

PSALM 127 vs 1

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This is the 8th of 15 psalms... sometimes called: **A Song of Ascents**... thought by some to be sung in praise to the LORD of glory... used in the all-night ceremony to begin **Passover**, **Pentecost** and **the Feast of Tabernacles**.

Charles Spurgeon wrote: It was proper that the builder of the holy house should be remembered by the pilgrims to its sacred shrine. If Solomon himself was the author, it comes fitly from him who raised the house of the Lord.

Observe how in each of these songs the heart is fixed upon YHWH only. Read all the first verses, from Psalm 120 to the present song, they run thus: "I cried to the Lord," "Will I lift up my eyes to the hills?" "Let us go to the house of the Lord," "Those who trust in the Lord," "When the Lord turned again the captivity." The Lord alone is lauded at each step of these Songs of Ascents. The **sons** and **daughters** build up families under the same divine blessing, to the great honor and desire of parents. **It is the Builder's Psalm**. Every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God.



A Song of Ascents of Solomon,

¹ Except the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it / the word: **vain** is the key-note here, we will hear it ring out clearly three times. Men, desiring to build, know that they must labor, and accordingly they put forth all their skill and strength; but let them remember that if YHWH is not with them, their designs will prove failures. Without God we are nothing – Charles Spurgeon.

It is a fact that **ben**, a son, and **bath**, a daughter, and **beith**, a house, come from the Hebrew root: **banah**, to build; because sons and daughters build a household, and constitute a family, as real stones and timber constitute a building. Unless the hand of God is on us, we cannot build a place of worship for His name; without His blessing – Adam Clarke, 1762-1832

Except the LORD builds the house: In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for Divine protection. Our prayers, sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor. To that kind Providence we owe this opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national happiness.

And have we now forgotten this powerful Friend? Or do we imagine we no longer need His assistance? I have lived for a long time (81 years); and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that **God governs in the affairs of man**. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, sir, in the sacred writings, that **Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it**. I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall proceed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel: we shall be divided by our little, partial, local interests; our prospects will be confounded; and we ourselves shall become a reproach and a by-word down to future ages.

And what is worse, mankind may hereafter, from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing government by human wisdom, and leave it to chance, war, or conquest. I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers, imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this assembly **every morning** before we proceed to business; and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service – Benjamin Franklin, 1706-1790: [Speech in Convention forming a Constitution for the United States, 1787](#):

Except the LORD builds the house, except the LORD keeps the city, the watchman stays awake in vain / around the wall the sentinels pace with constant step; yet the city is betrayed unless the wakeful Watcher is with them. We are not safe because of watchmen, if YHWH refuses to watch over us. Even if the guards are sleepless, and do their duty, still the place may be surprised if God is not there.

² It is vain for you to rise up early, it is vain to sit up late, it is vain to eat the bread of sorrows / because the Lord is mainly to be rested in, all arduous care is mere vanity and vexation of spirit. We are bound to be diligent, for this the Lord blesses, we ought not to be anxious, for that dishonors the Lord, and can never secure His favor – Charles Spurgeon:

so He gives his beloved sleep / “so” means: with the same result, the same without more trouble. This one may work and sleep; and what is needed will be provided as if they labored with anxiety. While they sleep, the Heavenly Father carries forward His work for them – Charles F. Deems, 1820-1879.

Worldly men beat their brains, tire their spirits, and rack their consciences often for nothing; but His beloved, without any of these racking cares enjoy contentment, have rest and peace; with silence submitting to the will of God, and with quietness waiting for the blessing of God – Thomas Manton, 1620-1677

³ Lo, children are a heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is His reward / mark this, children are a heritage belonging to the Lord; not merely given by the Lord, as most readers seem to take it – H.T. Armfield, 1830s-1889.

Think about it: The Psalmist speaks of what children are to good-sense parents, for only to such is a blessing given by God as a reward. For others, they are not a reward, but a curse, and a sorrow to those who begat them. We know the worth of lifeless treasures; but who knows the worth of living treasures? Children are chiefly a blessing to the people of God – Joseph Caryl, 1602-1673.

⁴ As missiles are in the hand of a warrior; so are children of the youth / well does David call children “arrows”; for if they are well bred, they shoot at their parents’ enemies; and if they be evil bred, they shoot at their parents – Henry Smith, 1560-1591.

Children are compared to “arrows”. We know sticks are not by nature arrows: they do not grow so; by nature they are knotty and rugged; but by art they are made smooth and handsome. So children are rugged, but by education are refined, made pliable to the Divine pleasure – George Swinnock, 1627-1673.

5 Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them / many children make many prayers, and many prayers bring much blessing – German Proverb.

Rev. Moses Browne had twelve children. On one remarking to him, “Sir, you have as many children as Jacob” he replied, Yes, and I have Jacob’s God to provide for them – G.S. Bowes, 1869.

I remember a great man entering my house at Waltham; seeing all my children standing in order of their age and stature, said, “These are they that make rich men poor.” But he straightway received this answer, No, my lord, these are they that make a poor man rich, for there is not one of these who we would part with for all your wealth.

It is easy to observe that none are so tight-fisted as the childless, while those who maintain large families, are used to frequent disbursements, and find such experience of Divine wisdom in the faithful management of their affairs, as they lay out more cheerfully what they receive. Their faith gives them ease in throwing their burden upon Him who has more power and more right, since our children are more His, than our own. He who feeds the young ravens, can He fail the best of His creatures? – Joseph Hall, 1574-1656:

they will not be ashamed, when they speak with their enemies in the gate / the weakest part of the city; exposed to its enemies who seek to assault it; there they can meet foes in the fight. Nobody cares to meddle with a man who can gather a clan of brave sons and daughters about him – Charles Spurgeon.

This is a family-psalm, as diverse as state-poems and church-poems. Dedicated by his father, it is entitled to Solomon; he having a house to build, a city to keep, and dynasty to raise up to his father, David directs him to look to God, and to depend upon His providence, without which all his wisdom, care and industry, would not serve – Matthew Henry, 1662-1714.

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