

Psalms 87:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

His foundation is in the holy mountains.

Analysis

His foundation is in the holy mountains. This opening of Psalm 87 establishes God's sovereign choice of Zion (Jerusalem) as His dwelling place. The pronoun "His" refers to the LORD mentioned in the psalm's superscription, emphasizing divine ownership and initiative.

"Foundation" (יְסוּדָתוֹ/yesudato) means base, establishment, that upon which something is built. This suggests permanence, stability, and divine purpose. Unlike human kingdoms built on shifting political power, God's city rests on His eternal decree. Isaiah 28:16 echoes this: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation."

"The holy mountains" (הַרְרֵי־קֹדֶשׁ/harrei-qodesh) refers specifically to Mount Zion and the surrounding hills of Jerusalem. "Holy" (qodesh) means set apart, consecrated, dedicated to God. These mountains are holy not by inherent nature but by divine designation—God chose this location for His name to dwell (Deuteronomy 12:5, 1 Kings 8:29).

Theologically, this verse establishes that God's work rests on His sovereign choice and unchangeable purpose. The New Testament applies this foundation imagery to Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11) and to the church built on apostolic teaching (Ephesians 2:20). What God establishes cannot be shaken, regardless of earthly kingdoms' rise and fall.

Historical Context

Psalm 87 is a 'Song of the Sons of Korah,' Levitical musicians who served in temple worship. The psalm likely dates to the monarchic period when Jerusalem and its temple represented the center of Israelite religious life. Mount Zion, the southeastern hill of Jerusalem where David established his capital, became synonymous with God's dwelling place.

Ancient Near Eastern peoples commonly viewed certain mountains as divine dwelling places. Canaanites venerated Mount Zaphon, Greeks Mount Olympus, Mesopotamians their ziggurats. Israel's faith distinctively proclaimed that the one true God chose Zion—not because of inherent sanctity but by gracious election. This humble location became the most significant place on earth because God said so.

After the Babylonian exile destroyed Jerusalem (586 BCE), this psalm gained poignant significance. How could Zion be God's foundation when it lay in ruins? Yet the returning exiles rebuilt, and the psalm's truth endured: God's purposes cannot be destroyed by human empires. Jesus would later identify Himself as the true temple (John 2:19-21), and the church as God's dwelling place (1 Peter 2:5).

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does God's choice of Zion as His foundation demonstrate His sovereign grace in choosing what seems insignificant by worldly standards?
2. In what ways does the Old Testament foundation on Zion point forward to Christ as the true foundation?
3. How should the truth that God's purposes rest on His unchangeable foundation affect our response to cultural and political instability?

Interlinear Text

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| וּסֹדֶת | בְּהַרֵּי | קֹדֶשׁ: |
| His foundation | mountains | is in the holy |
| H3248 | H2042 | H6944 |

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 56:7 (Holy): Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.

Isaiah 28:16 (Parallel theme): Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

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.

Matthew 16:18 (Parallel theme): And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Psalms 68:16 (Parallel theme): Why leap ye, ye high hills? this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the LORD will dwell in it for ever.

2 Peter 1:18 (Holy): And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

2 Chronicles 3:1 (Parallel theme): Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.