

PSALM 127

A Psalm of Protection

5

PROTECTION OF THE FAMILY

- sons are a possession of and benefit to their parents (verse 3)
- in this comparison arrows are sons and the warrior is their father (verse 4)—the father is a skilled archer with a quiver full of arrows (verse 5a)
- arrows suggests he has trained his sons in the martial arts: they are weapons available when needed to protect the family on pilgrimages or elsewhere
- verse 5 is a beatitude promising happiness to fathers who have many fighting sons (skill and numbers)
- his sons will protect the family's interests when they meet with their enemies at the city gate to settle legal disputes while in Jerusalem (verse 5b)

4

HUMAN EFFORT VERSUS GOD'S PROTECTION

- third vain thing: getting up early, working hard, working late and eating a late supper is futile if God is not willing to protect you (verse 2a)
- but God protects his beloved while sleeping (object of "gives" is elided and must be supplied from the context = "protection")
- a comforting promise for pilgrims going to Jerusalem
 - we are least capable of protecting ourselves and our families while asleep
 - Circle of Divine Protection: God protects us when we are least capable of protecting ourselves (verse 2b)

1

PSALMS OF ASCENT

- collection of 15 ascent songs (Psalms 120–134)
 - sung by pilgrims going up to the Temple to celebrate Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles
 - Jerusalem is in the hill country at 2550' elevation (cf. Luke 2:42, 51)
 - verb 'alah is often used of going on a pilgrimage (Psa 24:3; 122:4)
 - all are uplifting worship songs
- Solomon wrote Psalms 72 & 127 (cf. 1 Kgs 4:32)

1 A song for the ascendings, by Solomon.
If the LORD does not (want to) build a house,
In vain the ones building it labor on it.
If the LORD does not (want to) guard a city,
The guard keeps watch in vain.
2 Risings early to stand,
Delays of sitting,
Eatings of the bread of toils (are) vain to you.
Even so He gives (protection) to His beloved in (his) sleep.

3 Behold! Sons (are) a possession from the LORD.

The fruit of the womb (is) a benefit.

4 As arrows in the hand of a warrior,

So (are) the sons of one's youth.

5 O the happiness of the man who has filled his quiver with them.

They will not be put to shame when they speak with (their) enemies at the gate.

(Psalm 127:1–5 RCL)

2

PROTECTION OF HOUSING

- first vain thing—building a house (verse 1b)
- a house provides protection from the weather, animals, and strangers—especially at night
 - God *actively* participates in building houses
 - two builders: God and men
- men do the actual construction; God controls the circumstances—personal finances, economy, national stability (e.g., in spite of opposition the Jews rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem with God's help, Neh 4:7–23; 6:16)
 - men may build furiously but a house will never be completed if God is unwilling (e.g., Tower of Babel, Gen 11:1–9)
 - also cooperation in birth of babies (Psa 139:13–16) and spiritual growth (1 Cor 3:6)

3

PROTECTION OF THE MILITARY

- second vain thing—guarding a city (verse 1c)
- guards provide protection from foreign enemies (Ezek 33:2–6)
 - two guards in this verse: God and a watchman
 - men post watchmen; God controls circumstances—he limits the strength and aggression of nations
 - Two Circles of Protection: walled cities were responsible to protect themselves as much as possible (Circle of Human Protection) and leave the rest up to God (Circle of Divine Protection)
 - a watchman is useless if God is not willing to protect a city