

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 122 — Praying for Jerusalem's Peace

1.0 Introducing Psalm 122

- Psalm 120 depicts the pilgrim living in a hostile world of unbelievers — facing trouble and problems. Psalm 121 explains that divine help produces the pilgrim's peace of mind in such a world. Trusting God's power brings about a solution to the pilgrim's troubles. Psalm 122 speaks of the triumph of arriving at Jerusalem and standing within its walls — a city under God's protective blessing.
✓ *Troubled travelers turn to God for a tranquil trust that results in triumph.*
- Psalm 122 joins the "Songs of Zion" (Psalms 46; 48; 76; 84; 87) in celebrating Jerusalem's chosen status and divinely blessed condition.
- This is the first of four Psalms of Ascents attributed to David (Psalms 122; 124; 131; 133).

2.0 Reading Psalm 122 (NAU)

122:1 A Song of Ascents, of David.

I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to **the house of the LORD.**"

122:2 Our feet are standing
Within your gates, O Jerusalem,

122:3 Jerusalem, that is built
As a city that is compact together;

122:4 To which the tribes go up, even the tribes of the LORD —
An ordinance for Israel —
To give thanks to the name of the LORD.

122:5 For there thrones were set for judgment,
The thrones of the house of David.

- 122:6** Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May they prosper who love you.
122:7 “May peace be within your walls,
And prosperity within your palaces.”
122:8 For the sake of my brothers and my friends,
I will now say, “May peace be within you.”
122:9 For the sake of **the house of the LORD** our God,
I will seek your good.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 122

3.1 Outline

- I. The Pilgrim’s Passion (vv. 1–2)
- II. The Pilgrim’s Praise (vv. 3–5)
- III. The Pilgrim’s Petition (vv. 6–9)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “I was glad”
 - “Eager joy should always fill the hearts of God’s people as they make their way into God’s house. In the company of like-minded worshippers, their hungry souls are satisfied as they sit under the exposition of Scripture. . . . Word-inspired worship is never a drudgery but a delight; never a burden but a blessing.” — Steven J. Lawson, *Psalms 76–150*, Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 269.
 - *What activities related to your faith make you glad?*
- **v. 1** “when they said to me”
 - Note that the invitation comes from fellow believers. This is part of the joy — that others consider David’s fellowship desirable and that they have determined to worship God corporately.
 - Cp. Hebrews 10:25.
- **v. 1** “Let us go to the house of the LORD.”
 - Cp. 1 Samuel 11:14; Isaiah 2:3; and Jeremiah 31:6 — common invitation to pilgrims.
 - The phrase “the house of the LORD” occurs in the first and last verses of this psalm.
 - ✓ Antagonists to Davidic authorship of this psalm insist that the phrase is a reference to the Temple.
 - ✓ It need not refer to the Temple. Moses, Joshua, and Samuel all three employed this terminology to refer to the Tabernacle: Exodus 23:19; Joshua 6:24; 1 Samuel 1:7, 24; 2 Samuel 12:20.
 - *How recently have you invited someone to church with you?*



- **v. 2** “Our feet”
 - David began the psalm with “I,” but has accepted the invitation to join in corporate worship.
- **v. 3** “As a city that is compact together”
 - Jerusalem’s builders constructed the city in a compact and unified plan that maximizes space. Its physical appearance appeals to the eye as much as to the heart.
- **v. 4** “the tribes of the LORD”
 - The psalmist employs an unusual description implying that the unity of the twelve tribes results from their common loyalty to the LORD (“Yah,” the shortened for of Yahweh).
 - The psalmist expresses a God-centered focus that goes beyond just the city itself.
- **v. 4** “An ordinance for Israel”
 - The Law of Moses commanded all males to gather three times a year in Jerusalem.
 - ✓ The feasts of Passover (Unleavened Bread and barley harvest, 14 Nisan), Pentecost (Weeks/First Fruits and wheat harvest, 6 Sivan), and Booths (Ingathering and fruit harvest, 15 Tishri). See Exodus 23:14–17 and Deuteronomy 16:16.
- **v. 4** “To give thanks”
 - Pilgrims purposed to give thanks to the Lord. They came to worship God.
 - *In what ways can we give thanks to the Lord?*
- **v. 5** “thrones”
 - Thrones are symbolic of the rule of law, of the establishment and administration of justice.
 - The psalmist identifies these thrones with those of the Davidic dynasty. The plural might indicate the succession of kings to come in the line of David (cp. 2 Samuel 7:16).
- **v. 6** “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem”
 - In Hebrew an alliteration occurs in the first 4 of a 5-word line using the *s* and *l* coinciding with the name “Jerusalem”: *ša^alû š^elôm y^erûšālāim yiš^elāyû*.
 - “Peace” (*šālôm*) shares three consonants with “Jerusalem.” Indeed, the play on words between “Jerusalem” and “peace” finds support in Hebrews 7:2 (cp. Luke 19:41-42).
- **vv. 6–7** “peace . . . prosper . . . peace . . . prosperity”
 - These terms repeat the same *s* and *l* consonants and highlight the concept of peace in association with the city’s name, Jerusalem.

