

Psalm 127

I am the Vine – You are the Branches

1. Background

The title of the Psalm says it is “of Solomon”, which may mean it was composed by, for, or of Solomon. The connection with Solomon makes a lot of sense – the Psalm speaks of “house building”, and Solomon was the house-builder par excellence of the OT, and it was through Solomon that the LORD built the house he had promised to David (2 Samuel 7:11-13).

Some commentators think that the Temple-building and the city-keeping referred to in vv. 1-2 describe the actions of the Jews who returned from Babylonian exile. E.g. “...how much better then Psalm suits the time of Zerubbabel and Joshua, when the building of the Temple was imperilled by the hostile neighbouring peoples; and in connection with the relatively small number of those who had returned home out of the Exile, a numerous family, and more especially many sons, must have seemed to be a doubly and threefoldly precious blessing of God” (Delitzsch).

The connection of the Psalm with Solomon is manifold (see below). However, its application to us is evident when we acknowledge that “something greater than Solomon is here” (Matt. 12:42).

2. Structure

The Psalm comprises two panels (vv. 1-2 and vv. 3-5).

The first panel emphasises human effort (labour, guarding, long hours) which falls short of its goals. In the following translation the underlined words are “frustration” words associated with the Fall. Over this panel I would write the words of Jesus at the end of John 15:5, “Apart from me you can do nothing.”

The second panel emphasises God’s blessing (children, happiness, victory) which never fails. In this panel the words in *italics* are “paradise” words associated with the restoration of God’s creation. Over this panel I would write the words of Jesus in the middle of John 15:5, “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.”

Between these two panels v. 2d (“truly he gives to his Beloved sleep”) acts as a hinge. It comprises three words in Hebrew. The two panels before and after it both comprise 27 Hebrew words. So v. 2d stands in stark contrast with vv. 1-2c, and is the explanation for the blessing described in vv. 3-5. The middle word of v. 2d is a code word for Solomon, since Solomon’s other name (given by the LORD) was Jedidiah (2 Samuel 12:25). Interestingly, “David” also means “Beloved”. There may also be a reference to Solomon in the statement with which v. 5 begins, “Oh how happy the man”. The three references to Solomon are highlighted in **bold**.

Since life is found only in Jesus, the great-than-Solomon, I would write the words of Jesus at the start of John 15:5 beside v. 2d, “I am the vine; you are the branches.”

3. Translation

¹ The Song of Ascents; **of Solomon**.

If the LORD does not build the house,
in vain its builders labour in it.

If the LORD does not keep the city,
in vain the guard watches over it.

² It is vain for you – rising up early, sitting up late,
eating the bread of pains;

truly he gives to his **Beloved** sleep.

³ Behold, sons are *the inheritance* of the LORD;
the fruit of the womb a reward.

⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
thus are the sons of youth.

⁵ **Oh how happy** the man who has filled his quiver with them;
they will not be ashamed when they speak with enemies in the gate.

“Apart from me you can do nothing.”

“I am the vine; you are the branches.”

“Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.”

4. Brief notes to help your own meditations

- Vanity – to no avail, frustration, emptiness, falsehood, deception
- Labour – toil, trouble, mischief, sorrow
- Pains – toil, pain, sorrow, grief, cf. Gen. 3:16 – here a plural of intensification

Sleep (*shena*) is only one consonant different from vanity (*shawa*). We embrace *shawa* (frustration) to ourselves by unbelief and distrust of the living God on whose name we do not call. Meanwhile the living God grants *shena* (sleep) to the one he loves.

“Whence proceeds this so great ardour in the unbelieving, that they move not a finger without a tumult or bustle, in other words, without tormenting themselves with superfluous cares, but because they attribute nothing to the providence of God! The faithful, on the other hand, although they lead a laborious life, yet follow their vocations with composed and tranquil minds. Thus their hands are not idle, but their minds repose in the stillness of faith, as if they were asleep” (Calvin).

- Children are “banim” as opposed to the builders (“bonim”) of v. 1.
- Inheritance – language of the Promised Land, Eden restored
- Fruit of the womb – cf. creation blessing of Gen. 1:28
- “Oh how happy” – cf. the first word of Psalm 1:1 and the last word of Psalm 72:17 (which is literally “they will declare him happy!”)
- Victory over the enemies in the gate – a Messianic promise, cf. Gen. 3:15; 22:17