

trapped bird that surprisingly regains its freedom. The praise is now less direct, but behind the passive verb of brokenness is implicit divine activity. Freedom is prized as the gift of God.

The closing verse bears witness to divine help, using a traditional formulation of temple worship (cf. 121:2). The cries of God's people, invoking the powerful name "Yahweh," did not go unheard. He graciously came to their aid. What are human enemies (v 2), when the divine creator is a friend (cf. Isa 51:12-13; 1 Pet 4:19)? The one who gives life and meaning to the world has kept death at bay and against all odds has preserved Israel as his people.

Here in one beautiful psalm of praise are brought together Yahweh's ever-repeated gifts of salvation and renewal. The people, never immune from suffering, celebrate the redeeming power of God and are encouraged and sustained thereby (cf. 1 Pet 1:3-9). An almighty savior is the savior still! This is the glad testimony of the psalm.

Immovable As the Mountains (125:1-5)

Bibliography

Hurvitz, A. "אימתו נטבע בעברית הצירוף 'שלום על ישראל'?" *Leš* 27/28 (1964) 297-302. Wanke, G. *Die Zionstheologie der Korachiten*. BZAW 97. Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1966.

Translation

¹ One of the processional songs.^a

Those who trust in Yahweh
are like Mount Zion,
which is immovable,^b abiding^c forever.

(2+2+3)

² Jerusalem has mountains around it—^a

and Yahweh is around his people
henceforth and for evermore.^b

(3+3+3)

³ The scepter of wickedness

will surely not remain
over the land allotted^a to the righteous,^b
or else the righteous might turn
their hands^c to wrongdoing.

(2+2+2)

(3+2)

⁴ Do good, Yahweh, to the good,

to those upright in their hearts.

(3+2)

⁵ But those who turn aside to their crooked ways^a

may Yahweh remove^b

together with the evildoers.

Peace be upon Israel.^c

(3+2+2)

Notes/Comments

1.a. See the note on 120:1.

1.b. Cf. 46:6 (5). In the Songs of Zion Yahweh's supremacy is described, in terms of victory over nations massed against Zion. Their attack is related to the threat of chaotic forces subdued at the creation of the world: cf. 93:1; 96:10; 104:5; G. Wanke, *Zionstheologie*, 68-70; H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen*, 499. The stability of the world and that of Zion are organically linked in Zion theology.

1.c. For the meaning of Heb. נשׁב "abide" cf. Mic 5:3 (4), unreasonably regarded by M. Dahood (*Psalms III*, 215) as "tenuous evidence."

2.a. "Zion is . . . a modest hill. Its top is not as high as the tops of surrounding mountains: it lies 66 meters below that of the Mount of Olives, 76 meters below that of Mount Scopus, 33 meters below that of the hill to its west . . . and 53 meters below that of *ras el-mekkaber*" (O. Keel, *Symbolism*, 114-15).

2.b. This phrase is often regarded as secondary, e.g. by H. Gunkel (*Die Psalmen*, 550); Kraus (*Psalmen*, 1028). But it is to be retained with A. Weiser (*Psalms*, 758): it provides a good external parallel to לעולם "forever" in v 1.

3.a. Heb. גורל "lot, tribal allotment" is here used of the whole land.

3.b. Heb. צדיקים refers to those in right relationship with Yahweh through the covenant, whose lives are lived in conformity with that relationship.

3.c. For the phrase י שלח "send (a) hand" see P. Humbert, "Étendre le main" (note de lexicographie hébraïque), *VT* 12 (1962) 383-95.

5.a. Lit. "bend their crookednesses." For the concept of the purging of impure elements within the religious community see Weiser, *Psalms*, 64, 75-79; K. Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978) 46-48.

5.b. Or "lead away": cf. Job 12:17, 19 for הלה used of Yahweh's punishment of leaders. "Allow to get lost" (D. Michel, *Tempora*, 115; cf. K. Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im AT?" *ZTK* 52 [1955] 16-17) is hardly strong enough. Here it appears to refer to exile: cf. Deut 28:36; 2 Kgs 24:15; Hos 2:16 (14).

5.c. The clause stands outside the metrical structure of the psalm; probably it was spoken by a priest as the answer to the choral prayer (S. Mowinkel, *Tricola*, 89-90). Gunkel (*Die Psalmen*, 549), Kraus (*Psalmen*, 1028); *et al.* regard as secondary. A. Hurvitz (*Leš* 27/28 [1964] 297-302) has surveyed the usage of the phrase in Hebrew literature and inscriptions and concluded that the formulation is post-sixth-century B.C. in origin.

Form/Structure/Setting

The psalm as a whole is a brief communal complaint. Its double petition and wish, directed toward selves and enemies, vv 4-5, follow an extended confession of trust, vv 1-3 (cf. C. Westermann, *Praise*, 52-55). The large proportion allocated to the confession of trust has encouraged classification of the psalm as a communal psalm of confidence (e.g. by Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 548). The formal structure of Ps 123 is comparable, except that this psalm exhibits only two elements of the complaint and Ps 123 has three.

The background of the psalm appears to be enemy occupation of the land (v 3, cf. Isa 14:5, 29; "evildoers," v 5). This situation suggests the post-exilic period as its time of origin. Gunkel's linguistic criteria (*Die Psalmen*, 549) are hardly decisive in confirmation; K. Seybold's tentative suggestion that עולות "wrongdoing," v 3, has been influenced by the Aramaic emphatic

state (*Wallfahrtspsalmen*, 40 note 28) is possible but not compelling (cf. GKC, § 90g; Dahood, *Psalms III*, 216).

