

Psalm 127

"A Song of degrees for Solomon."

Targum: "a song by the hand of Solomon"

But this psalm more probably was written "for" Solomon; that is, for the sake of Solomon.

Perhaps it was composed by David, after Nathan had informed him that not he, but his son Solomon, would build a temple for the Lord. Or perhaps after the Temple preparations had been made, and David charged Solomon with building it:

- **1 Chronicles 28:19-20** - "All this, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern. And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD."

Medieval rabbi David Kimchi (1160–1235) thinks "Solomon" represents the Messiah, who is often called Solomon in the **Song of Solomon 3:7**. So this would be a psalm about the Messiah.

Psalm 127:1 - "Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

Rashi - This song David recited about his son, Solomon, for he saw through the holy spirit that he [Solomon] was destined to build the Temple, and on that very day, Solomon would marry Pharaoh's daughter, and concerning this was said (Jer. 32:31): "For this city has aroused My anger and My wrath since the day they built it." Therefore, he recited this song. My son, why should you build a house and turn away from following the Omnipresent? Since He does not desire it, its workers have toiled at it in vain.

It concerns the Temple, but also the "House of David" or the "House of Israel."

- **Ruth 4:11** - "And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem:"

This actually fits in with the rest of the Psalm - building up the "House" with children - "children are an heritage of the Lord."

Of course this is true of any endeavor, but especially of the building up of the church by adding converts, which we participate in but is really the work of the Lord.

- **1 Corinthians 3:9** - "For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."

- **Ephesians 2:22** - "And in Him you too are being built together into a dwelling place for God in His Spirit."

- **1 Peter 2:5** - "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

Also, consider last week's Torah reading in Deuteronomy, where one who has built a house but not dedicated it is exempt from military service, because he would have "labored in vain" (**Deuteronomy 20:5-8**).

Psalm 127:2 - "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep."

Rashi has a different translation, contrasting vain physical toil with laboring in the Torah: "It is futile for you": The craftsmen, who rise early and stay late at their work and sustain themselves with toil and labor, with bread of toil, [i.e.,] of the toil of work. [Instead] "so will the Lord give to one who banishes sleep from himself." The Holy One, blessed be He, [will give] sustenance to him who banishes his sleep from his eyes in order to engage in the Torah.

The implication is that the physical work in building the house, or the producing offspring, or whatever the goal, all is in vain unless you trust in the Lord, represented by Rashi as tireless study of the Torah. The same goes for defending or protecting what has been built. Even if you have a sleepless watchman, the safe-keeping of the "house" depends on God alone.

- **Proverbs 10:22** - "The blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and toil can add nothing to it."

It is vain to "eat the bread of sorrows" or, the "bread of fatigue" - i.e. to be "careful and troubled" about your work in the world, whatever it is.

Jesus took this central idea even further:

- **Mark 4:26-27** - "The kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed on the ground. Night and day he sleeps and wakes, and the seed sprouts and grows, though he knows not how."

- **Matthew 6:25-26** - "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them."

- **1 Peter 5:7** - "...casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."

"For so he gives his beloved sleep." -

The pristine example of this is Jesus asleep in the boat in the midst of a storm:

- **Matthew 8:24-26** - "Suddenly a violent storm came up on the sea, so that the boat was engulfed by the waves; but Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke Him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We are perishing!' 'You of little faith,' Jesus replied, 'why are you so afraid?' Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it was perfectly calm."

And ultimately, He rested asleep in the grave, fulfilling the Sabbath Rest.

Psalm 127:3-4 - "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth."

Rather "a heritage *from* the Lord"

"reward" - not as a wage for labor but as a gift of grace:

- **Romans 4:4** - "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt."

Rashi - "sons": These are the disciples whom he sets up, who are to him like sons.

"Arrows in the hand" can be aimed and, if shot with strength, can hit the target, bring down the prey or stop an enemy:

Children who are young may be directed aright to the mark, God's glory, and the service of their generation; but when they are gone into the world, they are arrows out of the hand, it is too late to direct them then. - *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*

Psalm 127:5 - "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate."

Targum: "who fills his *school* of them," referring to disciples as Torah scholars.

To "speak with the enemies in the gate" means to debate matters with other judges at the gates, where a public court would be convened. (Again relating to the Torah readings in Deuteronomy recently about setting up courts and establishing justice)

Targum: "in the gate of the house of judgment"

See **Zechariah 8:16-17** - "These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbor; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let

none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD."

In the same way, believers are to contend for the Gospel, have a ready answer for those who inquire, resist evil and stand up for truth and justice at the "gates" of public discourse:

- **1 Peter 3:15-16** - "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ."