

PSALLO

Psalm 87:1–7

Psalm 87 is ascribed to the “sons of Korah.” We have spoken before of this prophetic/Levitical group of men as those who were descended from the rebel Korah himself. Having that family name attached to the authorship of eleven of the one-hundred fifty sacred hymns, as well as 1 Chronicles 9:19, speaks to the great mercy and forgiveness of the Lord, and reminds us that not all of Korah’s family died in his rebellion. Indeed, a remnant of them was saved, and given useful service pertaining to the holy things of Israel, including the song. See also 1 Chronicles 26:1, 26:19, 31:14.

In the metrical translation you have before you, we have italicized those few words that have been added to smooth out the meter and perhaps also the understanding of the Psalm. The Psalm begins, “His foundation is in the holy mountains,” inviting the questions “Whose foundation?” and “What foundation?” The rest of the Psalm clearly speaks of Jerusalem, the city of our God, and so we understand that it is the Lord’s foundation. He has laid the foundation of Zion, and made her holiness sure and enduring by nestling her among the holy mountains. This picturesque description, however, is not only for the city of old, but for the “heavenly Jerusalem” (Hebrews 12:22), and as often is the case in the Psalter, speaks of the Church of the living God in every age of redemptive history. God has set apart a people for His own possession, that they might approach Him in the beauty of holiness. According to the analogy of Scripture, I take this foundation to mean the Great and Chief Corner-Stone, Jesus Christ Himself, and the inspired Apostles and Prophets, the human authors of the Word of God (Ephesians 2:20, 1 Peter 2:4–8).

The balance of the Psalm reveals the great desirability of this “city of God” (v. 3). First, glorious things are spoken of her. Things of weight, worth, things that matter and endure are rightly said of her. She is not like other cities, which come and go, wax and wane, are prosperous for a time and shortly fall to ruins. This city *matters*. The policy, benefits, and declarations are all important and are enduring like her foundation. This is a *weighty* city. The Psalmist then contrasts Zion to those other places in the ancient world that once had some honor and notoriety, and perhaps animus against the glorious city. Verse four begins with the Hebrew word זָכַר *zachar*, to remember, in *hiphil*, the causative form, properly understood

as “I will cause to remember,” or “I will bring to mind,” and then, “to them that know me.” The Lord Himself takes up the speech here, and declares that He will bring these other cities to mind, and will in this context help His people to remember that such cities were not established or founded by Him. They were not glorious, nor were they permanent. The Reverend William Plumer, D. D., LL.D., is correct, in my opinion, to say that in this connection Rahab is poetic language for Egypt.¹ These places of old, each honored by the world in their day for some earthly glory, are now gone by the way, in contrast to the glorious city of God, whose foundation is established by God, and that in holiness. The cities of the world, and all their glory, offered to the Lord Jesus Christ by Satan himself, and characterized here in this Psalm under these names, are but passing and profane. Because this is the Lord’s city, its permanence, holiness, and glory are to be desired by the people of God over every other society. This is true also, according to the Psalmist, of those that are born in those cities mentioned—they may have a passing renown, but in the end the best that can be said of them is that “they were born there.” Thus, their glory passes along with the prominence of those places.

Verse five makes explicit the contrast hinted at in verse four. There is another set of men, different from the former, for whom it is said, they were born of Zion—but note the reversal in the expression: It is said of *Zion*, that this man was born in her. This fits with the symmetry of the Psalm, which before had “made mention” of the world-cities, the profane cities and their inhabitants. Such a passage, where our birthright is found in Zion, ought to remind us of Colossians 3:1–4, where the Apostle tells of where our life, or may I say, “life-blood” is founded. Having died to the cities of this world, and received life from Christ, it might be said of us in the heavenly city, “this man was born *in her*, in Jerusalem.” The advantage of being born in Zion is emphasized once again with the addition of “and the highest himself shall establish her.” O to be associated in Zion! To have one’s birthright there! The Lord, here presented as “The Highest” (heb. עֵלְיוֹן *Elyon*) is the One who establishes, and it cannot be undone—He lays her foundation, and she cannot be brought down, for there is none higher than He.

