

Psalm 129

The Lord has preserved Israel
A Song of degrees.

Psalm 129: This psalm grows out of a situation of conflict.

The psalmist looks back at the record of the past: though he was afflicted, God delivered him (verses 1-4). Then he sets forth a prayer for the future: let God confound the enemies and bless His people (verses 5-8).

Verses 1-8:

See note on Palm 120:1-7.

The author and occasion are not specified.

However, verse 4 indicates a release from captivity, most likely the Babylonian captivity.

- I. Israel's Freedom Celebrated (129:1-4);
- II. Israel's Foe Imprecated (129:5-8).

Verses 1-8:

Now that the Lord had "cut ... the cords" that bound Israel ("Zion"), to her longtime oppressors, the psalmist now prayed against any prosperity for the those who had "afflicted" her.

Psalm 129:1 "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say:"

"Afflicted":

From living in Egypt (ca. 1875 – 1445 B.C.), to enduring the Babylonian Captivity (ca. 605 – 538 B.C.), Israel had enjoyed little rest from her enemies.

This is looking back at the afflictions through life.

This is speaking of physical Israel; who no one can deny went through terrible afflictions. They were bad, even though they brought them on themselves by disobeying God.

The Christians (spiritual Israel), have gone through terrible persecutions as well.

We know the disciples and the early Christians paid a terrible price for us to be able to worship as freely as we do.

Psalm 129:2 "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me."

This is repeated for the confirmation of it, to excite attention to it, and to express the vehement affection of the speaker.

"Yet they have not prevailed against me":

The Egyptians could not prevail against literal Israel.

The more they were afflicted, the more they grew and multiplied.

In the times of the Judges, one after another were raised up as deliverers of them.

Neither the Assyrians, Chaldeans, nor Romans, nor any other, have been able to cut them off from being a nation, they continue to this day.

The enemies of the church of Christ, even the gates of hell, have not been able to prevail against it, being built upon a rock, so as to extirpate and destroy it.

Neither by open and cruel persecutors, nor by secret and fraudulent heretics.

Nor could the enemies of the Messiah prevail against him.

For though they brought him to the dust of death, they could not hold him in it.

And they themselves, through his death, were conquered by him, as sin, Satan, the world, and death itself.

Nor can the enemies of the saints prevail against them, God being on their side.

Christ making them more than conquerors, the Spirit in them being greater than he that is in the world.

"Prevailed":

As the LORD had promised Abraham (compare Gen. 12:1-3).

Now David has jumped back from the afflictions of the house of Israel to himself.

He did suffer great affliction in his youth from Saul.

Notice that he looks back to remember that God delivered him from those afflictions.

It is no good to look back, unless we learn a lesson from it.

Psalm 129:3 "The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows."

"Plowed upon my back":

A farming analogy used to describe the deep, but non-fatal, wounds inflicted on Israel by her enemies.

I do not recall David being flogged in the manner mentioned here.

This to me, is speaking prophetically of the many lashes the whip made on the back of Jesus our Lord.

This indicates the lashes went all the way across the back and they were deep as a plough would make.

By His stripes, we are healed.

Psalm 129:4 "The LORD [is] righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked."

Or gracious and merciful; hence acts of mercy are called righteousness as we see in the Hebrew language.

The LORD has compassion on his people under their afflictions, and delivers them.

Or is faithful to his promises of salvation to them, and just and righteous to render tribulation to them that trouble them, and take vengeance upon them.

"He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked":

Alluding to the cords with which the plough is fastened to the oxen, which being cut, they cannot go on ploughing.

Or to the cords of whips, which when cut cannot be used to any purpose.

It designs the breaking of the confederacies of wicked men against the people of God.

The confounding their counsels and schemes, and disappointing their devices; so that they cannot perform their enterprises, or carry their designs into execution, or go on with and finish their intentions.

The Targum renders it, "the chains of the wicked;" (see Isa. 5:18).

They were evil men, prodded by Satan, that made the slashes on the back of Jesus.

He was far above man.

He was the purest of the righteous.

He even said, Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

He cut the cords that were binding all of mankind, when He defeated Satan at the cross.

Verses 5-8:

A 3-part imprecatory prayer:

- (1) To put to shame and defeat (verse 5);
- (2) Be few and short lived (verses 6-7); and
- (3) Be without God's blessing (verse 8).

