

PSALM 127

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 127

A Song of degrees for Solomon.

This psalm was written for Solomon; that is, for the sake of Solomon, as Aben Ezra interprets it; of concerning Solomon, as Jarchi: and so the Syriac title,

“it was said by David concerning Solomon.”

Perhaps it was composed by David, after Nathan had informed him, that not he, but his son Solomon, should build a temple for the Lord; and when he had made provision of gold and silver, and other things, for it, and had given the pattern of it to his son; and encouraged and animated him to it, assuring him that the Lord would be with him until he had finished it; and prayed that God would give him a perfect heart to do it; for he knew the whole success depended upon the Lord, notwithstanding all the preparations he had made: hence the psalm begins, “except the Lord build the house”; (see [1330](#) 1 Chronicles 28:20 29:19). Theodoret is of opinion it was written for Zerubbabel, and respects the building of the second temple by him; who is called Solomon, because he descended from him, and restored his work; but Zerubbabel, though he was of the house of David, yet not in the line of Solomon, but of Nathan, ([4187](#) Luke 3:27,31). The inscription of the Syriac version seems to agree with this conjecture; which adds, to what is before observed,

“and it is also said concerning Haggai and Zechariah, who were solicitous for the building of the temple.”

And Arama the Jew says, that it is possible it may be said of the building of the second temple, and the walls of Jerusalem. But others think it is a composition of Solomon himself; who might set out upon the building of the temple with this song, as he made a prayer at the dedication of it when finished: and the Targum renders it,

“a song by the hand of Solomon;”

and our translators for the most part render the particule of, which they here translate “for”, as “of David”, in many places. And so accordingly it may be rendered here “of Solomon”^{f1766}, or Solomon’s, and be one of the thousand and five songs he made; which, besides that called the Song of Solomon, is the only one extant: and the doctrine of it agrees with many things in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes; that all things depend upon the providence and blessing of God, without which all the endeavours of men are in vain. Kimchi thinks the Messiah is meant, who is often called Solomon in the book of Canticles, (~~2R07~~ Song of Solomon 3:7,11 8:11,12); and to whom many passages in it may be applied.

Ver. 1. *Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it,* etc.] Whether it be understood literally of an artificial house, as Solomon’s own house; or the house of the Lord, or any other: let a man be ever so bent upon building one, or have ever so much skill in drawing the plan of it, or be ever so well provided to go through the expense of it, or have ever so many hands employed in it, yet, if the Lord does not give success, it will all be in vain; the building will fall down, or be consumed by fire before it is finished; or by one providence or another he will be obliged to desist from it, as in the case of the builders of the tower and city of Babel. Or whether it be understood of a family, which is built up by an increase and multiplication of children; so Leah and Rachel built up the house of Israel, (~~0R01E~~ Ruth 4:11); this depends upon the providence of God; for, as it is after said, “children are an heritage of the Lord”, (~~0C7B~~ Psalm 127:3). Or whether it be understood, figuratively and mystically, of the church God, the house of the living God; the house of Christ, a spiritual one; a Gospel church, whose materials are lively stones, or true believers. Now there are builders in this house, some indeed very bad ones; and it is no wonder that they labour in vain, who reject and lay aside the foundation and corner stone, Christ; who deny his deity, despise his righteousness; or mix grace and works, law and Gospel, together, and pluck down with one hand what they build with another: and though there are others that are good ones, and lay the foundation, Christ; and build on this foundation precious truths, comparable to gold, silver, and precious stones; minister the word, and administer the ordinances, truly and faithfully; and in all direct to Christ for grace, strength, peace, comfort, and eternal life; speak to edification, and are the means of reviving the graces of God’s people, and of establishing their souls; as well as of the conversion of sinners, whereby the house of God is built up; yet if the Lord does not prosper their work, all is in vain.

For the principal builder is God, Father, Son, and Spirit; this is mostly applied to the second Person, the Word and Wisdom of God, (²⁰⁰⁰Proverbs 9:1 ³⁰⁶²Zechariah 6:12,13 ⁴⁰⁶⁸Matthew 16:18); but not to the exclusion of the Father, who has laid in Zion a foundation, a precious corner stone, and builds souls on it; nor of the Spirit, through whom saints are built up an habitation for God, (²³⁸⁶Isaiah 28:16 ⁴⁰²²Ephesians 2:22). The Targum here is,

“if the Word of the Lord does not build the city.”

It follows,

except the Lord keep the city; the city Jerusalem, as the Targum; who also here makes mention of the Word of the Lord: or any other city: God, with the Heathens ^{f1767} was called **πολιευς**, the keeper of cities; this title is given to Minerva by Pindar ^{f1768}, and is one of Jupiter’s titles ^{f1769};

the watchman waketh [but] in vain; to preserve it from riots, robberies, fires, etc. This may be applied to the church of God, the city of the living God, of which saints are fellow citizens: now in this city there are watchmen, some indeed that are blind and asleep, and so quite unfit for this office; but there are others who are awake and diligent, and watch in all things; and for the souls of men, and the good of the city, the church, to prevent heresies, errors, and immoralities; and yet all their watchfulness is in vain, unless the Lord keep it, who watches over his people for good, and that none hurt them; he wakeful, never slumbers nor sleeps, and constant night and day; and keeps his people by his power, and as tenderly as the apple of his eye.