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1. “He says: ‘I will make mention, I will announce, I will cause to be known.’ *Rahab*, a word found also in Ps. 89:10; Isa. 51:9. It no doubt designates Egypt, at some time before the loss of her national greatness. *Rahab* sometimes means pride; sometimes, strength; sometimes, violence. In either way it is a fit title for Egypt.” William S. Plumer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms: Being a Critical and Expository Commentary, with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks on the Entire Psalter* (Philadelphia; Edinburgh: J. B. Lippincott Company; A & C Black, 1872), 814.

Verse six advances the thought and ascribes to the Lord Himself the office of “recorder.” He is the registrar of those who are in Zion, for he Himself writes their names in that city’s register—this book is authentic and cannot be doubted because of the greatness of its registrar. Again, what privilege and blessing to have the names of Zion’s citizens spoken, recorded and registered by the Lord, the Highest! This ought to remind us of Hebrews 12:22–24, where we hear that the “firstborn ones” are registered in heaven, in that holy city. The Apostle in Hebrews 12 is perhaps drawing on the Psalm before us, pondering what it means to belong to Zion and to be registered as her sons, with all the privileges of being firstborn. Following verse six is our familiar *selah*. The inspired author often places this notation after he has asserted something particularly weighty, and invites the singers and readers to pause and reflect upon the weightiness of his statement. The Lord’s own writing of the register in Zion reminds us of His great sovereignty, electing a people to Himself in Christ, writing His Name upon them, and their names in His city (Rev. 14:1; 22:4).

At the end of the Psalm, verse seven reminds us of the principle business of Zion. Egypt might be remembered for her river and pyramids, Babylon for her gold and gardens, Philistia for her giants, Tyre for her trade, and Ethiopia for her merchandise, but Zion is remembered for her singers and players, and for possessing the springs of God. In the singers and players we have reference to the formal, public worship of God. In understanding this to be so, we must remember that the 288-member Levitical Choir and Orchestra existed only in Jerusalem, uniquely there to accompany that which was also unique in that day to Jerusalem, the offerings of the people (2 Chron. 29:20–30). In the reference to springs we have the “wells of salvation” of Isaiah 12:3 and many other places in the Psalms and Prophets, which would, in poetic language, represent the preaching of the Gospel, accompanied by the Spirit of God as those “streams in the desert” (Isaiah 35:6). The Church, Zion, is to be remembered for her worship and her proclamation of the Gospel. Our Lord, speaking to the Samaritan woman, told her of both things: He spoke to her of “living water” and that the age to come would bring forth worship not in Jerusalem, nor Samaria, but everywhere in spirit and truth (John 4:9–25). The business of Zion, her occupation and place in this world, is not to collect gold or silver, not to be known for her trade and merchandise, nor for her great martial prowess, but for her worship, and her preaching of “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

I have omitted thus far the discussion of verse two: “The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of

2. David Clarkson, *The Works of David Clarkson*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 187.

Judah.” I have saved this for last because I have desired first to show the emphasis of the Psalm, in presenting the glory of Zion, to be centered in her worship, which includes the service brought to the Lord each Lord’s Day as we come together in service to him. In so doing, I commend to you the sermon by the Rev. David Clarkson on this verse, titled *Public Worship to be Preferred Before Private*.² There are some sermons written and preserved that truly ought to be read over and again, and this is indeed one of those. Rev. Clarkson notes the preference asserted by the Psalmist that the Lord maintains concerning the “gates” or business, the official function of Zion, as compared to the tabernacles of Jacob.

