

Psalm 122

The LORD Give You Peace

1. Background

The word “peace” runs through Psalm 122. Yet look at the psalms on either side; in them the psalmist complains about alienation (120), anxiety (121), contempt (123) and conflict (124). Psalm 122 know none of this – it is a haven of peace.

Peace “conveys a wide range of meanings – not only health and prosperity but also well-being and inner tranquillity, the serenity that comes from the assurance that God knows and supplies all that is necessary for life’s journey. That Hebrew word is from a root that means ‘perfect’ or ‘whole’; it is used to describe perfect weights. *Šālôm* meant ‘wholeness’; it embraced a wide range of countless gifts and rich provisions. Thousands of our contemporaries have material benefits and financial security, but their unfilled hands reach out for more; they lack contentment, fulfilment and *šālôm*” (Raymond Brown).

“Peace (*šālôm* in Hebrew) means more than the absence of war. It means well-being, health, prosperity and salvation: in short, the sum total of all God’s good gifts to his people” (G.J. Wenham).

2. Structure

A (vv. 1-2) *The joy of being in Jerusalem*

B (vv. 3-5) *Jerusalem is built – the house God built for David is there*

C (vv. 6-9) *Jerusalem is blessed – the house Solomon built for the LORD is there*

The first and second stanzas are linked in a “terrace” pattern by the repetition of “Jerusalem”. Repetition continues in the second stanza: “tribes...tribes”, “thrones...thrones”. The middle words of the stanza are “a testimony for Israel”.

The third stanza is marked by six alliterations on the name *Jerusalem*: “peace” (x3), “ask”, “prosper”, “prosperity”. Also each verse finishes with “you” or “your”.

Notice that the psalm opens and closes with “the house of the LORD” and that “the house of David” is in the middle verse (v. 5). This suggests that a ring structure is also present:

A (v. 1) The house of the LORD

B (vv. 2-4) Jerusalem – three forms of unity: built, gathered, worshipping

C (v. 5) The house of David

B' (vv. 6-8) Jerusalem – threefold desire for peace

A' (v. 9) The house of the LORD

The psalm’s structured use of the houses of the LORD and of David “is a reflection of the crucial importance of the theocentric institutions of temple and monarchy. They stood as material manifestations of the commitment and claim of the covenant God to and on every member” (L.C. Allen).

3. Notes

(a) *The joy of being in Jerusalem* (vv. 1-2)

The destination is not Jerusalem – it’s the house of the LORD.

Calvin: “Our joy, in like manner, should be doubled, when God by his Holy Spirit not only frames each of us to the obedience of his word, but also produces the same effect upon others, so that we may be united together in the same faith.”

“The joy of setting out and the thrill of arriving are unmistakable in these two introductory verses. With what added emotion would they have been sung after the exile! From 516 BC there had been a rebuilt *house of the LORD* to go to; in 445, for the first time in nearly 150 years, Jerusalem had walls and gates through which to pass in order to go to it” (Wilcock).

(b) *Jerusalem built – the house of David* (vv. 3-5)

The psalmist makes three great claims to substantiate his joy in Jerusalem: the city’s massive defences; the city’s religious centrality; the city’s judicial significance.

The verb “bound together” is used of the binding together of the curtains used in the construction of tabernacle. The expression “a statute for Israel” in v. 4 uses the word for the “testimony” placed in the ark of the covenant – it is interesting that the expression “a statute for Israel” is at the centre of this stanza – the law of God at the heart of the city. Thus vv. 3 and 4 contain echoes of the outer and inner limits of the sanctuary – implying that Jerusalem’s peace is sacred.

The “house of David” – remember the promise of 2 Samuel 7:11.

“Justice...is a ruler’s first duty and best gift: cf. Isaiah 2:4; 42:3f. See also on Psalm 72:1-4” (Kidner).

(c) *Jerusalem blessed – the house of the LORD* (vv. 6-9)

Peace and prosperity are “the proper fruits of justice, the subject of v. 5” (Kidner).

To “‘ask peace’ [v. 6] signifies to find out any one’s prosperity by asking, to gladly know and gladly see that it is well with him, and therefore to be animated by the wish that he may prosper” (Delitzsch).

Compare v. 8 with Nehemiah 1:1-3 (“...one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped,...and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, ‘...The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.’”) and Nehemiah 2:10 (“...someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel”).

Remember the words of Jesus on his way up to Jerusalem: “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes” (Luke 19:42).