The stylistic structure of the psalm consists of three strophes, each of two lines (Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 549; E. J. Kissane, *Psalms II*, 256; Mowinkel, *Tricola*, 101). The word play *טוֹב יָמוּם* "immovable," v 1, and *הַחַטִּיִּים* "those who turn aside," v 5, provides inclusion, and so does the doubled use of the divine name in the first and third strophes in the same positioning, the first colon in the first line and the middle colon in the second. The first strophe is marked by external parallelism (*הַר יְרוּשָׁלַיִם* "mountain[s]," *עוֹלָם* "forever," Zion/Jerusalem and a double comparison). The second has a chiasmic structure, in respect of *צַדִּיקִים* "righteous" and terms for wickedness, which befits its central position. The last strophe is antithetic and has double terms for the good and the wicked. Seybold (*Wallfahrtspsalmen*, 49, 61-62, 64, 90) regards vv 1 and 4 as secondary, the first verse on account of its reference to Zion, which he judges to be a redactional mark of the collection of Pss 120-134. Such deletion leaves completely out of account the artistic patterning of the psalm, as does his judgment that even with the recensional additions the psalm remains an incomplete torso.

Explanation

Post-exilic Judah is under the control of a foreign power. In the course of worship in the temple, Yahweh's people bring to him in prayer this situation (cf. Neh. 9:36-37), which is aggravated by the collaboration of certain Jews in flagrant breach of their ancestral faith. It is this faith that is foremost in the worshipers' prayer. Echoing the Songs of Zion (cf. Pss 46, 48, 76 and Isa 28:16), they affirm that their security is as permanent as the impregnable city. It is not self-confidence that prompts this assertion, but confidence in Yahweh. The second verse reinforces the significance of the opening phrase of the psalm and explains the divine basis of the people's security. Vivid reference is made to the ring of mountains surrounding Jerusalem. To the eye of faith they became a symbol of Yahweh's everlasting protection (cf. 34:8 [7]; Zech 2:9 [5]). The confidence of the covenant community depends upon their knowledge of Yahweh's continual care for them.

Armed with this twofold guarantee of Judah's salvation, the psalm dares to draw a conclusion for the contemporary situation. Foreign occupation is a travesty of Israel's traditional theology, which inextricably linked the covenant between Yahweh and the (obedient) people with the gift of the land (cf. Deut 11:22-25; Isa 57:13; 60:21). The people's sole tenancy is a divinely given privilege to which they may boldly lay claim before Yahweh in an implicit appeal for his intervention. He will surely not allow such profanation to continue lest his people grow weary in their faith and turn away from him in despair (cf. Mal 3:15; Matt 24:12), ceasing to maintain the moral outworking of the covenant in their lives.

The concluding strophe develops both of the preceding ones in turn, in a direct prayer. First, on the basis of his covenant care for the faithful, Yahweh is asked to intervene actively in the religio-political situation. There is no warrant for the human partners to the covenant to undergo the covenantal

curses (cf. Deut 11:26-28; 28:63). On the contrary, their endeavors to conform in spirit and behavior with the standards of the covenant constitute an appeal to Yahweh to fulfill his own obligations (cf. Prov 2:21-22). The final verse takes up the concept of aversion to foreign (current) and Jewish (potential) wickedness in v 3. This concept is made a plea for Yahweh to deal with renegades who have broken the covenant and forfeited their share in the land, by expelling both them and their foreign patrons ("evildoers"). These apostates are sharply distinguished from the faithful of the previous verse: they have no part in the covenant. Their apostasy is not regarded as compromising the community at large before God.

The psalm closes with a priestly benediction in response to the prayer (cf. 1 Sam 1:17), calling down God's blessing of weal upon the troubled people. "Israel" stands for the faithful. Paul's apparent echo of the benediction in Gal 6:16 is true to the psalm's limiting of the true Israel to those who conform with God's will for their lives (cf. Rom 2:29).

Psalm 125 gives valuable insight into the faith of the post-exilic Judean community. It reveals a society struggling with the pressures upon it and represents the endeavors of its religious leaders to hearten it with encouragement and prayer. Zion theology and Deuteronomic and sapiential teaching are harnessed to the task of supporting the people's faith. Yahweh's protective power and faithfulness to his promises concerning the people and land are theological factors used to bring comfort and hope to the faithful and to encourage moral perseverance (cf. 1 Cor 10:13; 2 Tim 2:12, 19). The discrepancy between traditional faith and contemporary experience is channeled positively into ardent, polarized prayer.

God Can Do It Again (126:1-6)

Bibliography

Beyerlin, W. "Wir sind wie Träumende." *Studien zur 126. Psalm*. SBS 89. Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1978. Borger, R. "Zu שְׁבוּת יִתָּן." *ZAW* 66 (1954) 315-16. Dietrich, E. L. שְׁבוּת שְׁבוּת. *Die endzeitliche Wiederstellung bei den Propheten*. BZAW 40. Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1925. Magne, J. "Répétitions de mots et exégèse dans quelques Psaumes et le Pater." *Bib* 39 (1958) 177-97. Morgenstern, J. "Psalm 126." *Homenaje a Millás-Vallcrosa*. Vol. 2. Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1956. Strugnell, J. "A Note on Ps. 126:1." *JTS* 7 (1956) 239-43.

Translation

¹ One of the processional songs.^a

When Yahweh restored

Zion's fortunes,^b

we were^c like dreamers.^d

² Then were filled with laughter our mouths
and our tongues with happy shouts.

(2+2+2)

(3+2^a)