The title of his sermon is an apt representation of the blessing and advantage the Lord has placed upon His public worship. There is a Biblical understanding and practice that must be maintained against errors on both sides of the Lord’s Word to His people. On the one hand, sacerdotalism and priestcraft bring superstition into public worship, putting grace in “things,” while de-emphasizing faith and heart-religion. On the other, contrary to God’s Word, pietism emphasizes almost exclusively what one does in the family or closet, and presents a lesser devotion and commitment to the Lord publicly with His covenant-people. Rev. Clarkson’s sermon contains first an introduction, then an observation (that public worship is to be preferred before private). Following this, he presents an explanation of public worship, showing the differences between the worship of the Old and New Testaments, proceeding thereafter to confirm his observation with twelve reasons. Some of these are:

- ◆ The Lord is more glorified in public worship than private.
- ◆ There is more of the Lord’s presence in public worship than private.
- ◆ Public ordinances are more edifying than those in private.
- ◆ Public ordinances are a better security against apostasy than private.
- ◆ The desires of eminent saints in Scripture was to prefer public worship to private.
- ◆ The promises of God are greater, made in reference to public worship than to private.

After this portion of the sermon Rev. Clarkson takes up the objection of one that perceives his blessing to be greater in private worship than in public, and gives several searching reasons why this may be the case. He follows those reasons with a section both pastorally encouraging and convicting, calling us to esteem the public ordinances of worship as the Lord commands, and commends them to us in His Word.

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Thomas Boston. Edited by Samuel M'Millan. 12 vols. London: William Tegg & Co., 1853. Reprint, Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1980. Especially see volume 1, commentary on Shorter Catechism Question 34, "What is adoption?"

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Thomas J. Crawford. *The Fatherhood of God Considered in Its General and Its Special Aspects and Particularly in Relation to the Atonement with a Review of Recent Speculations on the Subject*. Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1867.

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David B. Garner. *Sons in the Son*. Phillipsburg NJ: P&R, 2016.

John L. Girardeau. *Discussions of Theological Questions*. Edited by George A. Blackburn. Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee, 1905.

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John Murray. *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955.

J. I. Packer. *Knowing God*. 20th anniversary ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

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Tim J. R. Trumper. "Adoption: The Forgotten Doctrine of Westminster Soteriology." In *Reformed Theology in Contemporary Perspective*, Lynn Quigley, ed. Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006, 87–123.

Robert Alexander Webb. *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1947.

C. N. Willborn. "Adoption: An Historical Perspective with Evangelical Implications," in *Sanctification: Growing in Grace*. Andrew J. Wortman and Joseph A. Pipa, eds. Greenville, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 2001. ■

Reviews. Continued from Page 194.

32n31; 33n35; 55n67; 55n69 and similar; see also 56n70, "Rian, Wheaton College Today," 115). These faults are thankfully few and by some considerations not worth mentioning. If a second printing is called for, I'm sure these matters will be cleaned up.⁶

6. Having made that criticism, let me here offer to prepare an improved set of footnotes for the book, which I will make available to interested readers upon their request. Contact the reviewer at the PCA Historical Center.

Separately, one commenter on a discussion forum faulted Douma's biography for its relative brevity, but I think it is an entirely appropriate length, and all the more so now with the addition of *Selected Letters*. I could wish that the book had more coverage about Dr. Clark's wife Ruth, for she must have been a most remarkable woman. "Life Outside of Work" only merits four pages in the biography, nearly as much space as is later spent in discussion of Clark's artistic endeavors, with his training in art courses taken under Dr. Ed Kellogg and his attempts at painting landscapes. But as the author stated in private conversation, he did try to discover more about Ruth Clark and there simply wasn't much else that could be found. Somehow, in a way I can't quite explain, that seems quite appropriate for the woman who was the wife and life-companion of Dr. Gordon Haddon Clark.

