

Psalm 87

- All my fountains are in you -

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Introduction

- ❖ Psalm 87 is Psalm full of hope and joy and says glorious things of the church.
 - A foundation of the LORD Himself, both in the Old as in the New Testament.
 - A new community of people who acknowledge the LORD, even the former enemies of Israel will come and worship together.
 - They are one by one registered by the LORD and counted as being born in Zion.
 - “All my fountains are found in you.” The fountain of life, love, grace, righteousness, and peace.
- ❖ Psalm 87 describes Zion / the church as a mother giving birth to her children.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Book of Psalms. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context

- ❖ The historical context of Psalm 87 is not known.

- ❖ The Book of Psalms belongs to the Wisdom literature. Psalm 87 belongs to the third book of Psalms (Psalm 73-89) – and one of the Psalms ascribed to the Sons of Korah: Psalm 42-49 and 84-88.

Form and structure

- ❖ Psalm 87 consists of three parts.
 - verses 1–3: God's choice of Zion;
 - verses 4–6: Zion, mother of all;
 - verse 7: closing expression of praise.¹
 - The notation *Selah* (see below) is functional.

<i>superscript</i>	Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm. A song.
<i>Zion, the chosen city</i>	
(verse 1-3) <i>Speaker: psalmist</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. He has set his foundation on the holy mountain; 2. the LORD loves the gates of Zion 3. more than all the dwellings of Jacob. 4. Glorious things are said of you, 5. O city of God: <i>Selah</i>
<i>Zion, mother of all</i>	
(verse 4) <i>Speaker: the LORD ("I")</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. "I will record Rahab and Babylon 7. among those who acknowledge me— 8. Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush— 9. and will say, "This one was born in Zion."
(verse 5-6) <i>Speaker: psalmist</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Indeed, of Zion it will be said, 11. "This one and that one were born in her, 12. and the Most High himself will establish her." 13. The LORD will write in the register of the peoples: 14. "This one was born in Zion." <i>Selah</i>

¹ Bratcher, R. G., & Reyburn, W. D. (1991, P. 757).

<i>Praise</i>	
<i>(Verse 7)</i>	15. As they make music they will sing,
<i>Speaker: psalmist</i>	16. "All my fountains are in you."

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

Historical setting

- ❖ The historical setting is unknown.

Sons of Korah²

- ❖ According to 1 Chronicles 6:22 and 1 Chronicles 6:33, the Sons of Korah can be identified with a musical guild that was active during the monarchy and also the period after the exile. Some Psalms ascribed to the Sons of Korah are full of joy, others are an example of lament. Especially the contrast between Psalm 87 and 88 is very sharp.

Word Study

- ❖ Selah = “שֶׁלֶחַ”³: “The meaning is obscure: possibly from the Persian salā meaning song, sound of the strings; probably a technical term added later concerning the style of music or recitation; suggested meanings: 1. raising the voice to, a higher pitch; 2. Aquila and Jerome suggested it to be understood as “always”; 3. pause, from Septuagint, interlude of instrumental music; 4. siglum: an abbreviation for a sign to change the voice.”

Structure

- ❖ There is some discussion about the order of lines of the Psalm. The New English Bible has in a footnote: “The text of this psalm is disordered, and several verses have been rearranged.” The New Jewish Version says in a footnote: “The meaning of many passages in this psalm is uncertain.”
 - The New English Bible suggests the following reordering and translation³:
 -
 - PSALM 87
 - 1-2 The LORD loves the gates of Zion

² Firth, D. G. (2008, 26–27). *Asaph and Sons of Korah*. In T. Longman III & P. Enns (Eds.).

³ <http://www.katapi.org.uk/NEB/NEB.html>

- more than all the dwellings of Jacob;
- her foundations are laid upon holy hills,
- 4-5 and he has made her his home.
- I will count Egypt and Babylon among my friends;
- Philistine, Tyrian and Nubian shall be there;
- and Zion shall be called a mother in whom men of every race are born.
- 6 The LORD shall write against each in the roll of nations:
- 'This one was born in her.'
- 7 Singers and dancers alike all chant your praises,
- 3 proclaiming glorious things of you, O city of God.
- This suggestion is not followed in this outline.

