



Psalm 127 - God's Blessings in the Home

A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.

Introduction

The basic theme of this wisdom psalm is that without the Lord's blessing, all human toil is worthless. This is explicit in vv.1-2, and implicit in vv.3-5, where the pious are to see their children as the Lord's gift. Psalms 127-128 are wisdom poems in the Songs of Ascents. Wisdom themes are suited to worshipful pilgrims, because in the OT, faithfulness in everyday life (the emphasis of wisdom) and vitality in worship go together. Christians need the same reminders. This psalm, along with Psalm 72, is attributed to Solomon. God gave Solomon great wisdom as confirmed in 1 Kings 4:29-34, although Solomon himself did not always abide by it; refer to 1 Kings 11:1-8. Of those who connect Psalm 127 to Solomon, most believe him to be the author. Yet it is possible that the sense may be that the psalm was composed by David for Solomon.

Psalm 127:1-2 - All Effort Is in Vain without the Lord.

A little reflection on v.1 makes the point clear: of course those who build a house must labour on it, and certainly the watchman of a city must stay awake. At the same time they must carry out their efforts in faith, trusting God to make the work beneficial. Similarly, a farmer must be diligent: **<<You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you>>** (Psalm 128:2), but he must practice his diligence in faith – in this case by receiving the sleep that God wants to give to his beloved. These verses share their theme with the wisdom in Proverbs, which promotes diligence but clarifies that diligence is neither greed nor restless anxiety. The Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8-11 is a gift to enable God's people to live by faith, requiring them not to work all the time, as they trust him for their future wellbeing.

- ¹ Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labour in vain.

Unless the Lord guards the city,
the guard keeps watch in vain.

Psalm 127:1

Unless the Lord builds the house. Solomon understood that the work of man had its place, but was of little ultimate use without the work and blessing of God. Without God's work and blessing, those who build it labour in vain.

Adam Clarke taught on the meaning of the Hebrew words behind the building of a house in this context, "It is a fact that *ben*, a son, and *bath*, a daughter, and *beith*, a house, come from the same root *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."

Unless the Lord guards the city. The watchman has his role and should stay awake, but God's work and blessing is needed to truly guard the city: <<***He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep***>> (Psalm 121:4).

Builds the house, guards the city. It is especially meaningful if Solomon wrote Psalm 127 because he knew what it was like to both build a house and guard a city. Wise Solomon understood that although God welcomed and even commanded human effort and participation, his work and blessing was even more important. Charles Spurgeon commented, "Note that the psalmist does not bid the builder cease from labouring, nor suggest that watchmen should neglect their duty, nor that men should show their trust in God by doing nothing: nay, he supposes that they will do all that they can do, and then he forbids their fixing their trust in what they have done, and assures them that all creature effort will be in vain unless the Creator puts forth his power, to render second causes effectual."

² It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives sleep to his beloved.

Psalm 127:2

It is in vain that you rise up early. The psalmist was not speaking against hard work because several proverbs, also attributed to Solomon, praise the hard worker who rises early: <<***Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways, and be wise. Without having any chief or officer or ruler, it prepares its food in summer, and gathers its sustenance in harvest. How long will you lie there, O lazybones? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want, like an armed warrior***>> (Proverbs 6:6-11). From the first

verse of this psalm, it seems that Solomon intended the trust many put in their hard work and the anxiety that shows they rely on self, not God, i.e. eating the bread of anxious toil.

Psalm 127:3-5 - The Blessedness of Children.

Like the first section, this does not eliminate human activity: children are a heritage from the Lord, and therefore his gift, and yet husband and wife must do something in bringing the children into the world and in raising them to be faithful members of God's people. Here the stress falls on the children of one's youth, now grown up and standing with their father when he speaks with his enemies in the gate, i.e. the place where justice was administered; refer to the comment made on Ruth 4:1-2. It will be hard for the enemies, who are assumed to be unfaithful, to intimidate such a man.

³ Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord,
the fruit of the womb a reward.

Psalm 127:3

Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord. When Solomon considered the wisdom of trusting God in building a house, he understood that a home is built by more than bricks and wood. He called upon all to see that children are a blessing.

Clarke commented, "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.'" Spurgeon also observed that, "He gives children, not as a penalty nor as a burden, but as a favour. They are a token for good if men know how to receive them, and educate them. They are 'doubtful blessings' only because we are doubtful persons."

The fruit of the womb a reward. Sadly, although Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines according to 1 Kings 11:3, very few of his specific descendants are known. Perhaps Solomon knew very little of this reward himself.

⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the sons of one's youth.

Psalm 127:4

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior. In many ways children are like arrows in the hand of a warrior:

- They must be carefully shaped and formed.
- They must be guided with skill and strength.

- They must be given care or will not fly straight.
- They must be aimed and given direction; they will not find it on their own.
- They are, in some respects, only launched once.
- They are an extension of the warrior's strength and accomplishment.
- They have potential for much good or evil.

Spurgeon commented, "We shall see them shot forth into life to our comfort and delight, if we take care from the very beginning that they are directed to the right point."

⁵ Happy is the man who has
his quiver full of them.
He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Psalm 127:5

Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. If children are a reward (v.3), then there is great blessing and happiness in having many children: <<*Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table*>> (Psalm 128:3). Spurgeon commented, "When sons and daughters are arrows, it is well to have a quiver full of them; but if they are only sticks, knotty and useless, the fewer of them the better." And again, "A quiver may be small and yet full; and then the blessing is obtained. In any case we may be sure that a man's life consists not in the abundance of children that he possesses."

Happy or, more commonly, **blessed** translates the Hebrew word *esher* meaning also contentment. The truly happy person is happy because God showers him with favour and blessing. Jesus uses the Greek equivalent in Matthew 5:3-11; as confirmed by: <<*Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him*>> (James 1:12).

He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. The gate of an ancient city was a place of business and justice. This speaks of the children of the godly having places of prominence and influence in their communities. Spurgeon noted, "Nobody cares to meddle with a man who can gather a clan of brave sons about him."