

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 *טוֹר* "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 (*הַרִים/הַרִים* "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)

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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)

- Then it was said among the nations:
 "Yahweh has done a great work^b
 in his dealings with them."
³ Yahweh did do a great work
 in his dealings with us;
 we were so glad.
⁴ Yahweh, restore^a our fortunes^b
 like river beds in the Negeb.^c
⁵ Those who sow with tears^a
 with happy shouts do reap.^b
⁶ The one who carries the bag^a of seed
 weeps as he goes along;
 but^b the one who carries his sheaves^c
 comes home with a happy shout.

Notes/Comments

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

1.b. For the phrase (cf. v 4a) and unique Heb. form שִׁיבָת "fortunes" see the eighth-century B.C. Seifire inscription (3:24 = *KAI*, 3rd ed. [1971] Nr. 224, line 24) הַשִּׁבּוֹת אֱלֹהִים שִׁיבָת "the gods brought about the restoration [of my father's house]." The common emendation to שִׁבּוֹת (H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen*, 1031; *BHS et al.*) is thus unnecessary (M. Dahood, *Psalms III*, 218). The noun evidently functions with the qal conjugation as an internal, cognate accusative with an objective genitive ("turn with a turning towards"): cf. E. L. Dietrich, *Wiederstellung*, 28-37.

1.c. The time perspective of vv 1-3 has been strongly disputed. The time of the initial שִׁבּוֹת "when (Yahweh) restored" is indeterminate of itself and dependent upon the main verb. In v 2 the verbs with יָרָא "then" may relate either to the past or to the future. H. Gunkel (*Die Psalmen* 551) took the verbs of vv 1b, 3 as "prophetic" perfects (cf. GKC § 106n) in a divine oracle. B. Duhm (*Psalmen*, 274) and D. Michel (*Tempora*, 243) have also related the passage to the future (in view of v 4), but regarded it as a meditation upon a future event. In that case vv 1-3 might be rendered (cf. GKC § 106o) "When Yahweh has restored . . . , we shall have become . . . (v 2) Then will . . . (v 3) Yahweh will have done . . . ; we shall be glad." An objection to both these future interpretations is the extreme awkwardness of v 3 after the certainly past tense of the perfect (לַעֲשׂוֹת) הִגִּדִיל "did do a great (work)" in v 2b. W. Beyerlin (*Träumende*, 35-37) compares the construction of vv 1aβ, 2 (יָרָא with the infinitive construct and a doubled יָרָא "then" with imperfect verbs) with the future sentences of Job 33:15-16; Prov 1:27-28. He regards v 1b as parenthetical (cf. Gen 2:4b-7) and present (cf. 122:2): "When Yahweh restores—we are like dreamers—then will . . ." V 3a also relates to the future, while v 3b like v 1b refers to the present, anticipating the future (see further in *Form/Structure/Setting*). Here too the awkwardness of (לַעֲשׂוֹת) הִגִּדִיל in vv 2b, 3a referring to different times creates difficulty. Would not the psalmist more naturally have said יִגְדִיל (לַעֲשׂוֹת) "will do a great (work)," conforming with the earlier future imperfects? Moreover, the change of time in the parenthetical v 1b makes the first line read most awkwardly. Beyerlin's claim that v 1b as well as v 2a, 2b would have to be expressed with יָרָא and an imperfect verb, if like them it was the consequence of the initial temporal clause, is not compelling. The two lines of v 2 may function as main clauses independent of v 1aβ-b (cf. Isa 35:5-6; 58:8-9). For the construction of v 1aβ-b cf. 114:1-2.