Exposition

Superscript

- ❖ The sons of Korah: see above.
- ❖ “This Psalm joyfully celebrates the (future) greatness of Jerusalem (Zion). It is a so-called Song of Zion. Other Songs of Zion are Psalm 46; 48; 76; 84; 87; 122. They celebrate the choice of the LORD of Zion (Jerusalem) as the site for the temple and his presence in the world.”⁴ “Because of his presence the psalmist proclaims, “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day” (Ps 46:4, 5). In some ways, Zion serves as a cipher for the active and protective presence of God among his people. It is this presence that demands the celebration and praise of the psalmist.”⁵

Verse 1-3

- ❖ The first line in Hebrew reads simply “His foundation on the hills of holiness.” This is for emphasis. Compare this with the following translations, changing an ‘acclamation’ into a description:
 - “He has founded his city on the holy mountain” (NIV).
 - “On the holy mount stands the city he founded” (ESV, NRSV).

⁴ Sweeney, M. A. (2008, p. 235). *Form Criticism*. In T. Longman III & P. Enns (Eds.).

⁵ Tucker, W. D., Jr. (2008, p. 583). *Psalms 1: Book Of*. In T. Longman III & P. Enns (Eds.).

- “His foundation **is** in the holy mountains” (KJV, NJKV)
- The text can thus be read as an acclamation, pointing towards Zion/Jerusalem. The reason for this acclamation is given in verses 2-3. An acclamation adds to the joyful character of the psalm.
- See also Hebrews 11:10: “For he (Abraham) was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”
- ❖ **“His foundation.”** The LORD has established Zion as his chosen city.
 - Compare Isaiah 28:16: “So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, **a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation**; the one who trusts will never be dismayed”; of Christ (1 Pet 2:6).
- ❖ **“Holy mountain”** The mountain devoted to his Name. See also Psalm 48:1, 2. “The mountain where God chooses to reign, where the LORD himself will dwell forever?” (Ps 68:16).
 - “In the last days **the mountain of the LORD’s temple** will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa 2:2, 3; see also Isa 56:7).
 - “This is what the LORD says: ‘I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain’” (Zech 8:3).
- ❖ **“The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the other dwellings of Jacob.”**
 - **“God loves:”**
 - Deuteronomy 7:7-8:
 - "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. **But it was because the LORD loved you** and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”
 - Psalm 132:13: “For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling.”
 - God loved his people (Ex 20:3-5) to be his people. In a similar strain, he loved Zion as a treasured possession on the holy mountains.

- **“Zion”**: The name is used 154 times, of which 46 instances are found in Isaiah and 38 in the Psalms, and 32 in Jeremiah and Lamentations.⁶ In the Book of Isaiah the name denotes on its own denotes “the place and its inhabitants, and in particular the exilic and post-exilic community” (Isa1:27; 33:5; 40:9; 41:27; 46:13; 51:16; 52:1, 7f; 60:14).⁷
 - **“Gates of”**: As a metaphor, it represents the entire city (Ps 24:7, 9; 87:2; Ps 100:4).⁸ A gate shows the power and the glory of a city, through which visitors can enter.
 - In the New Testament Zion refers both to the earthly Jerusalem (1 Pet 2:5) as to the heavenly city of God.
- **“more than all the other dwellings of Jacob”** Jacob includes all the tribes. After the reign of King Solomon, there was a distinction between Israel and Judah.
- ❖ **“Glorious things are said of you, city of God:”**
 - **“Glorious things” = “praiseworthy things”**. These glorious things are specified in the next part of the Psalm.