The author indicated to me in a private message that he had available to him as he was writing this book a scanned copy of Fred H. Klooster's 142 page Th.D. dissertation at Vrije Universiteit Te Amsterdam, a long-standing treatment of the Clark/Van Til debate, published under the title of *The Incomprehensibility of God in the Orthodox Presbyterian Conflict* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1951). However I could find no reference to this work in the bibliography or in any of the three chapters treating the controversy. I will assume that discussing Klooster's views would have been astray from the subject proper of the book, but those wanting to dig deeper into the Clark/Van Til controversy will want to be aware of Klooster's contributions. Where Herman Hoeksema wrote contemporaneously in support of Clark, Klooster's treatise in favor of Van Til came a few years later.

One last little item about this book may be mentioned. Just after the title page of *The Presbyterian Philosopher* is a dedication page that reads, "To Henry." The author informed me that Henry was his Bernese Mountain dog which he brought with him to seminary. Henry died just before he found a publisher for his book. The author also noted that the book's index ends with an entry for Zephi, which was Gordon Clark's dog (see p. 180). Thus the book begins and ends with a dog. Douma noted that Betsy Clark George, one of Clark's daughters, was appreciative of this subtle tribute to Dr. Clark's love of dogs.

All in all, Doug Douma's *The Presbyterian Philosopher* is one of the most readable and informative books I've come across in quite a while. Get a copy, read it, and keep it on a near shelf for reference. ■

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Rev. Clarkson then proceeds to several uses or applications. The first is "Reproof for those that undervalue public worship," handled in several sub-points. The second runs thus:

“Use 2, of exhortation. Be exhorted to give to the public worship of God the glory that is due to it; let it have the pre-eminence which the Lord has given it; prefer it before private, in your thoughts, in your affections, in your practice. Get higher thoughts of public ordinances, get affections answerable to those apprehensions; manifest both by a frequent affectionate use of these ordinances, by your praises for the enjoyment, by your prayers for the continuance of them” (205).

His final section presents five ways to reap the advantage of the preferred public worship:

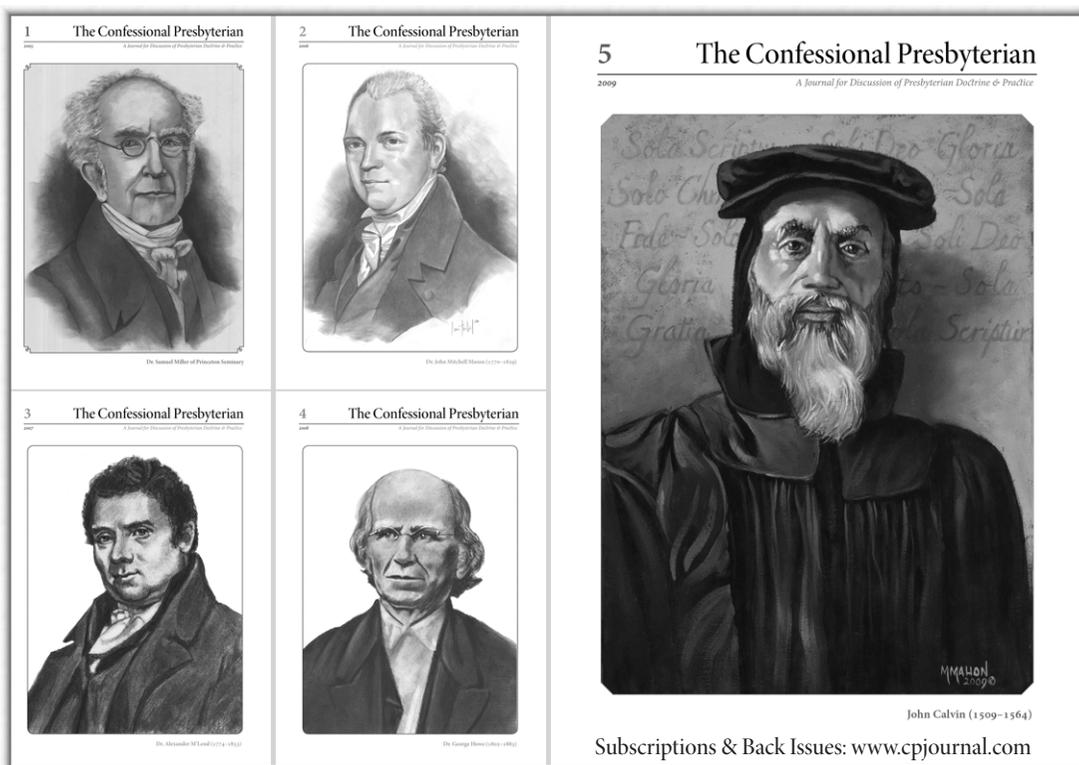
1. Come not unprepared.
2. Get acquainted with your spiritual condition.
3. Come with hearts hungering after the enjoyment of Christ in his ordinances.
4. Use the holy ordinances with fear and reverence.

