

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 128 — The Blessing of Family

1.0 Introducing Psalm 128

- Psalm 128 is the third psalm in the third set of three psalms in the Psalms of Ascents (cp. Pss 122 and 125).
 - ✓ This is a close companion of Psalm 127, with its focus on family. There children are protection; here children are prosperity.
 - ✓ This psalm begins (v. 1) like the previous psalm ended (127:5) — with a beatitude. It is the second of six of these psalms to contain a beatitude.
 - ✓ Psalm 128's theme: *Troubled travelers who fear and follow God will have fruitful families.*
- The key concept of this psalm is blessing (vv. 1, 2, 4, and 5).

2.0 Reading Psalm 128 (NAU)

128:1 A Song of Ascents.

How **ble^ss^ed** is everyone who fears the LORD,
Who walks in His ways.

128:2 When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands,
You will be **happ^y** and it will be **well** with you.

128:3 Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
Within your house,

Your **child^ren** like olive plants
Around your table.

128:4 Behold, for thus shall the man be **ble^ss^ed**
Who fears the LORD.

128:5 The LORD **ble^ss** you from Zion,
And may you see the **prosperity** of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

128:6 Indeed, may you see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel!

3.0 Understanding Psalm 127

3.1 Outline

Psalm Heading (v. 1a)

- I. Proclamation of Blessing (vv. 1b–4)
- II. Prayer for Blessing (vv. 5–6)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “How blessed”
 - This is the word with which the Psalter begins (1:1). It is its twentieth occurrence in the book thus far — see the list of passages in the notes on Psalm 127:5. An alternative translation is “Oh the happiness of . . .”
- **v. 1** “who fears the LORD”
 - In the wisdom literature of the Old Testament we learn that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7), “the beginning of wisdom” (Ps 111:10), and even “wisdom” itself (Job 28:28).
 - ✓ “The fear of the LORD” includes trusting in the LORD (Ps 115:11), being forgiven by Him (Ps 130:4), delighting in His Word (Ps 112:1), keeping His Word (Ps 119:63; Eccl 12:13), hating evil (Prov 8:13), and hoping in His loyal love (Ps 147:11).
 - ✓ Scripture associates “the fear of the LORD” with blessing (Pss 112:1; 115:13; 128:1, 4).
- **v. 1** “Who walks in His ways”
 - Basically, to walk in the Lord’s ways is to obey His Word.
 - “If the heart is joined to God, the feet will follow hard after him. A man’s heart will be seen in his walk, and the blessing will come where heart and walk are both with God.” — C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (reprint; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 3/2:97.
- **v. 2** “the fruit of your hands”
 - Scripture assumes that the God-fearer will labor (Exod 20:9).
 - Those who work eat the fruit of their labor; those unwilling(!) to work ought not eat (2 Thess 3:10–12).
- **v. 2** “You will be happy”
 - “Happy” is the same word as “blessed” in verse 1.
 - Happiness or blessing is the result of fearing the Lord and walking in His ways.
- **v. 2** “it will be well with you”
 - God provides an abundance of good to those who fear Him (Ps 31:19; Eccl 8:12 — cp. v. 13). Indeed, fearing God and obeying His Word is

- for the good of His people (Deut 6:24).
 - Compare Deuteronomy 5:29, 33; 6:3; 12:28.
- v. 3 “a fruitful vine”
 - In Scripture the vine symbolizes fruitfulness (Gen 40:9–10; Ezek 19:10; John 15:5).
 - Being “fruitful” refers to multiplying descendants and populating the earth (Gen 1:28; 9:1; 48:4; Lev 26:9).
- v. 3 “Within your house”
 - Some commentators take this as a reference to the women’s quarters within the ancient near eastern houses.
 - ✓ This view makes much of the woman being “a home bird. . . . She keeps at home, and so keeps the home.” — Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3/2:99.
 - ✓ Compare Titus 2:5.
 - Other interpreters associate it merely with the interior of the home, parallel to the end of the next line (“Around your table”).
 - ✓ This view relates the location to the home and family in general as well as the private sections of a home (cf. the same phrase in Amos 6:10, “in the innermost part of the house”).
 - ✓ Compare Proverbs 31:16, 24.
- v. 3 “like olive plants”
 - Children are like olive shoots that eventually replace the original tree.
 - “The tree grows very slowly but it attains a great age. It is difficult to kill the olive tree by cutting it down because new sprouts are sent up from the root and all around the margins of the old stump, often forming a grove of two to five trunks, all from a single root which originally supported only one tree.” — John W. Klotz, “Plants,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2 vols., ed. by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 2:1718.
- v. 3 “Around your table”
 - The table is the place of family care (providing food) and fellowship.
 - The labors of the parents provide the food for their children.
- v. 4 “thus shall the man be blessed”
 - Verses 1 and 4 bracket the first stanza of Psalm 128 (inclusio).
 - “Thus” refers to the content of verses 1–3. The focus is on the blessing of family.
- v. 5 “The LORD bless you from Zion”
 - Or, “May the LORD bless you” — the psalmist pens his petition keeping in mind the preceding description of what that blessing looks like.
 - Compare the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6:24–26.



- Zion is the place of God’s residency and represents Him in the same way “the throne” refers to a king or queen by metonymy.
- v. 5 “prosperity”
 - This is the same word translated “well” in verse 2 (literally, “good”).
- v. 6 “may you see your children’s children”
 - Blessing upon the family includes the gift of grand-children, the result of the long life (v. 5b).
 - See Psalm 103:17; Proverbs 17:6; 1 Timothy 5:4.
- v. 6 “Peace be upon Israel!”
 - See notes on Psalm 125:5.
 - In this context there is emphasis on the fact that blessed families result in a blessed nation.

4.0 Singing Psalm 128

“Happy the Man Who Feareth God” (Tune: “Doxology”)



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| <p>1 Happy the man who feareth God,
Whose feet His holy ways have trod;
Thine own good hand shall nourish thee,
And well and happy shalt thou be.</p> <p>3 Lo! to the man these blessings cleave
Who in God’s holy fear doth live;
From him the ancient curse hath fled
By Adam’s race inherited.</p> <p>5 He shall be with thee in thy ways,
And give thee health and length of days;
Yea, thou shalt children’s children see,
And peace on Israel shall be.</p> | <p>2 Thy wife shall, like a fruitful vine,
Fill all thy house with clusters fine;
Thy children all be fresh and sound,
Like olive-plants thy table round.</p> <p>4 Out of Mount Zion God shall send,
And crown with joy thy latter end;
That thou Jerusalem mayst see,
In favor and prosperity.</p> |
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— Words: Martin Luther (1524)
Translated by Richard Massie (1854)

5.0 Praying Psalm 128

- Father, lead me to fear You and to walk in Your ways. [v. 1]
- Thank You, Lord, for my wife/husband and children. [v. 3]
- Oh how You have blessed me beyond all measure! [vv. 1, 4, 5]
- Lord, give me time to enjoy the grandchildren You have given me. [v. 6]

6.0 Applying Psalm 128

- Fearing and obeying the Lord is the root of all blessing.
- Spouse and children are divine blessings.
- As the family goes, so goes the community.