

real, was not accompanied by such awesome phenomena; hence, there arose the danger of familiarity.

The preparations for entering the temple, such as those reflected in Ps 26, are part of a conscious attempt in the Hebrew tradition to prepare the pilgrim for the presence of God. There must always be a double focus in such preparations—the glory of God and the basic unworthiness of the worshiper to enter the divine presence. The two themes inform each other. Reflecting on God's glory, the worshiper is made aware of unworthiness; but reflecting on that unworthiness, the worshiper becomes aware of the need for forgiveness and mercy, for moral integrity and spiritual faithfulness, which propel him toward the worship of God. And so the preparation to enter God's presence involves two dimensions. First, the integrity and lifestyle of the worshiper must be such that he can say to God, in honest humility, "judge me" (v 1). But it is in the very nature of such integrity and honest desire that there is evoked recognition of the fact that integrity alone is not enough, although it is essential. The worshiper must also pray, with the same humility and expectation, "redeem me and be gracious to me" (v 11); only then may he proceed into the divine presence and participate in worship.

A Royal Ritual (27:1-14)

Bibliography

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Translation

- ¹ For David.
The Lord is my light and my salvation; (3+2)
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the refuge of my life; (3+2)
of whom shall I be afraid?
² *When evildoers approached me* (3+2)
to devour my flesh,
they^a were my opponents and my enemies; (3+2)
they stumbled and fell.
³ *Even though an army encamps against me,* (3+2)
my heart shall not fear.
Even though war rises up against me, (3+2?)
in spite of this, I am confident.
⁴ *One thing I have asked of the Lord—* (3+2?)
I will seek it!—
to dwell^a in the house of the Lord (3+2)
all the days of my life,^b

- to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord* (3+2)
and to inquire^c in his temple.
⁵ *For he will conceal me in a booth^a* (3+2)
on the evil day;
he will hide me in the hiding place of his tent; (3+2)
he will place me high on a rock.^b
⁶ *And now my head will be raised^a up* (3+3)
above my enemies round about me.^b
And I will sacrifice in his tent (2+2,3)
sacrifices of joy;^c
I will sing and I will make music to the Lord.
⁷ *O Lord, hear my voice when I cry;* (4/3+2)
be^a gracious to me and answer me!
⁸ *My heart said to you:* (3+2)
"I have sought your face."^a
Your face, O Lord, I will seek; (3+3)
⁹ *do not hide your face from me!*
Do not turn away your servant in anger (2?+2)
you who have been my help!
Do not reject me and do not forsake me, (2?+2)
O God of my salvation!
¹⁰ *For my father and my mother have forsaken me,* (3+2)
but the Lord will take care of me.
¹¹ *Teach me your way, O Lord,* (3+3+2)
and lead me on a level path,
because of my enemies.
¹² *Do not deliver me to the greed of my opponents* (3+3+2)
for false witnesses have arisen against me,
violent witnesses^a too!
¹³ *I^a believe^b that I will see the goodness of the Lord* (4/3+2)
in the land of the^c living.
¹⁴ *Wait for the Lord! Be strong,* (3+2+2)
and let your heart be bold.
Yes, wait for the Lord!

Notes

2.a. The *athnah* in v 2b is placed after םהם ("they"), and ל ("to me") is omitted, following G and S, thus retaining the 3+2 metrical balance of the opening verses. It is unlikely that םהם should be translated as an interjection, "Lo," on the basis of Ugaritic *hm*, as suggested by Dahood, *Psalms I*, 167. See note a on Ps 9:8.

4.a. יִשְׁבֹּתִי: inf. constr. of שָׁבַת ("dwell"), without ל because it is in apposition to ׀תן ("one [thing]"); the two following inf. constrs. in this verse have ל, introducing circumstantial clauses (see Dahood, *Psalms I*, 167).

4.b. The second bicolon of v 4 is sometimes said to be a gloss from Ps 23:6 (cf. *BHS*), and the absence of ל with יִשְׁבֹּתִי is taken as evidence that the glossator did not assimilate the line to its new context (Briggs, *Psalms*, 243). But this view is incorrect; (a) on the absence of ל, see note a above; (b) the similarity with Ps 23:6 is probably to be accounted for by the high percentage of formulaic language in the psalm as a whole (cf. Culley, *Oral Formulaic Language in the Biblical Psalms*, 103).