- *What is involved in the biblical concept of peace?*
- vv. 8–9 “I”
 - David reverts to “I,” which he had employed at the beginning of the psalm.
 - The community is still present in his mind: “my brothers and my friends” (v. 8).
 - ✓ David has an obligation to seek the good of his fellow worshippers.
 - ✓ Praying for their good belongs with that obligation (cp. v. 6).
 - *In what ways can I seek the good of others?*

4.0 Singing Psalm 122

“How Did My Heart Rejoice to Hear”

(Tune: “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?” or “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee)



How did my heart rejoice to hear
My friends devoutly say,
“In Zion let us all appear,
And keep the solemn day!”

I love her gates, I love the road;
The church, adorned with grace,
Stands like a palace built for God,
To show His milder face.

Up to her courts with joys unknown
The holy tribes repair;
The Son of David holds His throne,
And sits in judgment there.

He hears our praises and complaints;
And while His awful voice
Divides the sinners from the saints,
We tremble and rejoice.

Peace be within this sacred place,
And joy a constant guest!
With holy gifts and heav’nly grace
Be her attendants blest!

My soul shall pray for Zion still,
While life or breath remains;
There my best friends, my kindred dwell,
There God my Savior reigns.

— Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David*, 1719

“My Heart Was Glad to Hear the Welcome Sound”

(Tune: “Search Me, O God” or “God of Our Fathers”)

My heart was glad to hear the welcome sound,
The call to seek Jehovah’s house of prayer;
Our feet are standing here on holy ground,
Within thy gates, thou city grand and fair.

God’s people to Jerusalem repair
To hear his Word and worship Him with praise;
The throne of justice stands eternal there,
Messiah’s throne through endless length of days.

Let earnest prayer be made for Zion’s peace;
Thy sons who hold thee dear shall prosper well;
May blessing in thy palaces increase
And peace within thy walls forever dwell.

For all my brethren and companions' sakes
My prayer shall be, Let peace in thee abide;
Since God the Lord in thee His dwelling makes,
To thee my love shall never be denied.

— Author unknown

5.0 **Praying Psalm 122**

- Lord, help me encourage others to attend worship services. [v. 1]
- Father, I give You thanks. [v. 4]
- O God, bring Your peace to Jerusalem. [v. 6]
- Lord, lead me in seeking good for others. [v. 9]



6.0 **Applying Psalm 122**

- Biblical thanksgiving includes worship with fellow believers.
- Biblical gladness results from corporate worship, intercessory prayer, and seeking the good of other people.

We need to recall the importance of Jerusalem in the counsels of God. There was never a city like it. Even today, draw a circle with a radius of about nine hundred miles, and you will take in nearly all the Middle East. The circle will embrace Athens, Istanbul, Antioch, Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Cairo, and Mecca. Much of western civilization is the offshoot of what transpired in those ten cities. Some idea of the importance of Jerusalem to God can be gathered from the number of times He mentions it in the Bible. About 465 verses in the Old Testament and about 24 verses in the New Testament (489 verses in all) speak of Jerusalem and its future. Many of the predictions have been fulfilled but many more await fulfillment. The city itself is named more than eight hundred times in the Bible.

— John Phillips, *Exploring Psalms*, 2 vols., John Phillips Commentary Series
(Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), 2:444–45