5. What you do in public worship, do it with all your might.

We will close this essay with this exhortation from the Reverend Clarkson:

It is the diligent man that shall be enriched with precious substance, even the precious advantages of public worship. The Lord is the rewarder of those that seek him diligently. Those that are diligent in preparing for it, diligent in attending on it, diligent in after improvement of the ordinances, this man’s soul shall be rich, rich towards God. The Lord will bless him with such spiritual riches, in the use of public ordinances, as will raise his esteem of them (Clarkson, 209).

Todd L. RUDELL ■



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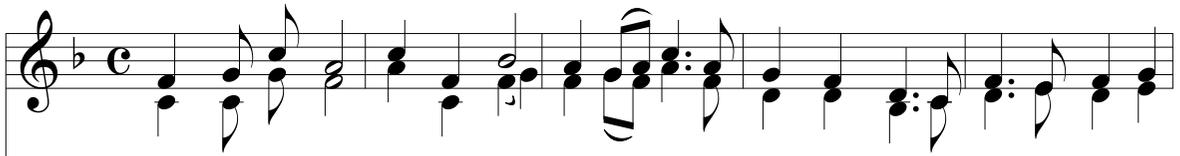
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Psalm 87:1-7

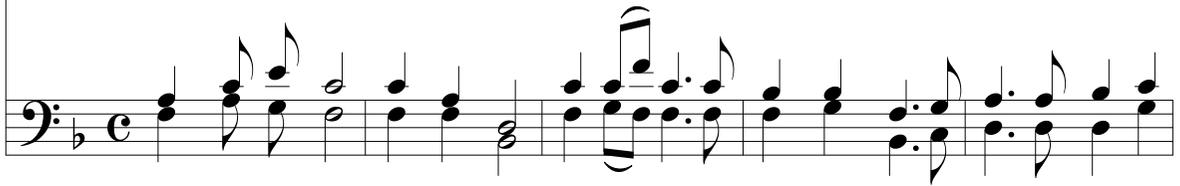
A Psalm or Song for the sons of Korah

B-Har-ey Qadesh

Todd L. Ruddell



¹ His *cit - y's* sure foun-da-tion In the ho-ly moun-tains is O More than Ja-cob's
³ Cit - y of God, glo - ri - ous things con-cern-ing thee are said;⁴ Of Ra-hab and of
 And be - hold o'er the lands E - ven of Phi - lis - ti - a And like-wise with the
⁵ Al - so per-tain - ing to Sion Ev - er shall it be de - clar'd: This man and that was
⁶ Num-ber'd shall be by the Lord When the peo-ple's He'll re-cord This man was born; and



dwel-ings all ²The Lord loves The Lord loves Loves the gates of Sion.
 Bab - y - lon I will re - mind I will re - mind Them that know - eth me.
land of Tyre Eth - i - o - pia Eth - i - o - pia This *man* was born there.
 born there - in The High'st Him-self The High'st Him-self He'll es - tab - lish her.
 there shall be ⁷Sing - ers and play'rs Sing - ers and play'rs All my s'prings are'n thee.

