

END OF PSALM 121

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.*
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 121

*The desire and hope of the just for the coming
of the kingdom of God, and the peace of His church.*

1. I rejoiced at the things that were said to me: We shall go into the house of the Lord.
2. Our feet were standing in thy courts, O Jerusalem.
3. Jerusalem, which is built as a city, which is compact together.
4. For thither did the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord; the testimony of Israel, to praise the name of the Lord.
5. Because their seats have sat in judgment, seats upon the house of David.
6. Pray ye for the things that are for the peace of Jerusalem; and abundance for them that love thee.
7. Let peace be in thy strength: and abundance in thy towers.
8. For the sake of my brethren and of my neighbors, I spoke peace of thee.
9. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I have sought good things for thee.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 121

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "I rejoiced at the things that were said to me: we shall go into the house of the Lord." Such is the language of God's people, expressive of their joy on hearing the welcome news of their return to their country. Jeremiah was the person to announce that, after seventy years, there would be an end to the captivity; and that the city and the temple would be rebuilt. Daniel, Aggeus, and Zacharias, who lived at the time the captivity was ended, foretold it more clearly; and they, therefore, created much joy among the people, when, on the completion of the seventy years, they said, "we shall go into the house of the Lord;" that is to say, we shall return to our country, where we shall get to see Mount Sion and the site of the house of the Lord; and then, when we shall have rebuilt the temple, we will again "go into the house of the Lord." Christ, however, was the bearer of a far and away more happy message when he announced, "do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;" and when he said more clearly, "in my Father's house there are many mansions. If not, I would have told you; because I go to prepare a place for you. And if I shall go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and will take you to myself, that where I am, you also may be." Such news fills with unspeakable joy those who have learned the value "of going into the house of the Lord;" and to hold in that house, not the position "of a stranger or a foreigner, but of a fellow citizen with the Saints and a domestic of God's." That must be well-known to anyone reflected seriously on the saying of David, "they shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house;" and in another Psalm, "we shall be filled with the good things of thy house;" as also on that saying of the apostle, "that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." Such is the man who, from his heart, desires to go into the house of the Lord; and, therefore, from his heart sings, "I rejoiced at the things that were said to me. We shall go into the house of the Lord." Now, "the sensual man perceiveth not the things that are of the Spirit of God," and, therefore, on the approach of death, or the termination of his exile and pilgrimage, instead of rejoicing, is troubled and laments, and justly, because, as he did not choose during his lifetime "to dispose in his heart to ascend by steps," he cannot possibly expect to go up to the house of the Lord on high, but rather fears to go down to the prison of the damned, there to be punished forever.

2. "Our feet were standing in thy courts, O Jerusalem." He tells us why the Jews were so overjoyed at the idea of their return to their country, and he says it arose from their remembrance of the time previous to the captivity, when they saw

kingdom there shall be no end.

6. “Pray ye for the things that are for the peace of Jerusalem; and abundance for them that love thee.” The Prophet now exhorts the exiles, on their return from their captivity, to salute, even from afar, the city of Jerusalem, praying for peace and abundance on it, two things that contribute principally to the happiness of cities; for peace, without abundance, is only a firm hold of misery; and abundance, without peace, amounts to doubtful and uncertain happiness; but when both are combined, the city needs nothing necessary for its happiness. He, therefore, says, “pray for the things that are for the peace of Jerusalem.” Pray ye to God for true and solid peace for your country, and for “abundance,” not only for the city of Jerusalem, but also “to them that love thee” you holy city.

7. “Let peace be in thy strength: and abundance in thy towers.” He dictates the very words in which those who pray for peace and abundance to Jerusalem are to salute her. When you salute her say ye, “let peace be in thy strength, and abundance in thy towers;” that is to say, may your walk be always secure and fortified, thereby ensuring perfect peace and quiet to all who dwell within them; “and abundance in thy towers;” no lack of meat or drink in your public buildings and private houses. Now, the two last verses, in reference to the heavenly Jerusalem, though they imply prayers for peace and abundance, still they do not mean to insinuate that there can ever possibly be a want of either there, when we read in Psalm 147, “who hath placed peace in thy borders; and filleth thee with the fat corn?” They, therefore, merely express the pious affection we cherish for the blessings of the Jerusalem above, just as we have in the Apocalypse, “salvation to our God who sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

