

PSALMS

Chapter 127

Unless the LORD Builds the House

A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.

Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. 2 It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

3 Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. 5 Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Ps 127† Godly wisdom concerning home and hearth. Its theme applies to all times; it reminded the pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem that all of life's securities and blessings are gifts from God rather than their own achievements (see Dt 28:1–14). Two balanced stanzas develop, respectively, two distinct but related themes. (CSB)

Credited to Solomon; may well be read with his advice in Pr concerning the building of the home and the value of children. May refer to his building of the temple. Solomon was considered the master builder in Israel.

Format: Vv 1–2, without the Lord, our labor is in vain; vv 3–5, the Lord blesses us with children. (TLSB)

The 127th psalm is a psalm of instruction. It teaches us that worldly authority and household order are nothing less than God's gifts and rest only in his hand. For where he does not give peace and good government, there no wisdom, order, exertion, or armor can hold onto peace. Where he does not give good fortune, with wife, children, and workers, there all care and work will be for nothing. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

This psalm elaborates on the relationship between human labor and divine blessing which was introduced in the preceding psalm. (PBC)

127 title *Of Solomon*. If Solomon was not the author (not all witnesses to the text ascribe it to him), it is easy to see why some thought him so. (CSB)

127:1–2 It is the Lord who provides shelter, security and food. (CSB)

127:1 *house*. Domestic shelter. (CSB)

This is an ambiguous term. It is a very common term for the temple in Jerusalem. It could also refer to any human building project or endeavor. It can also mean "family" in biblical usage, and this is the connotation of the word in the last part of the psalm. (PBC)

Lit, "a house." Houses or households built apart from the blessing and foundation of God and His Word will stand only until the first storm. Cf Mt 7:24–27. (TLSB)

builds. Both building and watching need divined bless and human work. No human effort can prosper without God’s blessing, but in earthly matters human effort is necessary. Builders are to build. Watchmen are to watch. Workers are to work. Farmers are to farm. All of them are to put forth their best effort. But then they are to relax, trust the Lord, and be content with what he has provided for them. Worry and discontent will only diminish their enjoyment of God’s blessings. (PBC)

watches over – The work of watching over the city was especially important during the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls during the time of Nehemiah. Because of the threat of a surprise attack by the Samaritans the builders had to work with tools in hand and weapons in the other. Thus the workers and the watchers were one. (PBC)

city. The center of power, the refuge when enemies invade the land. (CSB)

watchmen. See 2Sa 13:34; 18:24–27; SS 3:3; 5:7. (CSB)

The Lord is the only watchman who is always alert in His duty and is able to overwhelm all enemies. He is never surprised, nor does He ever call for help. Cf 121:3–8. (TLSB)

127:2 *beloved sleep.* A good harvest is not the achievement of endless toil, but it is the result of God’s blessing (see Pr 10:22; Mt 6:25–34; 1Pe 5:7). (CSB)

Under His watchful care, His children can rest, committing their cares to His loving hand. Cf 1Pt 5:7. (TLSB)

127:3–5 Children are God’s gift and a sign of his favor. (CSB)

The abrupt change of subject matter to children is really quite natural since the focus of these psalms is on possession of the land. The promise of the land and the promise of the seed belong together. There could be no building up of the nation without children who would carry on the work and keep the promise of the Savior alive. The emphasis on sound family life became especially important during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah when many, even among the leaders of Israel were deserting their first marriage and intermarrying with their heathen neighbors. Personal satisfaction had become a more important goal than raising a godly family. Our society is repeating that mistake. (PBC)

127:3 *children.* Children too are a gift—not the mere product of virility and fertility. (CSB)

Children filling a house (v 1) are God’s continued blessing. (TLSB)

Children are a blessing of the Lord. This message needs to be proclaimed strongly in our day when self-fulfillment and materialism seem to have drastically changed people’s attitude toward children. The prevalence of abortion, child abuse, child neglect, and divorce stand as a terrible indictment of our society and its values. In God’s view passing on the heritage of faith is the most important goal of each generation. It is doubtful if many in our society, including many in the church, would list this as the first priority of life. (PBC)

heritage. Emphasis here is on gift rather than possession. But perhaps more is implied. In the OT economy, an Israelite’s “inheritance” from the Lord was first of all property in the promised land (Nu 26:53; Jos 11:23; Jdg 2:6), which provided a sure place in the life and “rest”

(Jos 1:13) of the Lord's kingdom. But without children the inheritance in the land would be lost (Nu 27:8–11), so that offspring were a heritage in a double sense. (CSB)

a reward. Bestowed by God on one who stands in his favor because he has been faithful. (CSB)

Children are God's inheritance given by grace. The ongoing family line continued to receive the inheritance of the land (Nu 27:8–11). (TLSB)

127:4-5 In Bible times, the man with several sons was well defended. Though he aged, his youth lived on through his vigorous sons, who spoke for him against his enemies. (TLSB)

Many of God's gifts are also a responsibility. God's Word is one such gift. Children are another. Children will be a blessing in the long run; in this psalm they defend their father against his foes. But for many years they are, in one sense, liability. Before they can contribute, they must receive. But this investment in children is the best investment in the future, both for the church and for society. (PBC)

127:5 *when he speaks with his enemies.* Fathers with many sons have many defenders when falsely accused in court. Moreover, the very fact that they have many sons as God's "reward" (v. 3) testifies to God's favor toward them (in effect, they are God-provided character witnesses; see 128:3–4). (CSB)

in the gate. For "(city) gate" as court see Dt 17:5; 21:19; 22:15, 24; 25:7; Isa 29:21 ("court"); Am 5:12 ("courts"). (CSB)

This psalm, which speaks of contentment at work and contentment at home, addresses two of the most urgent needs of our society. It gives us a message to apply in our own lives and to share with our society. It was tragic that Solomon did not practice more fully in his own life the truth he advocates in this psalm. As the book of Ecclesiastes points out, Solomon had to learn the hard way. It will also be tragic for our society if we fail to learn the lessons taught by this psalm. We too will learn the hard way. (PBC)

127 Our houses and the families within them are God's gifts. However, our walls are fragile and our rooms are empty without His blessing. The Lord leads us to value His gifts and to commit them to His watchful care. He will preserve us unto life everlasting. • Fill our homes with devout children, our heritage from You. Give us this faith and help us build our homes and families on the security of Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)