1.d. J. Strugnell (*JTS* 7 [1956] 239-43) rendered "as hale men, as men who had been / were healed," comparing the parallelism of restoring fortunes and healing in Hos 6:11-7:1. He claimed the support of Tg. and LXX: (a) Tg. הִיךְ מַרְעִיָּה דְאִיתִיין "like sick people who are cured," understood MT in terms of the other Heb. (and Aram.) stem חָלַם "be strong, healthy" (rather than presupposing כְּחַלִּים "like sick people" [*BKH*, *BHS*]); (b) LXX rendered the verb as in Isa 38:16 (cf. *BHS*; *contra BHK* which retroverted as כְּחַלִּים). He also regarded שׁ יִחַ חַמּוּן *dhayn* "like those who rejoice" as a paraphrase of this second stem (in terms of v 3b), although

this is not necessarily the case. Significantly 11QPs^a reads כְּחַלִּימִים or כְּחַלִּימִים according to S. Speier, "Sieben Stellen des Psalmentargums in Handschriften und Druckausgaben," *Bib* 48 (1967) 507 (already tentatively suggested as an alternative by J. A. Sanders, *Psalms Scroll*, 25). The first possibility could be an adjective "sound, healthy" like the second: cf. M. Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 468a, 471a. Heb. חָלַם, which Jastrow explained as a passive participle, is more probably a stative adjective: cf. GKC § 50f, 84^{am}. The strong exegetical tradition, adopted by NEB ("like men who had found new health") is possible, but in the light of the overall context Kraus (*Psalmen*, 1031) is doubtless right in regarding it as less probable. Beyerlin (*Träumende*, 19-31) has rightly urged caution in interpreting MT in terms of dreaming, lest an alien, anachronistic meaning be read into it. He himself understands the text as a dreamlike anticipation of Yahweh's future restoration of Zion: in OT thought dreams can reveal the divinely determined future, and so the speakers describe themselves as "like dreamers," in the sense that they look forward to it and were certain that it would come. He also regards כְּחַלִּימִים as an allusion to Joel 3:1 (see *Form/Structure/Setting*). More probably the reference to dreaming is to be compared with Isa 29:7-8 ("like a dream . . ."), where a hungry and thirsty man dreams that he is eating or drinking. It is true that there the dreamlike experience is characterized as unreal and doomed to frustration, but that is only because it is stressed that the dreamer awakes. In the dream itself the need is felt to be met and it is not till awaking that the dreamer realizes otherwise. Waking is here irrelevant to the simile, which describes the welcome reversal of a situation of need.

2.a. Gunkel (*Die Psalmen*, 550) scanned as 2+2+2, and J. Morgenstern ("Psalm 126," 111-12) and Beyerlin (*Träumende*, 33) as 4+2 (likewise vv 1, 3), but it is more probably 3+2 (Kraus, 1032): או "then" is to be taken metrically with the next word, as in v 2b.

2.b. For הִגִּדִיל לַעֲשׂוֹת "do a great work" cf. Joel 2:21; cf. too הִגִּדִיל in 1 Sam 12:24 and חֲלֹמֵי "do great things" of Yahweh in Deut 10:21; Pss 71:19; 106:21. The event is implicitly compared with the Heilsgeschichte.

4.a. Dahood (*Psalms III*, 220), who relates the whole psalm to the past, regards שִׁבּוֹת as a *qaṭala* form "šābāh or the Phoenician form šōbāh," so that vv 1 and 4 both describe the same past event. Cf. the tentative proposal in *BHK* to read a standard שִׁבּוֹת.

4.b. For the semantically irrelevant variation of K שִׁבּוֹת and Q שִׁבִּית, see R. Borger, *ZAW* 66 (1954) 315-16.

4.c. In summer, in the arid south especially, the wadi beds were dry (cf. Joel 1:20) until the winter rains filled them. It is with this latter phenomenon that comparison is made. "Most of these floods swept into the Mediterranean and were useless in antiquity; however, along these river beds are located most of the springs and wells of the Negeb which were essential for permanent habitation" (Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible* [Tr. A. F. Rainey; London: Burns and Oates, 1967] 24; cf. N. Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert* [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1959] 92-94).

5.a. Behind this apparent proverb lies mythological antecedents of the burial and revival of the fertility god, which may be illustrated from Egyptian and Ugaritic texts, but "the poet had long ago lost any memory that this antithesis was rooted in the ancient Canaanite cult drama" (F. F. Hvidberg, *Weeping and Laughing in the OT* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962] 132; cf. A. Weiser, *Psalms*, 762).

