

# Psalm 48:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness.

## Analysis

**Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness.** This psalm opens with emphatic declaration of God's greatness. The Hebrew structure uses intensive forms: gadol (גָּדוֹל, "great") and mehullal me'od (מְהֻלָּל מְאֹד, "greatly to be praised"). The repetition emphasizes that God's magnitude demands proportionate worship—His greatness calls for great praise.

"The city of our God" refers to Jerusalem, specifically Zion, which held unique theological significance as God's chosen dwelling place. The phrase "mountain of his holiness" (har qodsho, הר קדשו) identifies Mount Zion as set apart, consecrated by God's presence. In ancient Near Eastern thought, mountains represented divine dwelling places, but Israel's theology radically differed—Zion was holy not because of inherent sacredness but because the true God chose to manifest His presence there.

The possessive "our God" reveals covenant relationship—this great God has bound Himself to His people in faithful love. The psalm celebrates both God's transcendent greatness and His immanent accessibility to His covenant community. This paradox finds ultimate expression in Christ, who is both the transcendent Creator (Colossians 1:15-17) and Immanuel, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). The New Testament reveals that God's dwelling is no longer limited to earthly Zion but extends to the church (1 Corinthians 3:16) and ultimately the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2-3).

## Historical Context

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Psalm 48 is a "Song of Zion," celebrating God's protection of Jerusalem, likely composed after a specific deliverance from enemy assault. Many scholars link it to the miraculous defeat of Sennacherib's Assyrian army in 701 BCE during Hezekiah's reign (2 Kings 19:32-36, Isaiah 37:33-37), when 185,000 Assyrian soldiers died in one night, forcing Sennacherib to retreat.

Jerusalem (Hebrew Yerushalayim, possibly meaning "foundation of peace") became Israel's political and religious center under David (circa 1000 BCE) and gained its temple under Solomon (circa 960 BCE). Zion's theological significance grew through the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7) and the psalms that celebrated God's choice of this location as His earthly dwelling place.

For ancient Israelites, Jerusalem represented stability, security, and God's faithful presence. In a world of constantly shifting empires and military threats, the city stood as a visible reminder that Yahweh defended His people. The psalm would have been sung during temple worship and pilgrimage festivals, reinforcing corporate identity and faith. After the Babylonian destruction (586 BCE) and subsequent restoration, this psalm gained poignant meaning as testimony to God's faithfulness despite judgment.

## Related Passages

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**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

## Study Questions

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1. How does recognizing God's greatness shape the quality and intensity of our worship?
2. What does it mean for God to dwell among His people today, and how should this truth affect our lives?

3. In what ways does focusing on God's greatness rather than our problems change our perspective on difficulties?
4. How does Christ fulfill and transcend the Old Testament concept of God dwelling in Jerusalem?
5. What practical steps can we take to cultivate hearts that "greatly praise" rather than offer perfunctory worship?

## Interlinear Text

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אֵלֶּה יְהוָה בָּעֵד וְלֹא  
 Great is the LORD to be praised and greatly in the city of our God  
 H1419 H3068 H1984 H3966 H5892 H430

בָּרָא שְׁמָן  
 in the mountain of his holiness  
 H2022 H6944

## Additional Cross-References

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**Micah 4:1** (References Lord): But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.

**Zechariah 8:3** (Holy): Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.

**Psalms 46:4** (Holy): There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.

**Psalms 96:4** (Resurrection): For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods.

**Psalms 145:3** (Resurrection): Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.

**Revelation 21:2** (Holy): And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

**Revelation 19:5** (Resurrection): And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.

**Psalms 87:3** (References God): Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah.

**Psalms 65:1** (Resurrection): Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed.

**Psalms 2:6** (Holy): Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

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