



## Psalm 122 - Song of Praise and Prayer for Jerusalem

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

### Introduction

This psalm, the third with the title 'Song of the Ascents,' celebrates Zion as God's chosen city, and specifically the privilege of going there on a pilgrimage. Not only is the house of the Lord there, but so are <<***the thrones of the house of David***>>. Christians who sing this recognise that in their gathered worship they are carrying out the task of the temple, and their Davidic king, Jesus, is present with them: <<***So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God***>> (Ephesians 2:19-22), and: <<***Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ***>> (1 Peter 2:4-5).

It is one of the four Songs of Ascents that is specifically attributed to King David. He wrote it both for what Jerusalem was in his day, and for what it would become under his son and their successors. David perhaps never made pilgrimage from a great distance to one of the major festivals, but he wrote Psalm 122 in the voice of one who did, and who has arrived at the Holy City. Charles Spurgeon commented, "David wrote it for the people to sing at the time of their goings up to the holy feasts at Jerusalem. It comes third in the series, and appears to be suitable to be sung when the people had entered the gates, and their feet stood within the city."

## Psalm 122:1-2 - Joyful Arrival in Jerusalem.

The song begins by remembering (they said is past tense) the invitation to go to Jerusalem for worship at the house of the Lord, from the perspective of having arrived, i.e. <<*our feet are standing*>> (v.2). The anticipation 'I was glad' is now to be fulfilled.

- <sup>1</sup> I was glad when they said to me,  
'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'

### Psalm 122:1

I was glad when they said to me. David had in mind both the community (when they said) and the individual (I was glad). He pictured the individual coming together with the group to go into the house of the Lord. That invitation and the acceptance of it made him joyful.

Let us go to the house of the Lord! During David's days there was never a temple, but he knew one would be built, having extensively planned and prepared for it; refer to 1 Chronicles 22:2-5 and 22:14-16. It is possible that David wrote here of the pilgrimage to the tabernacle, which did exist in his day and was regarded as the house of the Lord. The tabernacle was located in Gibeon during David's reign under the authority of Zadok the priest: <<*And he left the priest Zadok and his kindred the priests before the tabernacle of the Lord in the high place that was at Gibeon, to offer burnt-offerings to the Lord on the altar of burnt-offering regularly, morning and evening, according to all that is written in the law of the Lord that he commanded Israel*>> (1 Chronicles 16:39-40). Gibeon was about 100 miles or 161 km northwest of Jerusalem. However, it is more likely that David wrote this psalm in anticipation of the pilgrims who would come to the house of the Lord, the magnificent temple built by Solomon. In David's extensive preparations for the temple, it is wonderful to think of him preparing the people of Israel to come to the temple, especially for the required festivals that were held three times a year.

Let us go to the house of the Lord! Coming to God's house made David joyful, although he knew it was not literally Yahweh's house and that no building could contain God in his glory and greatness. Yet at the house of the Lord he could focus his thoughts, prayers, worship, and receiving of God's Word in the community of God's people in a special way, and David was glad for that.

Too many do not know the gladness David sang of, either because they do not go into the house of the Lord, or because they do go and it is not a joyful occasion for them. Christians should go into the house of the Lord. It is good and important for them to gather with God's people for prayers, worship, and the receiving of God's Word. The gathering should be formal and ordered

enough so that it is regarded as a gathering of God's house – not everyone doing their own thing, but God's people coming together for his glory and their benefit in his house.

For any Christian, and indeed those seeking God, going to God's house should be a joyful event. This is not the same as saying it should be entertaining, especially in an age when entertainment is a dangerous idol for so many. Not everything that happens at the house of the Lord must be fun, but it should all be good, both welcoming to the not-yet-believer and good for those who are spiritual. If going to the house of the Lord is not a joyful thing, the problem may be in the heart of the one who comes or it may be in what happens at the house of the Lord – but the problem should be prayerfully diagnosed and lovingly addressed by all concerned.

<sup>2</sup> Our feet are standing  
within your gates, O Jerusalem.

#### Psalm 122:2

Our feet are standing within your gates. Most regard this as David's description of the joyful statement of the pilgrim who has finally arrived. A few (such as Morgan) regard this statement as the joyful and confident hope of one still on the journey. The most important thing is the evident joy and gladness at coming to the destination. They came to Jerusalem because that was where Solomon built the temple that David planned and prepared for. Before that, Jerusalem was where David had brought the Ark of the Covenant and an altar of sacrifice was established there as well at Gibeon, the location of the Tabernacle.

