

# PSALM 129

This psalm relates to the public concerns of God's Israel. It is not certain when it was penned, probably when they were in captivity in Babylon, or about the time of their return.

**I.** They look back with thankfulness for the former deliverances God had wrought for them and their fathers out of the many distresses they had been in from time to time (v. 1-4).

**II.** They look forward with a believing prayer for and a prospect of the destruction of all the enemies of Zion (v. 5-8). In singing this psalm we may apply it both ways to the Gospel-Israel, which, like the Old-Testament Israel, has weathered many a storm and is still threatened by many enemies.

## PSALM 129:1-4

### DOMESTIC HAPPINESS

#### *A song of degrees.*

The church of God, in its several ages, is here spoken of, or, rather, here speaks, as one single person, now old and gray-headed, but calling to remembrance the former days, and reflecting upon the times of old. And, upon the review, it is found,

**1.** That the church has been often greatly distressed by its enemies on earth: *Israel may now say*, "I am the people that has been oppressed more than any people, that has been *as a speckled bird*, pecked at by *all the birds round about*," <sup>2419</sup> Jeremiah 12:9. It is true, they brought their troubles upon themselves by their sins; it was for them that God punished them; but it was for the peculiarity of their covenant, and the singularities of their religion, that their neighbours hated and persecuted them. "For these *many a time have they afflicted me from my youth*." Note, God's people have always had many enemies, and the state of the church, from its infancy, has frequently been an afflicted state. Israel's youth was in Egypt, or in the times of the Judges; then they were afflicted, and thenceforward more or less. The gospel-church, ever since it had a being,

has been at times afflicted; and it bore this yoke most of all in its youth, witness the ten persecutions which the primitive church groaned under. *The ploughers ploughed upon my back*, v. 3. We read (<sup>303B</sup>Psalm 125:3) of *the rod of the wicked upon the lot of the righteous*, where we rather expected the plough, to mark it out for themselves; here we read of the *plough of the wicked upon the back of the righteous*, where we rather expected to find the rod. But the metaphors in these places may be said to be *crossed*; the sense however of both is the same, and is too plain, that the enemies of God's people have all along used them very barbarously. They tore them, as the husbandman tears the ground with his ploughshare, to pull them to pieces and get all they could out of them, and so to *wear out the saints of the Most High*, as the ground is worn out that has been long tilled, tilled (as we say) quite out of heart. When God permitted them to plough thus he intended it for his people's good, that, their fallow ground being thus broken up, he might sow the seeds of his grace upon them, and reap a harvest of good fruit from them: howbeit, the enemies meant not so, neither did their hearts think so (<sup>280B</sup>Isaiah 10:7); *they made long their furrows*, never knew when to have done, aiming at nothing less than the destruction of the church. Many by the *furrows* they made on the backs of God's people understand the stripes they gave them. *The cutters cut upon my back*, so they read it. The saints have often *had trials of cruel scourgings* (probably the captives had) *and cruel mockings* (for we read of the scourge or lash of the tongue, <sup>311B</sup>Hebrews 11:36), and so it was fulfilled in Christ, who *gave his back to the smiters*, <sup>280B</sup>Isaiah 50:6. Or it may refer to the desolations they made of the cities of Israel. *Zion shall, for your sake, be ploughed as a field*, <sup>332B</sup>Micah 3:12.

**2.** That the church has been always graciously delivered by her friend in heaven.

**(1.)** The enemies' projects have been defeated. They have afflicted the church, in hopes to ruin it, but they have not gained their point. Many a storm it has weathered; many a shock, and many a brunt, it has borne; and yet it is in being: *They have not prevailed against me*. One would wonder how this ship has lived at sea, when it has been tossed with tempests, and all the waves and billows have gone over it. Christ has built his church upon a rock, and the gates of hell have not prevailed against it, nor ever shall.

