

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

Bereans Adult Bible Fellowship
Placerita Baptist Church
2009

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Psalm 129 — Persecuted, But Not Forsaken

1.0 Introducing Psalm 129

- Psalm 129 is the first psalm in the fourth 3-psalm set in the Psalms of Ascents (cp. Pss 120, 123, and 126).
- Psalm 124:1 said, “Let Israel now say” and Psalm 125 ended with “Peace be upon Israel!” The order is reversed with Psalm 128 ending in “Peace be upon Israel!” and Psalm 129:1 saying, “Let Israel now say.”
- Psalm 129 “is a psalm which breathes confidence, not the shallow confidence of the starry eyed, but the robust confidence of those who have often had to face the worst that life could throw at them and have responded with a realism rooted in faith in the LORD.” — Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 422.
- Theme of Psalm 129: *Troubled travelers look to God for vindication and blessing.*

2.0 Reading Psalm 129 (NAU)

129:1 A Song of Ascents.

“Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up,”
Let Israel now say,

129:2 “Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up;
Yet they have not prevailed against me.

129:3 “The plowers plowed upon my back;
They lengthened their furrows.”

129:4 **The LORD is righteous;**
He has cut in two the cords of the wicked.

129:5 May all who hate Zion
Be put to shame and turned backward;

- 129:6** Let them be like grass upon the housetops,
Which withers before it grows up;
- 129:7** With which the reaper does not fill his hand,
Or the binder of sheaves his bosom;
- 129:8** Nor do those who pass by say,
“The blessing of the LORD be upon you;
We bless you in the name of the LORD.”

3.0 Understanding Psalm 129

3.1 Outline

Psalm Heading (v. 1a)

- I.** Israel’s Past Experience (vv. 1b–4)
- II.** Israel’s Present Expectation (vv. 5–8)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “Many times”
 - Israel’s history of persecution repeats itself over and over again.
- **v. 1** “from my youth up”
 - With the nation of Israel as the subject, the reference is to the time of Israel’s Egyptian bondage and her exodus from Egypt (cf. Hos 2:15; 11:1; Jer 2:2; Ezek 23:3).
 - The repetition in verse 2 parallels the beginning of Psalm 124 and highlights the statement.
- **v. 1** “Let Israel now say”
 - The psalmist calls on all believers in Israel to verbalize their experience of persecution. Cp. Psalm 124:1.
 - Such a recitation reminds God’s people of His faithfulness to them in the midst of their torment and trial.
- **v. 2** “Yet they have not prevailed against me”
 - The enemies of Israel were unable to overpower her.
 - Israel’s declaration stems from thankfulness and confidence, not from a false bravado. It is the theme of this psalm.
 - Israel’s continued existence is proof of God’s blessing and evidence of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.
- **v. 3** “The plowers plowed upon my back”
 - The agricultural metaphor appears to describe the scars from scourging by the task masters’ whips.
 - ✓ “They lengthened their furrows” refers to the extremity of the affliction — the persecutors made full use of their opportunity and tools of torture.
 - Compare Isaiah 1:5–6; 51:23.

- v. 4 “The LORD is righteous”
 - Israel’s experience confirmed this universal truth.
 - In other words, the Lord keeps His covenant with His people.
- v. 4 “He has cut in two the cords of the wicked”
 - “Cords” consist of twisted strands of rope or line like those with which Samson was bound in Judges 15:13 or with which God challenges Job to restrain the wild ox for the purpose of plowing the soil (Job 39:10).
 - ✓ See Psalm 2:3.
 - Compare Psalm 124:7.
- v. 5 “May all who hate Zion”
 - Israel prays a prayer of imprecation upon those who hate her. The prayer is that those enemies might experience the absence of honor (v. 5), success (vv. 6–7), and blessing (v. 8).
 - ✓ On the matter of imprecation, read C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (reprint; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 3/2:110 (v. 5).
 - Zion represents more than the capital of Israel. It is the city of God, the place of His residence (Pss 9:11; 48:1–2; 78:68; 99:2; cp. 2:6). Zion’s enemies are enemies of God first and foremost (cp. Rom 5:10).
- v. 6 “like grass upon the housetops”
 - Roof grass withers quickly under the hot sun because its roots are so shallow.
 - Second Kings 19:26 and Isaiah 37:27 employ the same simile.
 - What a contrast between the godly (Ps 128) and the ungodly!
 - See Psalm 37:1–2.
- v. 7 “the reaper does not fill his hand”
 - Haters of Zion (Israel) cannot prosper. Not only will they wither like grass on a roof top, they will not harvest their crops.
- v. 7 “his bosom”
 - What the psalmist depicts is the reaper’s placement of heads of harvested grain in the fold of his/her garment (see Neh 5:13, “the front of my garment”) in order to carry it to the threshing floor or home.
- v. 8 “The blessing of the LORD be upon you”
 - Passers-by will not greet haters of Zion with the usual harvest blessing spoken to the reapers (cp. Ruth 2:4).
- v. 8 “We bless you in the name of the LORD”
 - Rather than taking this as a response from the reapers to those passing by, it might be better to understand it as a liturgical conclusion to the psalm.
 - ✓ The priest(s) in Jerusalem bless the pilgrims with these words.



- ✓ Such an ending might account for the placement of this psalm immediately following Psalm 128 with its theme of blessing.

4.0 Singing Psalm 129

“Oft They, Now Israel May Say”

(Tune: “Blessed Be The Name”)



- 1 Oft they, now Israel may say,
me from my youth assailed;
Oft they assailed me from my youth,
yet never have prevailed.
- 2 Upon my back the plowers plowed,
and furrows long did cast:
The righteous Lord hath cut the cords
of wicked men at last.
- 4 Whereof the mower cannot find
enough to fill his hand;
Nor can he fill his lap that goes
to glean upon the land:

Refrain:

*Blessed be the name
Blessed be the name
Blessed be the name of the Lord.*

(Repeat)

- 3 They that hate me shall be ashamed
and turned back also,
And made as grass upon the house
which withers ere it grow:

- 5 Nor passers-by pray God on them
to let his blessing fall;
Nor say, We bless you in his Name,
who is Lord over all.

— Words: Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins,
*The Whole Book of Psalms Collected into
English Metre* (1812)

5.0 Praying Psalm 129

- Lord, You have allowed me to suffer many times. [vv. 1, 2]
- Thank You, Father, for preserving me through my trials. [v. 2]
- Oh God, You alone are righteous. [v. 4]
- Thank You, Lord, for delivering me out of my troubles. [v. 4]
- May those who hate God not find honor or have success. [vv. 5–8]

6.0 Applying Psalm 129

- “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” (2 Cor 4:8–10)
- “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Do you think of Christian faith as a fragile style of life that can flourish only when the weather conditions are just right, or do you see it as a tough perennial that can stick it out through storm and drought, survive the trampling of careless feet and the attacks of vandals?

— Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*
(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 122