

PSALMS

Chapter 129

They Have Afflicted Me from My Youth

A Song of Ascents.

“Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth”—let Israel now say—2 “Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me. 3 The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows.” 4 The LORD is righteous; he has cut the cords of the wicked. 5 May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward! 6 Let them be like the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up, 7 with which the reaper does not fill his hand nor the binder of sheaves his arms, 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!”

Ps 129 Israel’s prayer for the continued withering of all her powerful enemies. The rescue celebrated (v. 4) is probably from Babylonian exile. Against the background of Ps 124–128, this prayer for the withholding of God’s blessing is set in sharp relief. Like Ps 124 (with which Ps 129 shares other affinities), the psalm is composed of two nicely balanced stanzas. (CSB)

Likely written after the Babylonian exile, though any time of oppression against Israel is possible. Some measure of God’s protection and justice has already been seen (vv 2–4), but a more complete judgment is still looked for (vv 5–8).

Format: V 1, lifelong affliction; vv 2–3, affliction continues; vv 4–8, the Lord’s judgment. (TLSB)

The 129th psalm is a psalm of thanks in which the people of Israel give thanks for the many deliverances that God has often done for them since the beginning. The book of Judges and of Kings show how often they were oppressed by the nations. They oppressed them severely for a long time and plowed furrows on their back. They burdened them with yoke and fetters until God raised up a deliverer for them to free them from their plows, yokes, and ropes. At the end the psalmist wishes for Israel (that is, prophecies of them) that all their enemies would be dried up and withered, which then was done. For all those peoples are gone; Israel alone remains. Thus all the heathen and enemies of Christ are like grass on the roof that sprouts and grows as though it will produce much. But it withers before it is developed. It brings no fruit, and there is no /blessing in it. This then is the legacy of the heathen, heretic, and other enemies, that after they rage and storm they ultimately vanish, leaving neither seed nor mark behind them. The Christians, however, remain forever and ever. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

129:1–4 The wicked oppressors have not prevailed. (CSB)

The description of the oppressors is general enough to apply to any situation in Israel’s history. Whoever they are the oppressors of God’s people will be uprooted. (PBC)

129:1 *they*. This psalm gives the Israelites a single voice. Their oppressors could be any nation from Assyria on through Babylon. (TLSB)

from my youth. From the time Israel was enslaved in Egypt, she has suffered much at the hands of hostile powers. (CSB)

129:2 *have not prevailed against me.* Have not succeeded in their efforts to destroy Israel totally or to hold her permanently in bondage. (CSB)

129:3 Image is more severe even than that of a whip scourging someone's back. Like a plow's furrows, the cuts made upon Israel are deep and long. (TLSB)

The point is clear: the wicked have persecuted the people of God ruthlessly and cruelly, physically and emotionally (see Micah 3:12). (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

129:4 *cut the cords.* The Lord cuts the harness of the oxen pulling the scourging plow of v 3. Israel's oppression is stopped. (TLSB)

129:5–8 May all who hate Zion wither. (CSB)

129:5 The presence of so-called "imprecations" (curses) in the Psalms has occasioned endless discussion and has caused many Christians to wince, in view of Jesus' instructions to turn the other cheek and to pray for one's enemies and his own example on the cross. Actually, these "imprecations" are not that at all; rather, they are appeals to God to redress wrongs perpetrated against the psalmists by imposing penalties commensurate with the violence done—in accordance also with normal judicial procedure in human courts. The psalmists knew that he who has been wronged is not to right that wrong by his own hand but is to leave redress to the Lord, who says, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay". Therefore they appeal their cases to the divine Judge. (CSB)

all who hate Zion. Enemies of Israel, but perhaps esp the Babylonians, who destroyed Jerusalem in the sixth century BC. (TLSB)

turned backward! Turned back to their own land. (TLSB)

129:6 *like grass on the housetops.* May those who would "plow" the backs of Israel (see v. 3) wither like grass that sprouts on the flat, sun-baked housetops, where no plow can prepare a nurturing soil to sustain the young shoots—and so there is no harvest (v. 7). (CSB)

The wicked are like worthless grass, without grain, growing thinly on the meager soil of a rooftop. Cf 1:4; Is 40:6–8. (TLSB)

129:8 *those who pass by.* Whoever may pass by the harvesters in the fields will exchange no joyful greetings (Ru 2:4) because the hands of the harvesters will be empty. (CSB)

Although pilgrims say this blessing to one another, let no such kindness come onto those who hate Zion and have spurned the Lord's name. The psalmist leads the people in a prayer that the Lord would deliver them from evil. (TLSB)

Ps 129 We may feel some part of the afflictions of this psalm. Yet, the afflictions shall not prevail! The blessings of the Lord are with us through Christ. • Lord, show Your power and justice over our enemies. Lead us to call on Your name and receive the blessings that come from You. Amen. (TLSB)