YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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Yom Yerushalayim

[**“The Lord Loves the Gates of Zion”**](http://etzion.org.il/en/%E2%80%9C-lord-loves-gates-zion%E2%80%9D)

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Translated by Yoseif Bloch

# *Tehillim* 87 describes the special love that God has for Jerusalem:

#### Of the sons of Korach: a psalm, a song.

He has founded his city on the holy mountain.
The Lord loves the gates of Zion
 more than all the other dwellings of Ya’akov.

Glorious things are said of you,
 city of God.
“I will record Rahav and Babylonia
 among those who acknowledge me —
Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush —
 and will say, ‘This one was born there.’”
Indeed, of Zion it will be said,
 “This one and that one were born in her,
 and the Most High Himself will establish her.”
The Lord will write in the register of the peoples:
 “This one was born there.”

As they make music they will sing,
 “All my fountains are in you.”

The psalm begins with a declaration clearly identifying it as an ode to Jerusalem. The opening immediately tells us of the uniqueness of the city, as God finds the gates of Zion beloved “more than all the other dwellings of Ya’akov” — i.e., every place where Jews live. Wherever His people reside, God associates His name with them, but the gates of Zion have a special status, superior to any other location.

*Metzudat David* (R. David Altschuller, 18th-cenutry Prague) explains this:

It is true that all of the Land of Israel is beloved to the Omnipresent, but nevertheless the gates of Zion are more beloved to Him than all else.

This is justified by the next line, in which the Psalmist directly addresses Jerusalem with a cry of wonder: “Glorious things are said of you, city of God.”

What does the continuation of the psalm indicate? The commentators struggle with this question, suggesting a variety of explanations. Most maintain that the Psalmist is describing a vision of God’s drawing Jewish believers from among all the nations and bringing them to Jerusalem. Thus, *Metzudat David* explains:

The herald announces to Zion, telling it that this person and that person, both of whom are born in it, are brought to it.

According to this explanation, the reference is to the ingathering of the exiles. Thus, Rashi cites the verse from *Yeshayahu* (27:12): “In that day the Lord will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, Israel, will be gathered up one by one.”

However, there is another way to read this psalm. In the future, God will arrive to judge all of humanity, and they will all pass before him like sheep (cf. Mishna, *Rosh Hashana* 1:2). Each person will be identified by birthplace: this one was born in Babylonia, that one was born in Philistia, this one in Tyre and that one in Cush. “The Lord will write in the register of the peoples: ‘This one was born there.’”

However, the Jewish nation is unique in that its members do not reside in one place. The definition of Jewish nationality, unlike any other, is not based on geographic criteria. Thus, when Jews pass before God, they are identified as being natives of Zion: “Indeed, of Zion it will be said, ‘This one and that one were born in her.’”

Instantaneously, desolate and abandoned Zion becomes the birthplace of millions of Jews. Indeed, this is the fulfillment of another vision of Yeshayahu:

Then you will say in your heart,
 “Who bore me these?
I was bereaved and barren;
 I was exiled and rejected.
 Who brought these up?
I was left all alone,
 but these—where have they come from?” (*Yeshayahu* 49:21)

This is alluded to in a famous statement of *Chazal* (Babylonian Talmud, *Ketubot* 75a), expounding this psalm:

“Indeed, of Zion it will be said, ‘This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High Himself will establish her’” — R. Meisha, grandson of R. Yehoshua ben Levi, explained: Both one who was born therein and one who looks forward to seeing it.

Every Jew, in fact, is a native of Jerusalem; it is only the historical tragedy of Titus’s having exiled our ancestors that results in a Jew’s birthplace being anywhere else. Whether one is physically born in Jerusalem or one anticipates its rebuilding, all are considered sons of Zion.

In our generation, we have been privileged to see both of these miracles: the ingathering of the exiles and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. “Indeed, of Zion it will be said, ‘This one and that one were born in her,’” and consequently, “‘the Most High Himself will establish her.’”