



Psalm 125 - The Security of God's People

A Song of Ascents.

Introduction

This psalm instils confidence in the Lord's people, that remaining loyal to him really is worth it. The leading image is of Zion as a city surrounded by sheltering mountains. It is possible that some of Zion's citizens might go over to evil, but the Lord will see to it that he publicly vindicates his faithful ones. This is like Psalm 122, in that it stresses the ideal of what the city should be and the faithful will do their part to make it live up to the ideal.

Like the others in the series of 15 Songs of Ascent, it was especially appropriate for those pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for one of the three annual major feasts of Israel. Charles Spurgeon observed, "We can imagine the pilgrims chanting this song when perambulating the city walls."

Psalm 125:1-2 - The Security of Zion.

The psalm begins by describing the secure position of those who trust in the Lord: they are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved: <<***They think in their heart, 'We shall not be moved; throughout all generations we shall not meet adversity'***>> (Psalm 10:6), and: <<***God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns***>> (Psalm 46:5). It is galling to the pious when the impious feel safe in their impiety.

- ¹ Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved, but abides for ever.

Psalm 125:1

Those who trust in the Lord. The following is a promise made to those who put their trust in the Lord. People cannot properly put their trust in God until they remove their trust from other things. He alone is a person's refuge and strength:

<<*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*>> (Psalm 46:1), and: <<*O Lord, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge on the day of trouble, to you shall the nations come from the ends of the earth and say: Our ancestors have inherited nothing but lies, worthless things in which there is no profit*>> (Jeremiah 16:19). Derek Kidner added, “The phrase, Those who trust in the Lord, shows one of the several facets of our relationship named in the Old Testament, along with the mention of those who ‘fear’, ‘love’ and ‘know’ him; a personal bond too intimate to be a passing liaison.” And Spurgeon commented, “It is a good thing to understand much, and to trust in the Lord with growing knowledge, but, dear soul, if you do not know much, yet if you are trusting in the Lord, you shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed.”

Are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved. The pilgrim who came from afar was impressed with the stature and standing of Mount Zion, the prominent hill upon which Jerusalem is established: <<*Look on Zion, the city of our appointed festivals! Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet habitation, an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be pulled up, and none of whose ropes will be broken*>> (Isaiah 33:20). The one who believes and trusts in the Lord is promised the same security and he or she abides forever. A Christian’s place in his love, his new life, and his gracious purpose abides for ever and cannot be moved:

- Some people are like the sand, ever shifting and unstable: <<*And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand*>> (Matthew 7:26).
- Some people are like the sea, restless and unsettled: <<*But the wicked are like the tossing sea that cannot keep still; its waters toss up mire and mud*>> (Isaiah 57:20), <<*But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind*>> (James 1:6).
- Some people are like the wind, uncertain and inconsistent: <<*We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming*>> (Ephesians 4:14).

² As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the Lord surrounds his people,
from this time on and for evermore.

Psalm 125:2

As the mountains surround Jerusalem. The hills on which Jerusalem sits are a little lower than the hills around it, so that one can picture the surrounding hills as a wall. This serves as an image of the Lord’s protection, as he surrounds his people like a high wall encircling the city.

So the Lord surrounds his people. Jerusalem is not set upon one hill, but established among a series of hills. God's people can trust that Yahweh will surround and protect them as the mountains surround Jerusalem: <<*Then the angel who talked with me came forward, and another angel came forward to meet him, and said to him, 'Run, say to that young man: Jerusalem shall be inhabited like villages without walls, because of the multitude of people and animals in it. For I will be a wall of fire all round it, says the Lord, and I will be the glory within it'*>> (Zechariah 2:3-5). The pilgrim coming to Jerusalem saw these mountains and with this song made spiritual application from the geography. God promised not only to be present with his people, but also to be all around them. He would surround them, so that nothing to get to them unless it first pass through him.

Adam Clarke commented, "It is surrounded with other mountains, at no great distance, as if placed in the midst of an amphitheatre." Spurgeon added, "The mountains around the holy city, though they do not make a circular wall, are, nevertheless, set like sentinels to guard her gates. God does not enclose his people within ramparts and bulwarks, making their city to be a prison; but yet he so orders the arrangements of his providence that his saints are as safe as if they dwelt behind the strongest fortifications."

From this time on and for evermore. This promise abides for the people of God – those who trust him (v.1). God's surrounding protection will be with them forever, even as Jesus promised his presence to his people to the end of the age in Matthew 28:20.