Jerusalem in her extent and in her splendor; for many who had been carried off as captives in their youth could have remembered Jerusalem as she then was; and in 1 Esdras 3, we read, that many returned from the captivity who had seen the city and the temple. These men, therefore, say, “our feet were standing in thy courts, O Jerusalem;” that is to say, because we recollected the time when we stood in your courts or in your gates, as it is more clearly expressed in the Hebrew. He names the courts or the gates, being, as it were, the vestibules of the city, rather than the public buildings or the streets, because it was at the gates that business was mostly transacted; it was there that the citizens mostly assembled, as we may infer from that verse in Proverbs, “her husband is honorable in the gates, when he sitteth among the senators of the land.” It also appears, from 2 Kings 18, that the gates of Jerusalem were not plain, ordinary gates, but that they were double gates, with a considerable space between them, which, perhaps, is here called “thy courts.” Thus we read in 2 Kings 18, “and David sat between the two gates.” And again, Jeremiah 39, “and all the princes of the king of Babylon came in and sat in the middle gate;” and, certainly, no small space was necessary to accommodate all those princes with their retinue. But how can we Christians say, “our feet were standing in thy courts, O Jerusalem,” when we were never in her courts? Well, we have been in her courts, otherwise we would not be now exiles and pilgrims, nor would Christ have redeemed us from captivity had we not been torn from our country and captives in a foreign land. We have been, then, in the courts of the heavenly Jerusalem, when, through our father Adam, we had possession of Paradise, that was the gate of the Paradise above; and the state of innocence then and there was the gate and the court to the state of glory; and that, that perhaps, that was the reason why the Holy Spirit made David write “in the courts,” instead of the streets of Jerusalem, that we may understand that this Psalm treats of the celestial, and not the earthly Jerusalem. “We have (therefore) rejoiced at the things that were said of thee,” when they said, “we should go into the house of the Lord,” because we remembered the time when “our feet were standing” in Paradise, and, consequently, in the courts of the Paradise above; and, from the idea we got of happiness in the place below, we can guess at the happiness that awaits us above. And though this great place in question is sometimes called the house of the Lord, sometimes the city of Jerusalem, still it is all one and the same place; for our heavenly country is one time called a kingdom, sometimes a city, and at other times a house. It is a kingdom by reason of the multitude and the variety of its inhabitants, as St. John observes, Apocalypse 7, “it is a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations and tribes, and peoples and tongues.” It is a city by reason of the friendship and fellowship that exists between the Saints and the blessed; for, however great their number may be, they know, recognize, and love each other as so many fellow citizens; and, finally, it is a house by reason of the elect having only one father, one inheritance, in which they are all brethren, under the one Father, God.

3. “Jerusalem, which is built as a city, which is compact together.” The Prophet now, in the person of the pilgrims hastening to Jerusalem, begins to enumerate its praises, with a view of thereby stirring himself up to make greater haste in his

ascent to it. He praises it, first, by reason of the supreme peace enjoyed by all its inhabitants, who were so united in the love of each other that they held all their property in common. "Our feet were standing in thy courts, O Jerusalem;" that same Jerusalem whose buildings have so increased, and are daily increasing, that it has now become a city "which is compact together;" which is enjoyed and shared in common by all. Referring the passage to a future state it is much more beautiful and more sublime, for the heavenly Jerusalem is truly built up as a city; not that it is, strictly speaking, a city, nor that there were stones used in the building; still, it is built up as a city so long as the living stones, dressed by a consummate workman, and, after being actually squared and fitted, are placed on the building of the celestial habitation; from which it follows, that they who understand it not only bear all manner of persecutions with equanimity, but they even rejoice and glory in their tribulation, being perfectly sensible that it is in such manner they are squared and fitted for being built into and raised upon the heavenly habitation. One of these living stones, St. James, thus admonishes us, "my brethren, count it a great joy when you shall fall into diverse temptations." Again, in our heavenly country, we shall have the real community of property; for, in the earthly Jerusalem such community of property was more a matter of fact than a matter of right, and arose from the mutual love of the inhabitants for each other; the same held for a time, in the infancy of the Church, as we read in the Acts, "neither did any of them say, that of the things which he possessed, anything was his own, but all things were common to them;" which still holds among those religious orders that observe the spirit of their institute. But in the heavenly Jerusalem there is complete community of property, the one God being all unto all; that is, the one and the same God being the honor, the riches, and the delight of all those who dwell in his house; and that most happy and most supreme abundance is really always the same, subject to no diminution or alteration whatever.