Ver. 2. [*It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late*, etc.] A description of an industrious and laborious person, who takes great pains to get a livelihood, or increase his substance; (see ³⁹⁴³Psalm 104:23) (²⁸¹⁵Proverbs 31:15,18); which, yet, as in the former instances, depends upon the blessing of divine Providence, (²⁰⁰⁴Proverbs 10:4,22 ²⁰⁰¹Ecclesiastes 9:11). For, after all, it may come to nothing more at last than

to eat the bread of sorrows; that is, to eat bread gotten with much sorrow and labour; such get bread, and that is all, and not that without the providence of God;

[for] so he giveth his beloved sleep; that is, the Lord: such who are partakers of his grace, that fear and love him; to them, thus diligent and industrious, he gives not only bread to eat, but sleep, which to a labouring man is sweet; and having food and raiment, he gives them contentment, quietness, and satisfaction of mind, which is the greatest blessing of all. Sleep, even bodily sleep, was reckoned with the very Heathens a divine gift^{f1770}. Some think respect is had to, Solomon, whose name was Jedidiah, and signifies the beloved of the Lord, (^{<1022>}2 Samuel 12:24,25); to whom God gave peace, rest, and safety all around; or, as others, the kingdom without labour, when Absalom and Adonijah toiled for it: Christ, who is the Beloved of the Lord, the Son of his love, his well beloved Son, may be thought of, whose rest is glorious; his sleep in the grave, where his flesh rested from his labours and sufferings, in hope of the resurrection of it: and it may be applied to all the Lord's beloved ones; to whom he gives spiritual rest in this world, sleep in the arms of Jesus at death, and an everlasting rest in the world to come; all which depends not on their endeavours, but on his grace and goodness.

Ver. 3. *Lo, children [are] an heritage of the Lord*, etc.] As all success, safety, and the blessings of life, depend on the providence of God; so this very great blessing is a gift of his; having children, and those good ones, as the Targum interprets it; for of such only can it be understood: so, in a spiritual sense, the children of Christ, the antitypical Solomon, are the gifts of his heavenly Father to him; his portion and inheritance, and a goodly heritage he esteems them;

[and] the fruit of the womb [is his] reward; “fruit”^{f1771} is the same with “children” in the preceding clause; (see ^{<1012>}Luke 1:42); a reward he gives to good men, not of debt, but of grace; the Targum,

“a reward of good works:”

so regenerate persons are a reward to Christ, of his sufferings and death, (^{<2530>}Isaiah 53:10,11).

Ver. 4. *As arrows [are] in the hand of a mighty man*, etc.] Are shot out with great strength; come with much force, and do execution, and do not return in vain; with which men defend themselves, and annoy their enemies; (see ^{<2510>}Jeremiah 50:9);

so [are] children of the youth: not young children, or children in their youth; but such who are born to their parents when they are in their youth;

and which are generally healthful and strong, and their parents live to see them grown up; and who are useful to protect them, and defend their persons and properties from enemies when grown old and feeble, and unable to defend themselves: whereas children born to them in old age are generally unhealthy and weak; and besides, their parents rarely live to see them brought up, or to be helpful to them. So Christ's spiritual seed and offspring, who are the dew of his youth, are strong, and overcome the evil one; and are serviceable in the defence of his cause and interest.

Ver. 5. *Happy [is] the man that hath his quiver full of them,* etc.] That is, his house full of them; called a quiver, referring to arrows before mentioned, this being the case in which they are put up: to have many children was always reckoned a great temporal blessing and happiness; (see ~~<B00>~~Job 1:2 ~~<B00>~~Psalm 128:3,4,6). The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions, render it, "that fills his desire" has as many as he desires or wishes for: the Targum,

"who fills his school of them:"

so Jarchi interprets the children, of the disciples of the wise men. It may be applied to young converts, the children of Christ and of the church; which, when numerous, is a blessing to him and her; see (~~<B00>~~Isaiah 49:20,21 53:10,11);

they shall not be ashamed; the father and his children, as Aben Ezra; parents rather are meant, who are not ashamed when they have many children: with the Romans^{f1772}, those that had wives and children were preferred in honour to senior persons that had none; and they that had most to those that had fewest; and so with the Persians; (see Gill on "~~<B00>~~Esther 5:11");

but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate: where courts of judicature were kept; and so the Targum,

"in the gate of the house of judgment."

The sense is, that their children should stand and plead the cause of their parents against their adversaries in courts of judicature; or publicly before the eyes of all, as Aben Ezra: and spiritually may design such of Christ's seed who are set for the defence of the Gospel, are valiant for the truth on earth, and earnestly contend for it; meet the enemy in the gate, publicly oppose him, and behave themselves like men, and are strong.