Spurgeon commented, "Note, it is not said that Jehovah's power or wisdom defends believers, but he himself is round about them: they have his personality for their protection, his Godhead for their guard." And again, "Do you hate the Church? Hate on: it will never be moved by all your hate. Do you threaten to crush it? It shall crush you, but you shall never injure it. Do you despise and laugh at it? Ah! the day is coming when the laugh shall be on the other side." Better still, as Jesus put it: <<*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it*>> (Matthew 16:18).

Psalm 125:3 - Righteous Rule over Zion.

The middle of the psalm stresses that the Lord intends to protect his city, not simply from enemies without (v.2) but from enemies within: the sceptre of wickedness is kingly power held by Israelites who do not serve God and his people, called the righteous here. The disastrous effects of such rule show up frequently in OT history, where the bulk of the people do in fact stretch out their hands to do wrong in defiance of the very purpose for which God chose them. Therefore, no one could suppose that in affirming that this godless regime shall not rest on the land, the psalmist was ignoring the obvious; rather, he was both instilling the ideal

toward which the Israelites should always press, and indicating that God will not allow the unrighteous to rule over his people forever. Christians rejoice that God raised Jesus to the throne of David in keeping with this principle, and pray that leaders in their churches and in their nations would model themselves after Jesus.

³ For the sceptre of wickedness shall not rest
on the land allotted to the righteous,
so that the righteous may not stretch out
their hands to do wrong.

Psalm 125:3

For the sceptre of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous. This was the protection God promised to his people who trusted in him: *<<I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant, and lay low the insolence of tyrants>>* (Isaiah 13:11). In Israel's history, that sceptre of wickedness only rested on the land when God's people were stubbornly unrighteous and untrusting in him. Kidner observed, "Evil has apparently the upper hand and the righteous are wavering. This may or may not point to foreign domination: the heathen have no monopoly of sin." Adam Clarke added, "Sceptre, here, may be taken for persecution, or for rule; and then it may be thus interpreted: 'The wicked shall not be permitted to persecute always, nor to have a permanent rule.'"

Spurgeon joined the debate, "He ordained that an Israelite who deserved punishment should not be beaten without measure: forty stripes save one was the appointed limit. We may therefore expect that he will set a bound to the suffering of the innocent, and will not allow them to be pushed to the uttermost extreme." The pilgrim on their journey to Jerusalem would see much of the land allotted to the righteous as they travelled. They could rightly reflect on this promise and determine that they would be those who trusted in God and were the righteous ones who received God's allotment of the land.

So that the righteous may not stretch out their hands to do wrong. God knows that the rule of the wicked could provoke even the godly to sin through rebellion or frustration. This is one of the reasons why God promised not to allow the wicked to rule on the land allotted to the righteous.

Psalm 125:4-5 - May the Lord Vindicate His Truth!

The final section looks forward to the Lord vindicating his own character: he really does reward the faithful - those who are good and those who are upright in their hearts, and he really does purge the unfaithful from his people for he will lead them away. Peace will certainly be upon Israel when God so visibly vindicates the truthfulness of his words and when his people take it to heart.

- 4 Do good, O Lord, to those who are good,
and to those who are upright in their hearts.
- 5 But those who turn aside to their own crooked ways
the Lord will lead away with evildoers.
Peace be upon Israel!

Psalm 125:4-5

Do good, O Lord, to those who are good. One of the primary features of the Old Covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai was the principle of blessing their obedience and cursing their disobedience. Here, the singer simply prayed that God would fulfil that aspect of the covenant and do good for those who are good: <<*You have dealt well with your servant, O Lord, according to your word*>> (Psalm 119:65). The greatness of the revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that God did good for those who are not good. It should be remembered that in due time Christ died for the ungodly as Paul wrote in Romans 5:6, and that: <<*God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us*>> (Romans 5:8).

Those who turn aside to their own crooked ways. Under the Old Covenant there was blessing for the good, but many curses for the wicked. The singer pictured these workers of iniquity being led out of the land in exile. Clarke commented, “Who are not faithful; who give way to sin; who backslide, and walk in a crooked way, widely different from the straight way of the upright, *yesharim*, the straight in heart; they shall be led forth to punishment with the common workers of iniquity.”

Peace be upon Israel! Psalm 125 ends with a prayer pronouncing *shalom* upon Israel: <<*As for those who will follow this rule – peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God*>> (Galatians 6:16); essentially, that they would be the good that enjoy blessing and not be the wicked who suffer exile.

The expression peace, the Hebrew word *shalom*, has a much richer connotation than the English word does, since it conveys, not merely the absence of conflict and turmoil, but also the notion of positive blessing, especially in terms of a right relationship with God, and, as a result, the idea that ‘all is well’ in one’s life. This may be manifested most clearly amid persecution and tribulation. It is a gift given by Jesus to his followers: <<*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid*>> (John 14:27).