2-5 and 6-9.

Each line in verses 6-9, as John Goldengay observes, ends with a reference to you speaking of the city of Jerusalem. A parallel is set up between the thrones for judgment that the Lord has established in his house, and the throne of David.

The house and the throne of David is elevated by virtue of its association with the house and throne of the Lord. Conrad Schaefer notes the echoing of the beginning of the name of Jerusalem in the word for city, and the end of it in the word peace, which is repeated three times in the last four verses.

The psalmist declares and celebrates the glory of the capital, a glory that arises from the Lord's dwelling there. The hearer or the singer of this psalm can feel the exhilaration of the pilgrims going up to God's presence and house, and to the holy city, which represents Israel's dwelling in, peace and security within, and exaltation by God's presence.

Beyond being the site of God's house, the city of Jerusalem is also the place where the decisions are made. It's the place of political rule. It's the place of the house of David. The city is a remarkable city, tightly bounded by constraining geographical features, and a place of commanding elevation containing buildings of great beauty and splendor.

[2 : 50] It is a place of focal significance for the life of Israel, in its political life as a nation, as in its religious worship. The Lord is never directly addressed within this psalm.

It isn't directly about the Lord. It is rather addressed to and concerns the glory and peace of Jerusalem, which reflects the glory of the God who dwells there. The great symbol of this city represents the way that God has blessed his people, and the psalmist ends with an exhortation to pray for and to seek the peace of the city, the endurance of this great concrete symbol and site of enjoyment of God's blessing of his people.