Verse 4-6

- ❖ **“I will record Rahab and Babylon”**
 - **“I”**, the LORD is King and all the earth belongs to him. He is sovereign to record, to write down the names of the peoples. Recording the names is well attested in the Old Testament, especially after the exile, when the people returned to Jerusalem: Ezra 2, 8:1-14, Nehemiah 7:6-63. “As if it were a formal proclamation on a state occasion.”⁹ In this case, the LORD records the gentiles.
 - The new status of these gentiles is declared in two ways, “each of which puts the matter very strongly.”¹⁰
 - 1. **“those who acknowledge me”**;
 - 2. **“This one was born in Zion.”**
- ❖ **“among those who acknowledge me—” (NIV) / “Among those who know me.” (ESV)**

⁶ Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 1022).

⁷ Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 1022).

⁸ Phua, M. (2008, p. 23). *Architectural Imagery*. In T. Longman III & P. Enns (Eds.).

⁹ Kidner, D. (1975, p. 346).

¹⁰ Kidner, D. (1975, p. 346).

- **“acknowledge” = “know”**, especially as a God of creation and salvation. "For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us"(Isa 33:22). When Rahab (Egypt) and Babylon will acknowledge the LORD as God, they will forsake their gods. See also Isaiah 44:6: **"This is what the LORD says—Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God."** (Isa 40:28; 43:15).
 - Isaiah 19:23-25: "In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.'" See also Isaiah 56:6, 7, Micah 4:1; Zechariah 2:11; 8:22–23; Malachi 1:11.
 - They will worship the LORD together with the sons and daughters of Israel.
 - **“Rahab”** is a symbolic name for Egypt (Isa 30:7). It also refers to a dragon or perhaps a crocodile, a symbol of the river Nile. Ezekiel pronounced the judgment of God upon Egypt (Ezek 29-32).
 - “Speak to him and say: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, you great monster lying among your streams.’” (Ezek 29:3).
 - **“Babylon”** it must be noted that Babylon has a negative connotation, both in the Old as in the New Testament (Rev 17:5). Prophecies against Babylon. References to the judgment upon Babylon are numerous.
 - **“Philistia.”** They are reckoned among the enemies of Israel and against the LORD (Ps 83:7; Joel 3:4). The LORD will triumph over them (Ps 60:8 = 108:9). Jeremiah proclaims the judgment of God upon Philistia (Jer 47). See also Ezekiel 26-28.
 - **“Tyre.”** During the reign of Solomon, the King of Tyre assisted with the building of the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 9:11, 12). People from Tyre lived in Jerusalem during the days of Nehemiah (Neh 13:16). Isaiah proclaims the downfall of Tyre (Isa 23).
 - **“Cush.”** During the days of King Asa, the Cushites attacked Israel together with the Lybians (2 Chron 16:7-10). But Cush will submit to God (Ps 68:31).
- ❖ **“and will say, ‘This one was born in Zion.’”** It is not a separate action. By recording the people, the Lord declares: **‘This one was born in Zion.’**

- Three times it is said “**born in Zion**” (verses 4, 5, and 6). To have been born in Jerusalem is something to be proud of.¹¹ Zion can be compared to a mother: The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament has in verse 5 “Everyone will say, ‘Zion is our mother.’” See also Galatians 4:26.
 - See also Isaiah 66:7-11.
- ❖ “**This one and that one**” expresses *diversity* and *distribution*.¹² a man from any background. “Every man, whoever he may.”¹³ This is an extension of the previous verse. The LORD counts the nations and also the individuals. “In Zion each individual is as important as a nation as a whole.”¹⁴
 - As per consequence, different people become brothers and sisters belonging to the same family of God.
 - And as Keil and Delitzsch note: there is no end: “Of an immeasurable multitude, and of each individual in this multitude in particular, it is said that he was born in Zion.”¹⁵ See also Revelation 7:9: “After this I (John) looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”
 - “The end of all history is that Zion shall become the metropolis of all nations.”¹⁶
- ❖ “**the Most High**” is one of the titles of the LORD God. This title is found 32 times in the Old Testament, of which 19 instances in the Book of Psalms. This title fits this Psalm. The LORD is the supreme God, ruling the nations.
- ❖ “**establish**” = “**to set up to last, fix solidly.**”¹⁷
 - Psalm 48:8: “As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD Almighty, in the city of our God: **God makes her secure forever.**”

¹¹ Bruce, F. F. (1992, Vol. 1, p. 1048). *Citizenship*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

¹² Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977, p. 253).