5.b. The verse is hardly a continuation of the prayer of v 4 (rsv "May . . ."): v 6 amplifies v 5, and v 6a cannot be so construed.

6.a. See *HALAT*, 610b; Dahood, *Psalms III*, 221.

6.b. "The infinitive absolute is used to give emphasis to an antithesis" (GKC § 113p).

6.c. P. Jolion (*Grammaire*, § 90e) by analogy with שְׂדֵי/שְׂדוֹת distinguished between אֲלֻמֹת "particular sheaves" (here and in Gen 37:7a) and אֲלֻמִּים "sheaves" in general (Gen 37:7b).

Form/Structure/Setting

As so often in the Psalms, assessment of the form depends upon judgment concerning the psalm's chronological perspective. The major problem of the psalm is the relation of vv 1, 4: both refer to a reversal of fortunes. Are they to be equated or differentiated? Dahood (*Psalms III*, 216) has equated them uniquely by interpreting the verb of v 4 as a (past) perfect. In fact he

construes all the verbs in the psalm as past, and so can regard it as a hymn of thanksgiving composed for one of the festivals. But usually v 4 is taken as a petition spoken in the name of the community. Equation of vv 1, 4 then is associated with regarding vv 1-3 either as a meditation upon the future (Duhm, Michel: see *Notes/Comments*, note 1.c.; cf. Weiser, *Psalms*, 760) or as a combination of present anticipations of the future and future statements (Beyerlin, *Träumende*, 31; see *Notes/Comments*, note 1.c.) or as an oracular pronouncement (Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 551) to which the people respond with a prayer for its fulfilment.

The alternative is to differentiate between the events of vv 1 and 4. Reversal of national fortunes need not be a single, isolated event: cf. H. W. Wolff's rendering of Hos 6:11 as "whenever I restored the fortunes of my people" and his reference to "an event which happened repeatedly in the course of Israel's history" (*Hosea*, 106, 123). Then vv 1-3 constitute a historical retrospect to Yahweh's praiseworthy intervention in the past (Kraus, *Psalmen*, 1034; A. A. Anderson, *Psalms*, 865; C. C. Keet, *Psalms of Ascents*, 49-50). Kraus (*Psalmen*, 53) has compared their role with 44:2-4 (1-3). The advantage of this orientation is that it overcomes the difficulties of verbal coordination involved in those interpretations which relate vv 1-3 to the future (see note 1.c. in *Notes/Comments*).

There remains the function of vv 5-6. Those who relate vv 1-3 to the past tend to regard the final verses as a prophetic promise, comparing the structure of Ps 85 (Kraus, *Psalmen*, 1032; J. H. Eaton, *Psalms*, 285). Otherwise they are usually taken as a declaration of confidence (Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 552; Weiser, *Psalms*, 762; Beyerlin, *Träumende*, 40; cf. Kraus, *Psalmen*, 53), which is a characteristic element of the complaint form. The stylistic structure of the psalm (see below) points to the latter explanation: a prophetic voice in vv 5-6 would entail a break within the psalm after v 4, but there are clear artistic signs of a major division after v 3. Accordingly the psalm as a whole is to be judged a communal complaint, the central petition of which is bordered by a reminder of Yahweh's past aid to motivate future intervention and by a strong affirmation of coming blessing.

The cultic setting of the psalm can hardly be precisely defined. The references to natural phenomena in vv 4b-6 have been taken as indications that the autumn festival was the cultic occasion of the psalm, which could have constituted a prayer for fertility and blessing for the coming year (cf. Weiser, *Psalms*, 760; Anderson, *Psalms*, 864; Eaton, *Psalms*, 285). Beyerlin has rightly condemned such a precise setting, observing the metaphorical nature of the fertility references, and concludes simply that the psalm was recited in the communal cult (*Träumende*, 40).

