
A Psalm by the sons of Korah; a Song.

PSALM 87: 1 His foundation is in the holy mountains.

The nature and glorious privileges of Zion and Jerusalem, Psa 87:1-3. No other city to be compared to this, Psa 87:4. The privilege of being born in it, Psa 87:5, Psa 87:6. Its praises celebrated, Psa 87:7.

The title, A Psalm or Song for the sons of Korah, gives us no light into the author or meaning of this Psalm. It begins and ends so abruptly that many have thought it to be only a fragment of a larger Psalm. This opinion is very likely. Those who suppose it to have been made when Jerusalem was rebuilt and fortified, imagine it to have been an exclamation of the author on beholding its beauty, and contemplating its privileges. If this opinion be allowed, it will account for the apparent abruptness in the beginning and end. As to its general design it seems to have been written in praise of Jerusalem; and those who are for mystic meanings think that it refers to the Christian Church; and, on this supposition it is interpreted by several writers, both ancient and modern. To pretend to have found out the true meaning would be very absurd. I have done the best I could to give its literal sense.

Verse 1

His foundation is in the holy mountains - Jerusalem was founded on the mountains or hills of Zion and Moriah. The after increase of the population obliged the inhabitants to inclose all the contiguous hills; but Zion and Moriah were the principal. We know that ancient Rome was built on seven hills.

PSALM 87: 2 The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

Verse 2

The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob - That is, he preferred Zion for his habitation, to be the place of his temple and sanctuary, before any other place in the promised land. Mystically, the Lord prefers the Christian Church to the Jewish: the latter was only a type of the former; and had no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth. To this position no exception can be made.

PSALM 87: 3 Glorious things are spoken about you, city of God. Selah.

Verse 3

Glorious things are spoken of thee - Or, there are glorious words or doctrines in thee. Does this refer to the glorious doctrines of the Christian Church? These are glorious sayings indeed.

PSALM 87: 4 I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me. Behold, Philistia, Tyre, and also Ethiopia: "This one was born there."

Verse 4

I will make mention of Rahab - The meaning seems to be, Rahab, i.e., Egypt, Babylon, Tyre, Philistia, and Ethiopia are not so honorable as Jerusalem. To be born in any of them is no privilege when compared with being a native of Jerusalem: their cities are but heads of villages; Jerusalem alone is a City. I have met with a very similar sentiment in a Persian work, of which I know not the author:

Tche Mesr, o tche Sham, o tche Birr o Buhr.

Heme rustae and, we Sheerazee Shuhr.

What celebrity can Egypt or Syria, or any thing on earth or on the sea, pretend to? "When compared to Sheeraz, those are but villages, but this alone is a City."

The meaning seems to be the same in both the Hebrew and Persian poet.

PSALM 87: 5 Yes, of Zion it will be said, "This one and that one was born in her"; the Most High himself will establish her.

Verse 5

This and that man was born in her - It will be an honor to any person to have been born in Zion. But how great is the honor to be born from above, and be a citizen of the Jerusalem that is from above! To be children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus! The Targum has, "David the king, and Solomon his son, were brought up here."

The Highest himself shall establish her - The Christian Church is built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles; Jesus Christ himself being the Cornerstone.

PSALM 87: 6 The LORD will count, when he writes up the peoples, "This one was born there." Selah.

Verse 6

The Lord shall count, when he writeth up the people - בכתוב עמים bichthob ammim, in the register of the people. When he takes account of those who dwell in Jerusalem, he will particularly note those who were born in Zion.

This has an easy spiritual meaning. When God takes an account of all professing Christians, he will set apart those for inhabitants of the New Jerusalem who were born in Zion, who were born again, received a new nature, and were fitted for heaven.

PSALM 87: 7 Those who sing as well as those who dance say, "All my springs are in you."

Verse 7

As well the singers, etc. - Perhaps, this may mean no more than, The burden of the songs of all the singers and choristers shall be, "All my fountains (ancestors and posterity) are in thee;" and consequently, entitled to all thy privileges and immunities. Instead of שרים sharim, "singers," many MSS. and early printed editions have, sarim, "princes." Some for מעיני mayenai, "my fountains," would read with several of the Versions, מעוני meoney, "habitations;" but no MS. yet discovered supports this reading.

It would be a very natural cause of exultation, when considering the great privileges of this royal city, to know that all his friends, family, and children, were citizens of this city, were entered in God's register, and were entitled to his protection and favor. Applied to the Christian Church, the privileges are still higher: born of God, enrolled among the living in Jerusalem, having their hearts purified by faith, and being washed and made clean through the blood of the covenant, and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, such have a right to the inheritance among the saints in light. I need not add that springs, wells, fountains, and cisterns, and waters are used metaphorically in the sacred writings for children, posterity, fruitful women, people, etc.; see among others Pro 5:15, Pro 5:16; Psa 68:26; Isa 48:1; and Rev 17:15. The old Psalter understands the whole as relating to Gospel times; and interprets it accordingly. Bishop Horne takes it in the same sense. The whole Psalm is obscure and difficult. I will venture a literal version of the whole, with a few explanatory interpolations, instead of notes, in order to cast a little more light upon it.

1. A Psalm to be sung by the posterity of Korah. A prophetic song.
2. "Jehovah loves his foundation, the city built by him on holy mountains. He loves the gates of Zion more than all the habitations of Jacob."
3. "Honorable things are declared of thee, O city of God. Selah."
4. "I will number Egypt and Babylon among my worshippers; behold Philistia and Tyre! They shall be born in the same place." They shall be considered as born in the city of God.
5. "But of Zion it shall be said, This one, and that one," persons of different nations, "was born in it, and the Most High shall establish it."
6. "Jehovah shall reckon in the registers of the people, This one was born there."
7. "The people shall sing, as in leading up a choir, All my fountains," the springs of my happiness, "are in thee."

I have nearly followed here the version of Mr. N. M. Berlin, who wonders that there should be any doubt concerning this translation of the last verse, when Symmachus and Aquila, who must have well known the sense of the Masoretic text, have translated: Καὶ ἡ ἀδοντις ὡς χοροὶ πασαι πηγαὶ ἐν σοι. "And they shall sing, as in leading up a dance, All my fountains are in thee." The translation cannot be far from the meaning.