4. "For thither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord; the testimony of Israel, to praise the name of the Lord." The second subject of praise in Jerusalem is the number of its inhabitants; and this verse has a connection with the second verse, because he now assigns a reason for having said, or rather, for having put in the mouth of God's people, "our feet were standing in thy courts, O Jerusalem;" for, though they were not all citizens of Jerusalem, but inhabitants of different cities, still they all came up to Jerusalem three times in every year. He, therefore, says, "our feet were standing in thy courts, O Jerusalem; for thither did the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord;" that is, a great many tribes; such repetitions, in the Hebrew, being indicative of multitude; and thus, a great multitude assembled in Jerusalem, "the testimony of Israel to praise the name of the Lord;" explaining the cause of such an assembly in Jerusalem. It was according to "the testimony," that is, the law that obliged all Israel to visit the temple of the Lord at stated times, it being the only temple in the land of promise; and there "praise the name of the Lord," in acts of thanksgiving and praise. From another point of view, which we consider was more intended by the Holy Ghost, the meaning is: a reason is assigned for having said, "Jerusalem which is built as a city;" because it was built as a city, by reason of "the tribes that go up there;" that is, the holy souls from all tribes and nations, who go up to be built into the spiritual structures, that St. Peter writes of in his first epistle, chapter 2. Now, those blessed souls have gone up to that heavenly Jerusalem, "to

praise the name of the Lord;" for that is their whole occupation there, to the exclusion of every other business. Hence, in Psalm 83, we have, "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord: they shall praise thee forever and ever;" and Tobias, speaking of the heavenly Jerusalem, has, "and alleluia shall be sung in its streets;" and such is "the testimony," that is, the command, "to Israel," that is, to the soul enjoying the beatific vision, that it should never desist from praise, inasmuch as it never ceases to love.

5. "Because their seats have sat in judgment, seats upon the house of David." The third matter of praise in Jerusalem is its being the seat of government, and having a royal palace in it; and the word "because" would seem to connect this verse with the preceding; for it looks like assigning a reason why God wished to have a temple, which the people were bound to visit three times a year, in Jerusalem, in consequence of being the residence of royalty, and the metropolis of the kingdom. He, therefore, says, "because there," in Jerusalem, "seats have sat in judgment;" seats of king's in succession, whose business it was to judge the people, "have sat," have been firmly settled and fixed, not like that of Saul's, which was for a while in Gabaa of Benjamin, and made no great stay there either; nor, like that of the judges who preceded the kings, who never had any certain fixed place for "sitting," or delivering judgment, while the kings of the family of David set permanently in Jerusalem; and he, therefore, adds, "seats upon the house of David;" that is, the seat of royalty founded on the family of David, met with rest and stability; for God said to David, 2 Kings 7, "and thy house shall be faithful, and thy kingdom forever before thy face; and thy throne shall be firm forever." From the expression, "seats upon the house of David," we are not to infer that they sat in judgment on the family of David alone; for they had authority over the whole family of Jacob, that is, over the twelve tribes of Israel; but they are called seats upon the house of David, because all the kings of God's people sprang from the family of David. All this is much more applicable to Christ and the heavenly Jerusalem. Because, lest the Jews may imagine that the words of the Psalm apply to that earthly Jerusalem, and not to the celestial Jerusalem, of which it was a figure, God permitted the seat of government to be removed from Jerusalem, and, furthermore, Jerusalem itself to be destroyed. The promise, then, applies to the Jerusalem above, and to Christ, according to the prophecy of Isaias 9; of Daniel 9; and of the Angel to the Virgin, Luke 1, "the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his Father, and he shall reign in the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end." In the strictest acceptance, then, of the words have "the seats sat in judgment" in the heavenly Jerusalem; because Christ's throne and the thrones of those who reign with him have been established most firmly in heaven; and because those very saints who reign and judge with Christ are a thrown for God; for "the soul of the just is the seat of wisdom;" and those seats sit in judgment, according to the promise of our Lord, "you that have followed me shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And those seats are upon the house of David, because all the power of the saints, royal as well as judiciary, is derived from Christ, who was called the son of David in the Gospel, and who got the seat of David his father, and who reign forever in the house of Jacob, and of whose