The historical background has been diversely explained. Dahood (*Psalms III*, 217-18) claims the psalm as pre-exilic on account of the eighth-century Aramaic parallel to שׁוֹבֵי צִיּוֹן "fortunes" in v 1 and the "archaic forms" which he discovers, and finds it impossible to interpret v 1 in terms of a specific restoration. Weiser attempts no historical earthing of the psalm's language, relating it simply to "the cult community's expectation of salvation in times of adversity" (*Psalms*, 760). Beyerlin, on the other hand, specifically ties the psalm to an exilic setting in Judah, interpreting the restoration of fortunes

as the (future) restoration of the Judean community, after its dissolution in 587 B.C. (*Träumende*, 49, 60). He urges that the psalm is closely based in its terminology upon the preaching of Joel, which with Kapelrud and Rudolph he dates in the late pre-exilic period. The soundness of this major plank in Beyerlin's total reconstruction of the psalm must be questioned: it is more likely that Joel belongs to the post-exilic period (see L. C. Allen, *The Books of Joel . . . and Micah*, 19-25). It is noteworthy that Morgenstern used parallels with Joel to justify a post-exilic dating for the psalm, in the third century B.C. ("Psalm 126," 115-16). Moreover, an assertion of dependence upon Joel must be weighed against Joel's oft observed propensity to echo and re-use earlier prophetic and cultic language (see note 3.d. in *Notes/Comments* of Ps. 110).

The repeated phrase שׁוֹבֵי צִיּוֹן "restore fortune" is obviously a crucial one in the psalm. Although not exclusively prophetic (cf., e.g., Job 42:10), its associations are mainly prophetic or dependent upon prophecy. Scholars have queried the dating of a number of the prophetic passages in which the expression occurs in the books of pre-exilic prophets, yet it is clearly pre-exilic in origin (Hos 6:11) and was certainly used in exilic times (Lam 2:14; Ezek 39:25). The majority of its contexts presuppose, whether in historical fact or prospect, a situation of severe divine judgment, a great divide in the experience of the religious community, on the farther side of which lies restoration to favor which finds concrete expression in restoration to the land and national exaltation (see, e.g., Jer 29:14; Joel 4 [3]:1; Amos 9:14; Zeph 2:7; 3:20). Jerusalem sometimes plays an explicit role in the passages which use the phrase in question (Jer 33:6 [cf. 30:18]; 31:23; Joel 4 [3]:1). If vv 1-3 are interpreted with reference to the past, it is hardly possible to avoid relating them to the return from exile and the rebuilding of the temple and city of Jerusalem. Of particular interest for this psalm is Ps 14:7, where restoration of the people of God is linked with a wish that salvation may issue from Zion. Either the verse or the whole psalm is probably post-exilic (Kraus, *Psalmen*, 247; Anderson, *Psalms*, 131), and the verse accordingly provides a parallel to vv 1, 4. Isa 52:8 too may well be significant. In Second Isaiah "Zion" is used as a cipher for the restored religious community: at Isa 52:8 Yahweh's return (שׁוֹב) to Zion is the occasion for shouts of joy (וְיִשְׂרָאֵל) and the revelation of his power before the nations (וְיִגְלוּ). The psalm may well in its first half celebrate such a restoration, but in the tones of Ps 14:7 go on to claim other prophetic promises of national prosperity (cf. H. Schmidt, *Die Psalmen*, 227; Kraus, *Psalmen*, 1034; J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay, *Psalms 101-150*, 124). Its post-exilic dating may well be confirmed by the Aramaic שׁוֹבֵי צִיּוֹן "fortunes" in v 1.

Structurally the psalm has been divided by J. Magne (*Bib* 39 [1958] 191) into vv 1-4 and 5-6. He found strophic inclusion in the repetition of שׁוֹבֵי צִיּוֹן/שׁוֹבֵי צִיּוֹן and a chiasmic order, with vv 2b and 3a functioning as an inner pair. He urged that this structure favored the emendation שׁוֹב "restored" (BHK) in v 4. Magne significantly left out of his table of repeated terms the comparative particle of vv 1b, 4b. That and the repeated הַיְיָ "happy shout" in vv 2aβ, 5b seem to suggest that the lines vv 1aβ-2aβ and 4-5 are the initial, parallel two lines of separate strophes. This impression is reinforced

