

PSALMS

Chapter 87

¹ He has set his foundation on the holy mountain; ² the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. ³ Glorious things are said of you, O city of God: *Selah* ⁴ “I will record Rahab ^a and Babylon among those who acknowledge me— Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush ^b— and will say, ‘This ^c one was born in Zion.’” ⁵ Indeed, of Zion it will be said, “This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her.” ⁶ The LORD will write in the register of the peoples: “This one was born in Zion.” *Selah* ⁷ As they make music they will sing, “All my fountains are in you.”

Ps 87 A celebration of Zion as the “city of God” (v. 3), the special object of his love and the royal city of his kingdom (see introductions to Ps 46; 48; 76). According to the ancient and consistent interpretation of Jewish and Christian scholars alike, this psalm stands in lonely isolation in the Psalter (but see 47:9) in that it foresees the ingathering of the nations into Zion as fellow citizens with Israel in the kingdom of God—after the manner of such prophetic visions as Isa 2:2–4; 19:19–25; 25:6; 45:14, 22–24; 56:6–8; 60:3; 66:23; Da 7:14; Mic 4:1–3; Zec 8:23; 14:16. (Accordingly, some have assigned it to the time of Isaiah and Micah, while others have thought it to be postexilic.) So interpreted, this psalm stands in sharpest possible contrast with the other Zion songs of the Psalter (see Ps 46; 48; 76; 125; 129; 137). The key to its main thrust lies in v. 4. It may be that its historic interpretation has sprung from the failure of tradition to preserve memory of the Hebrew poetic device of interrupted syntax (which occurs elsewhere) and that the references to foreign nations should be read as vocatives (see NIV text note on v. 4). With this reading, the psalm stands in thematic accord with the other Zion songs, celebrating God’s special love for Zion—which is thrown into the teeth of Zion’s historic enemies (see note on v. 4). (CSB)

Psalm includes Gentiles in God’s salvation (v 4). Also, the Lord carefully records the name of each person born in Zion (vv 5–6). *Sons of Korah*. See Ps 42 intro. *Song*. See Ps 46 intro.

Format: Vv 1–3, Zion; vv 4–6, the Lord established Zion and His people; v 7, dancing in Zion. (TLSB)

Like Psalms 47 and 67 this psalm expresses a world mission theme. (PBC)

87 title *Of the Sons of Korah*. See note on Ps 42 title. (CSB)

song. See note on Ps 30 title. (CSB)

87:1 *his foundation.* The Lord himself has laid the foundations of Zion (see Isa 14:32) and of the temple as his royal house. (CSB)

Although it does not mention the temple, this psalm is obviously based on the fact that the Lord's temple was built on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. The presence of the temple made Jerusalem a unique city on earth. (PBC)

mountain. The Hebrew for this word is plural, emphasizing the majesty of the holy mountain on which God's throne has been set (see 48:2 and note). (CSB)

Lit, "hills of holiness"; Jerusalem covers a number of hills. (TLSB)

city He founded. Zion. Cf Gn 28:10–17; Rv 21:1–4. (TLSB)

87:2 *the gates of Zion.* Referring to the temple, where God dwells among people. (TLSB)

loves ... more than. As the city of his founding, his chosen seat of rule over his people, Zion is the Lord's most cherished city, even among the towns of Israel (see 9:11; 78:68; 132:12–14). (CSB)

Jacob. A synonym for Israel (see Ge 32:28). (CSB)

87:3 SELAH – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. "The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers" (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

87:4 *Me.* God is speaking. (TLSB)

I will record ... This one was born in Zion. God will list them in his royal register (see notes on 9:5; 51:1; 69:28) as those who are native (born) citizens of his royal city, having all the privileges and enjoying all the benefits and security of such citizenship. (CSB)

Rahab.† Whereas elsewhere this name is applied to the mythical monster of the deep (see 89:10; see also notes on 32:6; Job 9:13), here the reference is to Egypt (see NIV text note), as in Isa 30:7 (see note there); 51:9. The nations listed are representative of all Gentile peoples. As usually interpreted, the psalm here foresees a widespread conversion to the Lord from the peoples who from time immemorial had been hostile to him and to his kingdom (see Isa 19:21). The alternative interpretation (see NIV text note and v. 5) is that the Lord is here portrayed as carefully recording the names of all his people, those who acknowledge him as their covenant Lord (Hos 6:3), so as to take them under his protection as the citizens of his royal city. Ominously he warns the nations (as in Isa 14:28–32) that he has carefully registered his people one and all and will hold the nations accountable for the harm they do to any one of them (see 105:15). (CSB)

Name of a mythological monster used to describe Egypt (cf Is 30:7). (TLSB)

Babylon ... Philistia ... Tyre ... Cush. Collection of nations representing Gentile converts from all over the world. (TLSB)

This one. Individual Gentile who by faith is included among the saints. (TLSB)

87:5 *of Zion ... born in her.* God's people are described here as a family into which believers are "born." Jesus later used birth imagery to describe the miracle of Baptism (Jn 3:3–8). (TLSB)

This one and that one. Wherever they may be dispersed among the nations. (CSB)

Most High. See note on Ge 14:19. (CSB)

87:6 *registers.* God is pictured as keeping a record of people who are granted the privilege of citizenship in His holy city (cf Php 4:3; Rv 20:15). (TLSB)

SELAH – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

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87:7 Singing and dancing are rooted in the joy that results from God’s acts of salvation (Cf Ex 15:1–21; 1Sm 18:6; 2Sm 6:12–15). (TLSB)

All my fountains. All that refreshes them is found in the city of God, a possible allusion to God’s “river of delights” (36:8) “whose streams make glad the city of God” (46:4); see notes on those passages. Alternatively, “fountains” may be a metaphor for sources; the sense of the line would then be: We all spring from you. (CSB)

Gentiles who were enemies of God and of his people, became citizens of Israel though faith in Christ. Citizenship in the true Israel, which will inherit God’s promises, does not depend on physical descent, but on spiritual rebirth. (PBC)

my. Communal use of the singular pronoun (see introduction to Ps 30). (CSB)

Ps 87 God includes people of all nations among His believers, all of whom may claim to be born in Zion (v 5). Your true identity before God is not rooted in your nationality, your language, your family ties, your wealth, or any other earthly thing. God claims you to be His own in Baptism, through which you become His own child (vv 5–6), no matter who you are or from where you came (v 4). • Thank You, dear heavenly Father, that You regard me as Your child through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)