#### Psalm 122:3-5 - The Beauty of Jerusalem.

The singer, as it were, looks around Jerusalem: bound firmly together probably goes from the physical cosiness of the city to the sense of unity the pilgrim expects to find there. If this sense of unity is not always there in reality, it ought to be. This idealisation also appears in the reference to the house of David, whose first goal should be the carrying out of judgement, i.e. ruling justly for the people.

<sup>3</sup> Jerusalem – built as a city  
that is bound firmly together.

<sup>4</sup> To it the tribes go up,  
the tribes of the Lord,  
as was decreed for Israel,  
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.

## Psalm 122:3-4

Jerusalem – built as a city. David conquered the city of Jerusalem, taking it from the Jebusites who held it as a Canaanite stronghold. He built the city in his own day, and David rejoiced in declaring, Jerusalem – built as a city.

A city that is bound firmly together. Bound, the Hebrew word *khubberah*, is related to companion, Hebrew *khaver*, in Psalm 119:63. David's city of Jerusalem was not large, but it was not a disordered collection of tents and shacks. It was built, and built together in an orderly way, i.e. it was bound firmly together. It was a real city. Spurgeon commented, "Furthermore, it is not erected as a set of booths, or a conglomeration of hovels, but as a city, substantial, architectural, designed, arranged, and defended." And, "A church should be one in creed and one in heart, one in testimony and one in service, one in aspiration and one in sympathy. They greatly injure our Jerusalem who would build dividing walls within her; she needs compacting, not dividing." Derek Kidner observed, "The expression 'bound firmly together' uses (as Anderson points out) the same verb as is found in the instructions for making the tent of worship: 'couple the tent together that it may be one whole' (Exodus 26:11). Such was the blueprint; such will be the ultimate reality (Revelation 21:10ff)."

To it the tribes go up. One of the reasons David conquered Jerusalem and established it as the capital of both the political and religious life of Israel was because it did not previously belong to a specific tribe; it was part of the land allocation for the smallest and weakest tribe Benjamin (Judges 18:28), but it remained under Canaanite occupation for some considerable time: <<***But the people of Judah could not drive out the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so the Jebusites live with the people of Judah in Jerusalem to this day***>> (Joshua 15:63). Because no tribe had claimed the city, it belonged to all the tribes, and the tribes of the Lord could come together as one at Jerusalem and the house of the Lord. Again Spurgeon commented, "Note that Israel was one people, but yet it was in a sense divided by the mere surface distinction of tribes; and this may be a lesson to us that all Christendom is essentially one, though from various causes we are divided into tribes. Let us as much as possible sink the tribal individuality in the national unity, so that the church may be many waves, but one sea; many branches, but one tree; many members, but one body."

Because Jerusalem was at a higher elevation than the surround land then it is always said that people 'go up' to the city, for example: <<***But Barzillai said to the king, 'How many years have I still to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem?'***>> (2 Samuel 19:34), and: <<***They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid***>> (Mark 10:32a). Similarly, since the temple was at the highest point in the city, people 'go up' to worship there: <<***Dibon has gone up to the temple, to the high places to weep; over Nebo and over***>>

*Medeba Moab wails>> (Isaiah 15:2a), and: <<One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon>> (Acts 3:1).*

As was decreed for Israel. This interprets the Jerusalem temple as fulfilling the requirements of Deuteronomy about the place that God would choose; e.g. Deuteronomy 12:5, 14:23 and 16:16. Some translations have this as to 'the testimony of Israel.' This describes the Ark of the Covenant, which was often called by this title because it held the tablets of the covenant: <<And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the Testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel>> (Exodus 25:22 KJ21). Representing the throne of God and his presence in Israel, the testimony of Israel was the centre of the tabernacle and later the temple.

Many commentators (such as Adam Clarke) regard Psalm 122 as written by and for exiles returning from the Babylonian captivity. This mention of the ark of the testimony argues against that idea, because it was not part of the temple when the exiles returned.