by the chiasmic order of words in both second lines, vv 2a α - β , 5. Accordingly v 3 is the final line of one four-line strophe and v 4 the first of a second. The stylistic variation of form between נב'ש and שבוש may have been intended as a pointer to a new beginning at v 4 and as a means of differentiating the changes of fortune as separate events. There is a climactic ring about v 3: it echoes elements taken from the three earlier lines: ננו "we were" (v 1b), the motif of joy (v. 2a α - β) and the praise of Yahweh's great deed (v 2b). The second strophe is structured differently. The last two lines, v 6, serve to amplify v 5, and exhibit external parallelism. This may well suggest that שש "the one who carries" is repeated deliberately *contra* the frequently made suggestion (e.g. *BHS*) to delete the former as a vertical dittograph. The repetition may function as a designed counterpart of the repeated reference to Yahweh's great deed in the last two lines of the earlier strophe.

Explanation

The community of God's people meditate in tones of praise upon Yahweh's earlier activity on their behalf. They look back to a turning point in their fortunes, most probably to the re-establishment of the worship of the religious community in Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. It was a dream come true; it marked a sharp reversal of the harsh reality of their former distress. In the court of the sanctuary they recall their reaction of joyful excitement and record the Gentiles' reactions of awe, whereby even they were forced to admit that Israel's God must be the author of such a transformation. The recipients add their own praise in confirmation. Their experience was of a piece with Yahweh's miraculous acts of salvation in their earlier history; it rightly called forth a response of glad testimony.

The self-reminder of earlier divine intervention has served as an encouragement to believe that Yahweh would again intervene so signally. He has the power to bless his people in their land. The retrospect has functioned too as a virtual inducement to their God, in whose presence they have met, to come once more to their aid. The psalm moves to an explicit appeal in v 4. The cycle of misfortune and deliverance celebrated in v 1 has half come round again. The community bring their prayer for restoration with the hope that Yahweh will repeat his saving activity (cf. 106:43-44; Judg 3:9, 15). That the Lord of history has such power is attested by his work as Lord of nature. Even the summer drought of the Negeb is succeeded by the welcome winter floods through the wadis. So Yahweh can intervene again in salvation, and to him is brought a plea that he may do so. Their parched lives need renewing. A time of great divine work has given way to a period of "small things" (cf. Zech 4:10); frustration and difficulty dog the steps of the post-exilic community. But with confident tones they affirm their faith that Yahweh will repeat his work of transformation. Reassurance is found in the fact that harvest follows seedtime in the divinely regulated calendar of the year (Gen 8:22). A proverb is used to express the people's plight and hope of renewed life. Traditionally, sowing had overtones of sorrow as a sign of death (cf. John 12:24; 1 Cor 15:36). But the toil and tears of frustration would eventually give way to a harvest of blessing for the community (cf. 30:6 [5]).

So God's people are sustained with the resource of prayer and with the assurances of both his past salvation and his inherent faithfulness. Present distress is no argument for the denial of Yahweh's power or grace (cf. 77:8-11 [7-10]). As he had reversed a calamitous past, he could be relied upon to reverse a painful present. He would, as it were, send his rain of blessing and crown their work of sowing with a welcome harvest. Hope lends wings to their prayer, and both are grounded in Yahweh's historical revelation of his character as faithful to his covenant people. In similar vein the early church was urged to look away from suffering to glory, with a conviction that the God who had begun a good work would faithfully bring it to completion (2 Cor 4:17, 18; Phil 1:6; 1 Thess 5:24).

The Secret of Human Achievement

(127:1-5)

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Translation

¹ One of the processional songs.^a Solomonic.

If Yahweh does not build a house,
in vain will its builders have toiled^b over it. (3+3)

If Yahweh does not guard a city,
in vain will the guard have stayed awake.^b (3+3)

² In vain do you act
who rise early^a
and rest^b late.^c (2+2+2)

Some eat bread for which they have labored^d—
this is the way^e he confers honor^f on those^g he loves. (3+3)