**(2.)** The enemies' power has been broken: *God has cut asunder the cords of the wicked*, has cut their gears, their traces, and so spoiled their

ploughing, has cut their scourges, and so spoiled their lashing, has cut the bands of union by which they were combined together, has cut the bands of captivity in which they held God's people. God has many ways of disabling wicked men to do the mischief they design against his church and shaming their counsels. These words, *The Lord is righteous*, may refer either to the distresses or to the deliverances of the church.

[1.] *The Lord is righteous* in suffering Israel to be afflicted. This the people of God were always ready to own, that, how unjust soever their enemies were, God was *just in all that was brought upon them*, ~~403~~ Nehemiah 9:33.

[2.] *The Lord is righteous* in not suffering Israel to be ruined; for he has promised to preserve it a people to himself, and he will be as good as his word. He is righteous in reckoning with their persecutors, and rendering to them *a recompence*, ~~506~~ 2 Thessalonians 1:6.

## ~~495~~ PSALM 129:5-8

### GOD'S REGARD TO HIS CHURCH

The psalmist, having triumphed in the defeat of the many designs that had been laid as deep as hell to ruin the church, here concludes his psalm as Deborah did her song, *So let all thy enemies perish, O Lord!* ~~405~~ Judges 5:31.

**I.** There are many that hate Zion, that hate Zion's God, his worship, and his worshippers, that have an antipathy to religion and religious people, that seek the ruin of both, and do what they can that God may not have a church in the world.

**II.** We ought to pray that all their attempts against the church may be frustrated, that in them they may be *confounded* and *turned back* with shame, as those that have not been able to bring to pass their enterprise and expectation: *Let them all be confounded* is as much as, *They shall be all confounded*. The confusion imprecated and predicted is illustrated by a similitude; while God's people shall flourish as the loaded palm-tree, or the green and fruitful olive, their enemies shall *wither as the grass upon the house-top*. As men they are not to be feared, for they shall be made as

grass, <sup><251D></sup>Isaiah 51:12. But as they are enemies to Zion they are so certainly marked for ruin that they may be looked upon with as much contempt as the grass on the house-tops, which is little, and short, and sour, and good for nothing.

**1.** It perishes quickly: It *withers before it grows up* to any maturity, having no root; and the higher its place is, which perhaps is its pride, the more it is exposed to the scorching heat of the sun, and consequently the sooner does it wither. *It withers before it is plucked up*, so some read it. The enemies of God's church wither of themselves, and stay not till they are rooted out by the judgments of God.

**2.** It is of no use to any body; nor are *they* any thing but the unprofitable burdens of the earth, nor will their attempts against Zion ever ripen or come to any head, nor, whatever they promise themselves, will they get any more by them than the husbandman does by the grass on his house-top. Their *harvest will be a heap in the day of grief*, <sup><257E></sup>Isaiah 17:11.

**III.** No wise man will pray God to bless the mowers or reapers, v. 8. Observe,

**1.** It has been an ancient and laudable custom not only to salute and wish a good day to strangers and travellers, but particularly to pray for the prosperity of harvest-labourers. Thus Boas prayed for his reapers. <sup><802E></sup>Ruth 2:4, *The Lord be with you*. We must thus acknowledge God's providence, testify our good-will to our neighbours, and commend their industry, and it will be accepted of God as a pious ejaculation if it come from a devout and upright heart.

**2.** Religious expressions, being sacred things, must never be made use of in light and ludicrous actions. Mowing the grass on the house-top would be a jest, and therefore those that have a reverence for the name of God will not prostitute to it the usual forms of salutation, which savoured of devotion; for holy things must not be jested with.

**3.** It is a dangerous thing to let the church's enemies have our good wishes in their designs against the church. If we *wish them God speed, we are partakers of their evil deeds*, <sup><601E></sup>2 John 1:11. When it is said, None will bless them, and show them respect, more is implied, namely, that all wise and good people will cry out shame on them, and beg of God to defeat

them; and woe to those that have the prayers of the saints against them. *I cursed his habitation,* ~~Job~~ Job 5:3.