4.c. לְבַקֵּר ("to inquire"); the meaning of the term has caused considerable debate, conven-

iently summarized in Anderson, *Psalms I*, 222-23. Ugaritic *bqr* may have the sense "to divine," and the parallel Hebrew term used here probably implies "inquire (by seeking a divine oracle)"; cf. Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan*, 2, 194 (note).

5.a. *Kethib* כֹּחֹת ("booth"); *Qere* חֹבוֹת ("his lair"; cf. *Q*). *Kethib* is to be preferred, providing an appropriate parallel to the following אֹהֶל ("tent"; viz. the temple).

5.b. The transition from the imagery of *hiding* to that of exposure on a rock is abrupt; it may be that בְּצוּר ("on a rock") should be read בְּצַר ("in straits"), providing a parallel to the preceding "evil day" (Briggs, *Psalms*, 243).

6.a. Alternatively (after *G*), it is possible to read יִרִי ("he will raise," Hiph.), which might be implied by the subject of the verbs in v 6.

6.b. *G* indicates a break after "my enemies," followed by a verb (אֶסְבֹּחַ ?) which goes with the next line ("I will go around and I will sacrifice . . ."). But MT probably has the better text, making good sense (and balance) as it stands.

6.c. Literally, "sacrifices of a shout of joy."

7.a. The conjunction is omitted, with the support of several Heb. mss, *G* and *S*.

8.a. The text of MT is difficult in the context: פָּנֵי שֶׁפָּנֵי, "seek (plural) my face." The second person plural form (שֶׁפָּנֵי) causes problems after the second person singular. Leveen solves the problem by radical means (*VT* 21 [1971] 54); the offending words are omitted as pleonastic, and the first three words of v 8 are emended to: כִּי טַר לִבִּי ("for my heart is bitter"). But the solution is too radical, and the versions, though apparently based on a text different from MT, offer no support for such major emendation. A possible solution is that of Dahood (*Psalms I*, 168), who translated: "Come, said my heart, seek his face." The translation involves the pointing פָּנֵי (impv. of פָּנֵי) and transposing the *waw* to provide the text: פָּנֵי שֶׁפָּנֵי ("seek his face"). But probably the best solution (that taken above) is to follow *G* (ἐξέζητησα τὸ πρόσωπον σου) and emend the Hebrew text as follows: פָּנֵי שֶׁפָּנֵי ("I have sought your face"). The variety of renditions in the versions indicates the possibility that the original text was corrupt at an early stage, probably as a result of confusion arising from the threefold use of פָּנֵי.

12.a. פָּפֵי is traditionally translated "breathing, puffing" (BDB; cf. *RSV*, *NIV*). But Heb. פָּפֵי is a verbal adjective, functioning as a noun, meaning "witness," cognate to Ugaritic *yph* and parallel to פָּדֵי in the preceding line. For the most comprehensive analysis of the meaning of the Hebrew and Ugaritic terms, see Pardee, *VT* 28 (1978) 204-13.

13.a. In MT, the line begins with אִלֵּל ("unless, if not"); but this term normally introduces a protasis clause, and in v 13 there is no apodosis (though it is possible that the apodosis clause could have been suppressed: *GKC*, § 159 dd). One solution is to provide the apodosis from v 12b (the clause introduced by כִּי "for"), as proposed by Niehaus (art. cit.). But the extraordinary pointing in MT (six points above and below the main consonants) indicates that the term was suspect to the Massoretes (cf. Briggs, *Psalms*, p. xxiv) and in five Heb. mss it is omitted, as in the translation above. (It is also omitted in *G*, though the equivalent of אִלֵּל is added to the last clause of v 12.)

13.b. The perfect form of the verb is used.

13.c. The definite article is provided in several Heb mss, including *G*.