¹³ Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 44).

¹⁴ Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996, Vol. 5, p. 574).

¹⁵ Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996, Vol. 5, p. 574).

¹⁶ Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996, Vol. 5, p. 575).

¹⁷ Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 465).

Verse 7

- ❖ “As they make music they will sing,”
- ❖ “make music” “pipe players *as well the singers as the pipe-players*¹⁸
- ❖ **“All my fountains are in you.”** See also Psalm 46:4, Ezekiel 47, and Revelation 22:1-2
 - Psalm 48:9-11:
 - "Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love. Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with righteousness. Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments."
 - Isaiah 12:9: **“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”**

Application

Praise

- ❖ He is the Most High, creator of heaven and earth, saviour and judge. He has established his covenant with Israel to be a blessing for the nations (Gen 12:1-3).

Foundation

- ❖ God is the founder of Zion. He is laid the foundation of the Church.
 - “Since the psalm will make it clear that Zion gives its name to a community, not only a place, the relevance of this to the church is direct.”¹⁹
 - Planting churches is important, but church planters must never forget that it is the LORD who lays the foundation, Jesus Christ: Isa 28:16; **Mt 16:16-18; 1 Pet 2:6**; 1 Cor 3:10, 11; Ps 127:1. See also Ephesians 2:20-22 and Revelation 21:14.
 - Do you look forward to “to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God”? (Heb11:10; **Rev 21:9-26**).

He loves Zion

- ❖ “These I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for **my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations**” (Isa 56:7).

¹⁸ Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977, p. 320).

¹⁹ Kidner, D. (1975, p. 346).

- ❖ Because Zion (earthly and the heavenly) is very precious to God, and the church is his foundation, Christians should love their local and worldwide church being aware that it is a foretaste of the glorious city of God.
 - At the same time, Jerusalem / Zion (Old Testament) and the church (New Testament) are often afflicted by sins, human strive, oppression, persecution, disbelief, disappointment, human failures. We must not close our eyes to this daily reality.

Glorious things

- ❖ Zion is chosen by the Lord as his dwelling (temple) not only for Israel but also for the nations (Isa 2:2-3).
- ❖ Glorious things:
 - Even the names of the former enemies of Israel, Rahab (Egypt) and Babylon will be written by God in its birth register. “As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Rom 10:11-13).
 - It will be a multitude who no one can count (Rev 7:9).

Acknowledge the LORD - Knowing God (verse 4)

- ❖ “I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart” (Jer 224:7). “They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious” (Isa 11:9-10).
 - They will worship the Lord. Love him, praise him and obey.
 - They will know him (Old Testament). They will know him because they know Jesus Christ (Jn 14:6-11; 17:3).

Zion / the Church as mother

- ❖ Stress the glorious fact that the LORD registers one by one, whatever background people have, being born in Zion. They/we receive citizenship:
 - “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philip 3:20).
- ❖ A mother takes care of her children. The community of God is obliged to take care of people, “from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev 7:9), the young and the old, the great and the small.

All my fountains are in you

- ❖ The fountains of life.

- ❖ Applied to Christ: Of eternal life (John 4):
 - Of faith, hope and love;
 - Of faithfulness, truth;
 - Of mercy, righteousness, reconciliation, forgiveness;
 - Of peace.
- ❖ That is the reason for joyful singing (and dancing).
- ❖
 - “So that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: ‘Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.’ Again, it says, ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.’ And again, ‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.’ And again, Isaiah says, ‘The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him’” (Rom 15:9-12).

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