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A Song of Ascents. By Solomon.

PSALM 127: 1 Unless the LORD builds the house, they labour in vain who build it. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman guards it in vain.

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The necessity of God's blessing on every undertaking, without which no prosperity can be expected, Psa 127:1, Psa 127:2. Children are a heritage from the Lord, Psa 127:3, Psa 127:4. A fruitful wife is a blessing to her husband, Psa 127:5.

The Hebrew, Chaldee, and Vulgate attribute this Psalm to Solomon. The Syriac says it is "A Psalm of David concerning Solomon; and that it was spoken also concerning Haggai and Zechariah, who forwarded the building of the temple." The Septuagint, Ethiopic, Arabic, and Anglo-Saxon have no title, but simply "A Psalm of Degrees." It was most likely composed for the building of the second temple, under Nehemiah, and by some prophet of that time.

#### Verse 1

Except the Lord build the house - To build a house is taken in three different senses in the sacred writings.

1. To build the temple of the Lord, which was called הבית habbeith, the house, by way of eminence.
2. To build any ordinary house, or place of dwelling.
3. To have a numerous offspring.

In this sense it is supposed to be spoken concerning the Egyptian midwives; that because they feared the Lord, therefore he built them houses. See the note on Exo 1:21. But, however, the above passage may be interpreted, it is a fact that b ben, a son, and tb bath, a daughter, and tyb beith, a house, come from the same root hnb banah, to build; because sons and daughters build up a household, or constitute a family, as much and as really as stones and timber constitute a building. Now it is true that unless the good hand of God be upon us we cannot prosperously build a place of worship for his name. Unless we have his blessing, a dwelling-house cannot be comfortably erected. And if his blessing be not on our children, the house (the family) may be built up, but instead of its being the house of God, it will be the synagogue of Satan. All marriages that are not under God's blessing will be a private and public curse. This we see every day.

Except the Lord keep the city - When the returned Jews began to restore the walls of Jerusalem, and rebuild the city, Sanballat, Tobiah, and others formed plots to prevent it. Nehemiah, being informed of this, set up proper watches and guards. The enemy, finding this, gathered themselves together, and determined to fall upon them at once, and cut them all off. Nehemiah, having gained intelligence of this also, armed his people, and placed them behind the wall. Sanballat and his company, finding that the Jews were prepared for resistance, abandoned their project; and Nehemiah, to prevent surprises of this kind, kept one-half of the people always under arms, while the other half was employed in the work. To this the psalmist alludes; and in effect says, Though you should watch constantly, guard every place, and keep on your armor ready to repel every attack, yet remember the success of all depends upon the presence and blessing of God. While, therefore, ye are not slothful in business, be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; for there is no success either in spiritual or secular undertakings but in consequence of the benediction of the Almighty.

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PSALM 127: 2 It is vain for you to rise up early, to stay up late, eating the bread of toil; for he gives sleep to his loved ones.

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Verse 2

It is vain for you to rise up early - There seems to be here an allusion to the daily and nightly watches which Nehemiah instituted. The people are worn out with constant labor and watching; he therefore divided them in such a manner, that they who had worked in the day should rest by night, and that they who worked by night should rest in the day; and thus his beloved, a title of the Jews, the beloved of God, got sleep, due refreshment, and rest. As for Nehemiah and his servants, they never put off their clothes day or night but for washing.

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PSALM 127: 3 Behold, children are a heritage of the LORD. The fruit of the womb is his reward.

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Verse 3

Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord - That is, To many God gives children in place of temporal good. To many others he gives houses, lands, and thousands of gold and silver, and with them the womb that beareth not; and these are their inheritance. The poor man has from God a number of children, without lands or money; these are his inheritance; and God shows himself their father, feeding and supporting them by a chain of miraculous providences. Where is the poor man who would give up his six children, with the prospect of having more, for the thousands or millions of him who is the center of his own existence, and has neither root nor branch but his forlorn solitary self upon the face of the earth? Let the fruitful family, however poor, lay this to heart; "Children are a heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward." And he who gave them will feed them; for it is a fact, and the maxim formed on it has never failed, "Wherever God sends mouths, he sends meat." "Murmur not," said an Arab to his friend, "because thy family is large; know that it is for their sakes that God feeds thee."

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PSALM 127: 4 As arrows in the hand of a mighty man, so are the children of youth.

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Verse 4

As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man - Each child will, in the process of time, be a defense and support to the family, as arrows in the quiver of a skillful and strong archer; the more he has, the more enemies he may slay, and consequently the more redoubted shall he be.

Children of the youth - The children of young people are always more strong and vigorous, more healthy, and generally longer lived than those of elderly, or comparatively elderly persons. Youth is the time for marriage; I do not mean infancy or a comparative childhood, in which several fools join in marriage who are scarcely fit to leave the nursery or school. Such couples generally disagree; they cannot bear the boyish and girlish petulancies and caprices of each other; their own growth is

hindered, and their offspring, (if any), have never much better than an embryo existence. On the other hand age produces only a dwarfish or rickety offspring, that seldom live to procreate; and when they do, it is only to perpetuate deformity and disease. It would be easy to assign reasons for all this; but the interpretation of Scripture will seldom admit of physiological details. It is enough that God has said, Children of the youth are strong and active, like arrows in the hands of the mighty.

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PSALM 127: 5 Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. They won't be disappointed when they speak with their enemies in the gate.

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#### Verse 5

Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them - This is generally supposed to mean his house full of children, as his quiver if full of arrows; but I submit whether it be not more congenial to the metaphors in the text to consider it as applying to the wife: "Happy is the man who has a breeding or fruitful wife;" this is the *gravida sagittis pharetra* "the quiver pregnant with arrows." But it may be thought the metaphor is not natural. I think otherwise: and I know it to be in the Jewish style, and the style of the times of the captivity, when this Psalm was written, and we find the *pudendum muliebre*, or human matrix, thus denominated, *Ecclus. 26:12*: Κατεναντι παντος πασσαλου καθησεται, και εναντι βελους ανοιξει φαρετραν. The reader may consult the place in the Apocrypha, where he will find the verse well enough translated.

With the enemies in the gate - "When he shall contend with his adversaries in the gate of the house of judgment." - Targum. The reference is either to courts of justice, which were held at the gates of cities, or to robbers who endeavor to force their way into a house to spoil the inhabitants of their goods. In the first case a man falsely accused, who has a numerous family, has as many witnesses in his behalf as he has children. And in the second case he is not afraid of marauders, because his house is well defended by his active and vigorous sons. It is, I believe, to this last that the psalmist refers.

This Psalm may be entitled, "The Soliloquy of the happy Householder: - The poor man with a large loving family, and in annual expectation of an increase, because his wife, under the Divine blessing, is fruitful." All are blessed of the Lord, and his hand is invariably upon them for good.