To give thanks to the name of the Lord. The primary purpose of the festivals of Israel was so that the people of God could come together and give him thanks. Their appreciation for what he had done gave them faith for what he would do in the future. Kidner explained, "Note that the object of these pilgrim feasts was to give thanks, not primarily to seek unity or prosperity. These were gifts over and above the occasion, not its raison d'être; whereas pagan worship was all too blatantly a means to securing what one wanted: as confirmed in Hosea 2:5."

<sup>5</sup> For there the thrones for judgement were set up,  
the thrones of the house of David.

### Psalm 122:5

For there the thrones for judgement were set up. Being the seat of government for Israel, Jerusalem was where their main courts for judgement were established. Jerusalem was to be a city of justice, where good was honoured and where evil was corrected. These thrones were for dispensing judgement, and may have been visible at the gates of the city; refer to Ruth 4:1-1.

The thrones of the house of David. David's house was established to reign over Israel. Saul's house never reigned, supplying really only one king. David's lineage reigned in Jerusalem and will forever reign there under the Messiah, the Son of David: <<When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body,

*and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever>> (2 Samuel 7:12-13).*

Psalm 122:6-9 - Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem.

In light of what Jerusalem should be, the psalm ends by urging God's people to seek the conditions that will make that a reality: the peace of Jerusalem will ensure its stability and accessibility, in order that God's people might be able always to journey to the house of the Lord.

- <sup>6</sup> Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  
'May they prosper who love you.
- <sup>7</sup> Peace be within your walls,  
and security within your towers.'
- <sup>8</sup> For the sake of my relatives and friends  
I will say, 'Peace be within you.'

Psalm 122:6-8

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. David exhorted pilgrims coming to the Holy City to pray for the peace of the city. Jerusalem's name itself marks it as the city of peace: <<*This 'King Melchizedek of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham as he was returning from defeating the kings and blessed him'; and to him Abraham apportioned 'one-tenth of everything'. His name, in the first place, means 'king of righteousness'; next he is also king of Salem, that is, 'king of peace'*>> (Hebrews 7:1-2), but in reality it has known much war and conflict, and continues to do so. In fact, it is reputed to be the most fought over city in history. It is good to pray for often-elusive peace of Jerusalem. Spurgeon added, "In a church one of the main ingredients of success is internal peace: strife, suspicion, party-spirit, division, – these are deadly things. Those who break the peace of the church deserve to suffer, and those who sustain it win a great blessing."

May they prosper who love you. David then gave a prayer to pray for Jerusalem. The prayer included a blessing for those who love the city, and a direct request for peace and prosperity for the city.

Kidner on peace and prosperity: "They are the proper fruits of justice, the subject of verse 5." Adam Clarke commented, "This is the form of prayer that they are to use: 'May prosperity ever reside within thy walls, on all the people that dwell there; and tranquillity within thy palaces or high places, among the rulers and governors of the people.'"

For the sake of my relatives and friends. David prayed for blessings on those who loved and prayed for Jerusalem, but the blessing was not only for the individual but for the community of those who cared for the peace of Jerusalem, those who said, "Peace be within you." Spurgeon observed, "The repetition of the desire displays the writer's high valuation of the blessing mentioned; he would not again and again have invoked peace had he not perceived its extreme desirableness."

<sup>9</sup> For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,  
I will seek your good.

### Psalm 122:9

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God. David understood that the gladness and goodness of the pilgrim towards God's city was not primarily political in nature. It was not because of loyalty to a political party, leader, or philosophy. It was because there was established the house of the Lord. This has a special application for the Christian under the New Covenant. For them, the church is the house of the Lord, with Jesus the head and Son of the house: <<***Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope***>> (Hebrews 3:5-6), <<***and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water***>> (Hebrews 10:21-22), <<***Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ***>> (1 Peter 2:5), and: <<***For the time has come for judgement to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God?***>> (1 Peter 4:17). What makes the church special is that it is God's habitation, which makes it his house. His presence makes it special. Ancient Jerusalem had political, economic, and social aspects, as well as others. Yet the most important reason to love and care for Jerusalem was because of the house of the Lord. Christians should have the same great care for and focus upon the work of God's house irrespective of the type of building they meet in.

I will seek your good. Just as it was good for pilgrims in Israel to seek the good of Jerusalem for the sake of God's house, so Christians today can and should seek the good of society for the sake of God's house. Spurgeon explained, "First we love it (verse 6) and then we labour for it, as in this passage: we see its good, and then seek its good."