

PSALMS 126 AND 127

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The usual historical setting for this psalm is seriously called in question by Rotherham. He has two reasons for doing so. Discuss them.
2. Rotherham concedes the possibility of a post-exilic date but doubts it. Discuss.
3. Read II Chr. chapter 32 and Isaiah chapter 37. Discuss your agreement (or disagreement) with Rotherham.

PSALM 127

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

In Relief of Domestic and Civic Anxiety.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, Jehovah's Blessing Succeeds our Endeavours, Allays our Anxieties, and Gives us Sleep. Stanza II., vers. 3-5, Children a Gift from Jehovah.

---

(Lm.) Song of the Steps—By Solomon.

- 1 Except Jehovah build the house  
in vain<sup>1</sup> will its builders have toiled thereon:  
Except Jehovah watch the city  
in vain<sup>1</sup> will the watchman have kept awake.
- 2 It is vain<sup>1</sup> for you who early rise who late take rest,  
who eat the bread of wearisome toil:  
So would he give his beloved ones<sup>2</sup> sleep.<sup>3</sup>
- 3 Lo! an inheritance from Jehovah are sons,  
a reward is the fruit of the womb:
- 4 As arrows in the hand of a warrior  
so are the sons of the youth.
- 5 How happy the man who hath filled his quiver with them!  
they shall not be put to shame,—  
Surely they will speak with enemies in the gate.

(Nm.)

1. Or: "For unreality."

2. So (pl.) some cod. (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn. M.T. (sing.).

3. Thus w. Per., rather than "in sleep"—preferred by O.G. 446a, Dav. Heb. Syntax 97, Br. and others.

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

### PARAPHRASE

#### PSALM 127

Unless the Lord builds a house, the builders' work is useless. Unless the Lord protects a city, sentries do no good.

2 It is senseless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, fearing you will starve to death; for God wants His loved ones to get their proper rest.

3 Children are a gift from God; they are His reward.

4 Children born to a young man are like sharp arrows to defend him.

5 Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. That man shall have the help he needs when arguing with his enemies.<sup>1</sup>

### EXPOSITION

The object and argument of this psalm are plain. Its object is, to allay carking care; and its argument is, that Jehovah cares for us—that the need of his blessing in order to the prosperity of our most arduous enterprises, should lead us to rest in him, since that is his way of leading us, that is how he would have us shew our trust in him. His benefactions are not deprecated: on the contrary, their value is picturesquely and impressively extolled; for how could anything surpass, for beauty and force, the picture of a yet able but ageing father, emboldened by the rally to him of stalwart sons, ready to speak with the enemy, either in judicial witness and plea on the forum, or by bold parley with the foe before striking the ready blow? Yet at the root of even this imposing tree of prosperity lay Jehovah's blessing. For it is thus that we grasp the unity of the psalm, in dissent from those critics who would divide it into two incoherent portions.

*In vain*, says the poet with threefold emphasis, your most toilsome work, your most wearisome watch, your most protracted restlessness, except you have Jehovah's blessing. It is by teaching you this lesson,—it is *thus*,—it is *so*,—that your loving heavenly Father *would give you sleep*.

This construction of the first stanza is surely sufficiently satisfying to lead us to acquiesce in the conclusion of A.V., R.V. (text), P.B.V., Perowne, Carter,—that the noun "sleep" is what is called "the accusative of object"; in other words, that "sleep" is the very blessing which Jehovah is here represented

1. Literally, "When they speak with their enemies in the gate."

## PSALM 127

as giving to his beloved ones. Nevertheless, it may be conceded to be, not only grammatically possible, but exegetically plausible and in a good degree satisfying, to render the word "sleep" as an "adverbial accusative" of time or manner—*in sleep*,—with R.V. (marg.), O.G., Davidson, Briggs, Leeser (*during sleep*); since it is perfectly true that the operations of nature are many of them still active, some of them especially active, while the worker is asleep, and not infrequently the plans of those with large enterprises on hand are advancing by leaps and bounds when the busy brain that originated them is sweetly at rest. Practically, the two constructions come nearly to the same thing; seeing that the likeliest way to get "sleep," is to be assured that all is going on well "during sleep." But *are* they going on well? Who knows, except Jehovah who never slumbers or sleeps (121:4)? Who can effectually prosper them, save the Maker of heaven and earth? Therefore, trust thou in Him—and rest.

The very geniality of this psalm, makes easy its assumed original application and intention, according to the theory favoured by the expositor. Quite taking is the suggestion of those who, from this psalm, picture the exiles rebuilding Jerusalem—the father aided by his numerous sons, speaking with and putting to shame or flight the troublesome Samaritans and others at Jerusalem's *gate*. Perhaps even more taking is the hint—that this psalm was first meant to encourage the *building* of an *ancestral house*, even the family of David, by one who had remained unmarried or a widower until about the time this *Song of the Steps* was written! This suggestion may attract to itself an especial interest if, with Thirtle (O.T.P. 49), we credit the Jewish tradition that King Hezekiah, after his recovery, married Isaiah's daughter Hephzibah; and if we conjecture, as we then may (2 K. 21:1), that this good king had yet to wait two or three years before there was born to him an heir! Even learned critics may forget to allow for the touch of nature which makes the whole world kin. In any case we have not yet felt any literary compulsion to carry the dating of these "Songs of the Steps" to a period so late as the Exile.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the one outstanding purpose of this psalm?
2. In verses three through five we have a picture of sons aiding

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

- and helping their father—but under what circumstances? How do we know this is the proper application? Discuss.
3. How does the noon “sleep” have a very prominent part in the first half of this psalm? Discuss.
  4. How related to the building of the Temple?

## PSALM 128

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Happy Home and a Prosperous Commonwealth.

### ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, The Happy Home Described. Stanza II., vers. 4-6, The Interest of the Commonwealth in Such a Home.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

- 1 How happy every one who revereth Jehovah—  
who walketh in his ways!
- 2 The toil of thine own hands when thou eatest—  
how happy for thee! and good for thine!
- 3 Thy wife—  
like a fruitful vine in the recesses of thy house!  
Thy children—  
like plantings of olive-trees around thy table!
- 4 Lo! surely thus shall be blessed the man who revereth  
Jehovah.
- 5 May Jehovah bless thee out of Zion;  
and gaze thou upon the prosperity of Jerusalem,
- 6 And see thou sons to thy sons.  
Peace be upon Israel!

(Nm.)

### PARAPHRASE

#### PSALM 128

Blessings on all who reverence and trust the Lord—on all who obey Him!

2 Their reward shall be prosperity and happiness.

3 Your wife shall be contented in your home. And look at