

Psalms 87:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her.

Analysis

And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. This verse presents the stunning declaration that people from various nations will be considered native-born citizens of Zion, with God Himself guaranteeing this status. This represents one of Scripture's clearest Old Testament prophecies of universal gospel inclusion.

"And of Zion it shall be said" (וְאָמַר/וְלֵצִיּוֹן Tziyon yei'amer) introduces prophetic declaration. The passive voice "shall be said" indicates divine decree—this isn't human wishful thinking but God's ordained future. What is spoken about Zion comes from divine authority.

"This and that man was born in her" (וְאִישׁ וְאִישׁ יוּלַד-בָּהּ ish va'ish yulad-bah) literally reads "man and man was born in her." The repetition "man and man" suggests many individuals, various persons, people from diverse backgrounds. Yulad (was born) emphasizes native citizenship—not converts or immigrants but those counted as born in Zion. Ancient citizenship was typically determined by birth; this verse extends that birthright to Gentiles.

The previous verse (not in our selection) names specific nations: Egypt (Rahab), Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia—representing enemies and distant peoples. That these hostile nations would be registered as Zion-born is revolutionary. Imagine Israelites hearing that Babylonians (who destroyed Jerusalem) would be counted as natives of God's city!

"And the highest himself shall establish her" (וְהוּא יְכַוְנֶנָּה עֲלֶיהָ/vehu yekhonneha Elyon) provides the guarantee. Elyon (the Highest, Most High) emphasizes God's supremacy over all nations and powers. Yekhonneha (shall establish, make firm, secure) promises divine action to accomplish this. God Himself will establish Zion as the multi-national city where all peoples find citizenship. This isn't Israel's political achievement but God's gracious work.

Theologically, this anticipates the gospel mystery revealed in Ephesians 2:11-22: Gentiles, once 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,' are now 'fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.' Through Christ, people from every nation become native-born citizens of God's kingdom, 'born again' (John 3:3-7) into God's family.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cultures maintained strict ethnic and religious boundaries. Citizenship derived from birth, and foreigners remained outsiders regardless of residence duration. Some nations practiced absolute xenophobia; others allowed limited rights to resident aliens but never full citizenship. Against this background, Psalm 87's vision is revolutionary—foreigners not merely tolerated but registered as native-born.

Old Testament law provided for resident aliens (ger) who could worship Yahweh but maintained distinction from native Israelites. Proselyte conversion was possible but complex, and even converts faced some social barriers. That hostile nations like Egypt and Babylon would be counted as Zion-born seemed impossible.

The exile forced Israel to reconsider their relationship with nations. Living in Babylon and Persia, Jews encountered God's sovereignty over all peoples. Prophets like Jonah and Isaiah declared God's concern for Gentiles. Yet the expectation remained that Gentiles must come to Jerusalem and essentially become Jewish to worship Yahweh.

Jesus's ministry began breaking these barriers: healing the centurion's servant

(Matthew 8:5-13), the Syrophoenician woman's daughter (Mark 7:24-30), the Samaritan woman (John 4), and declaring that many from east and west would sit with Abraham in the kingdom (Matthew 8:11). His commission to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19) initiates Psalm 87's fulfillment.

Acts records the early church's struggle to understand Gentile inclusion. Peter's vision (Acts 10), the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), and Paul's ministry among Gentiles gradually revealed what Psalm 87 prophesied: through Christ's cross, God creates 'one new man' (Ephesians 2:15) where national, ethnic, and social barriers dissolve. All believers are 'born again' into God's family, native-born citizens of Zion.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the concept of being 'born in Zion' help us understand what it means to be 'born again' in the New Testament?
2. What barriers and prejudices must we overcome to fully embrace that believers from every nation are equally native-born citizens of God's kingdom?
3. How does God's promise to 'establish' this multinational Zion give us confidence in the church's future despite current divisions and challenges?

Interlinear Text

וְלִצִּיּוֹן	יֵאמַר	אִישׁ	אִישׁ	יָלַד	בְּה
And of Zion	it shall be said	This and that man	This and that man	was born	H0
H6726	H559	H376	H376	H3205	
וְהָיָה	יִכְוֶנֶה	עַל־יְהוָה			
H1931	himself shall establish	in her and the highest			
	H3559	H5945			

Additional Cross-References

Romans 8:31 (Parallel theme): What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

Ezekiel 48:35 (Parallel theme): It was round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there.

Psalms 48:8 (Parallel theme): As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. Selah.

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.