Psalms 129:5 "Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion."

Or "ashamed": as all the enemies of God's people will be sooner or later.

Either in this world, or however when Christ shall come in the clouds of heaven.

Or let them be disappointed of their views, aims, and ends, when they will be confounded, as disappointed persons are.

"And turned back":

From pursuing their designs and accomplishing them.

As the Assyrian monarch was, who had a hook put into his nose, and a bridle in his lips, and was turned back by the way he came (Isa. 37:29).

"That hate Zion":

The inhabitants of Zion, who are called out of the world, and separated from the men of it, and therefore hated by them.

The King of Zion, the Messiah, whom they will not have to reign over them.

The doctrines of the Gospel, meaning the word that comes out of Zion, to which they are utter enemies.

And the laws and ordinances of Zion, the discipline of God's house, which they cannot bear to be under and submit unto.

Zion again, is the church.

Those who hate Zion in the physical, or the church which is spiritual Zion, are those who are lost.

They are the unsaved.

They are the ones upon whom the wrath of God will fall.

They are those who will be thrown into the lake of fire.

Psalm 129:6 "Let them be as the grass [upon] the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up:"

The housetops, or roofs of houses, covered with sand or earth, in which seeds of grass may germinate and begin to grow.

But where, as there is no depth of earth, and as the heat of the sun there would be intense, it would soon wither away (see the notes at Isa. 37:27).

“Grass ... housetops”:

Grass with shallow roots, which quickly dies with the first heat, depicts the wicked.

"Which withereth afore it groweth up":

This, even if it has any meaning, is not the meaning of the original.

The idea in the Hebrew is, and it is so rendered in the Septuagint, the Latin Vulgate, and by Luther: "which before (one), pulls it, withers."

Grass would wither or dry up, of course, if it were pulled up or cut down, but the grass here spoken of withers even before this is done.

It has no depth of earth to sustain it; having sprouted, and begun to grow, it soon dies.

A perfect image of feebleness and desolation; of hopes begun only to be disappointed.

Grass growing in this manner, does not need to be killed, it dies of its own account. That is what evil man is doing.

The Bible says that he will destroy himself.

Psalm 129:7 "Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom."

Such grass never rises high enough to be mowed, nor is of that account to have such pains taken with it.

Nor the quantity so large as to fill a mower's hand, and carry it away in his arms.

"Nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom":

When corn is mowed or reaped, the binders come and gather it up in their arms, and bind it in sheaves, and then bring it into the barn.

But nothing of this kind is done with grass on the housetops.

This represents the insignificancy and worthlessness of wicked men; who, when the harvest comes, the end of the world, will not be gathered in by the reapers, the angels, into Christ's garner into heaven as the wheat, the righteous will.

But like the tares and chaff will be cast into unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12).

There is no wheat in this.

There will be no harvest.

It is dead.

Wheat is bound in sheaves to take into the barn.

There is no wheat here.

We know that wheat symbolizes the Christians.

Psalm 129:8 "Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the LORD [be] upon you: we bless you in the name of the LORD."

As was usual with passengers, when they went by where mowers, and reapers, and binders, were at work in the field in harvest time.

Who used to wish the presence and blessing of God with them, and upon their labors.

And who returned the salutation, as may be seen in Boaz and his reapers (Ruth 2:4).

"We bless you in the name of the LORD":

Which is either a continuation of the blessing of the passengers, or the answer of the reapers to them.

So the Targum, "nor do they answer them, "we bless you", " etc.

The sense is, that those wicked men would have no blessing on them, from God nor men.

That no God speed would be wished them; but that they were like the earth, that is covered with briers and thorns; which is nigh unto cursing, and its end to be burned.

How can you bless those in the name of the LORD, who have denied that He exists?

They would not appreciate the blessing, even if you spoke it.

There is no need to speak a lie, and that is what it would be, because God does not bless those who reject Him.

Psalm 129 Questions

1. The terrible afflictions that physical Israel had they _____ on themselves.
2. Who paid a terrible price, so that we might worship freely?
3. What is chapter 129 verse 3 speaking of prophetically?
4. Who cut the cords that were binding all of mankind?
5. Who are those that hate Zion?
6. What will the evil man do that is like this grass that dies?
7. What is verse 7 saying, pertaining to harvest?
8. In verse 8, he blessed them in whose name?