Form/Structure/Setting

From the time of Gunkel's pioneering work on the Psalms into recent times, Ps 27 has commonly been divided into two psalms, the first (vv 1-6) a *psalm of confidence* and the second (vv 7-14) an *individual lament* (e.g., Fohrer, *Introduction to the OT*, 287). But there are a number of arguments against the division of the psalm (the classic argument against Gunkel's division being that of Birkeland, *ZAW* 51 [1933] 216-21); although there are indeed two principal sections in the psalm, the whole should be perceived as a unity. The first part differs from the second in both form and substance; (a) in form, the Lord is referred to in the third person in vv 1-6, but addressed directly in vv 7-13; (b) in substance, the first section is characterized by confidence and trust, whereas the second contains the words of prayer. But the

unity binding the two principle parts is to be perceived in the overall liturgical setting of the psalm (below) and in the use of key words common to both sections. The following terms are used in both sections of the psalms: (a) עֲשֵׂי "salvation" (vv 1, 9); (b) צָר, "opponent" (vv 2, 12); (c) לֵב "heart" (vv 3, 8, 14); (d) קוּם "rise" (vv 3, 12); (e) שֶׁבֶר "seek" (vv 4, 8); (f) יַחַי "life" (vv 4, 13).

The liturgy, which provides the context within which the psalm must be interpreted, has three parts, interrupted perhaps by two ritual actions which are implied, rather than explicitly stated, in the text: (1) a statement of confidence, in which the worshiper (probably the king; see below) publicly declares his faith to the congregation and declares his intention of offering his sacrifices and praise (vv 1-6); (2) a prayer addressed directly to God (vv 7-13), and (3) an oracle, delivered by a priest or temple servant (v 14). It is likely that between stages (1) and (2), the spoken part of the liturgy ceased while sacrifices were being offered. Between stages (2) and (3), the priest or temple servant may have undertaken certain actions in order to determine or receive the divine oracle.

The evidence for the royal interpretation of the psalm is indirect, though a number of scholars support a royal interpretation: e.g., Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, I, 238; Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 39-40. The precise details giving rise to the royal interpretation are elaborated in the *Comment* (below); they include such matters as the military language (e.g. v 3) and the concept of sonship (v 10). But if the royal interpretation is correct, it is difficult to be precise in determining the setting for this liturgical psalm; it could be a ceremony undertaken prior to a king's departure for battle, but it is perhaps more probable that the setting is to be found in an annual event such as the anniversary of a coronation (cf. Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen*, 210).

In the later history of Judaism, and continuing into the present century, Ps 27 has played a central role in the "Days of Awe" (*Yamim Noraim*), being recited in the synagogue during each of the ten holy days. The psalm's substance, concerning God's compassion and love for his people, is most appropriate for the season in which judgment and deliverance are the central themes in the Jewish liturgy.

Comment

A statement of confidence (27:1-6). The first part of the statement of confidence (vv 1-3) expresses the absolute certainty that banishes fear, regardless of the dimensions of the threat. The confidence is based upon the Lord, who is described by three terms: *light*, *salvation* and *refuge*. (1) The first metaphor, *light*, implies a force that automatically dispels darkness (here representing the psalmist's enemies); the language is reminiscent of Ps 23:4, in which fearlessness is expressed despite death's dark shadow. But the metaphor may also be associated specifically with military dangers, as is implied by the same kind of language in Ps 18:29. Thus the psalmist is affirming that even in the darkness of the terrible threat of war, he has no fear, for God is the light that can dispel such darkness. (2) The Lord is also *salvation* (or "victory,"

or "deliverance"); again, the metaphorical language emphasizes God's ability to give victory, regardless of the military odds against success. (3) The third term is ambiguous. It may mean "refuge" (from the root נִצֵּל) or it may mean "stronghold" (from the root נִצְרָה). But, in either case, the term carries connotations of a place of safety in a military context. The military associations of all three terms, together with the substance of v 3, are part of the basis for associating this psalm with the king, who was commander-in-chief of Israel's armies.

Both v 2 and v 3 refer to enemies; if the tenses implied by the forms of the Hebrew verbs have been rendered correctly, v 2 refers to past victories (one of the sources of confidence) and v 3 expresses confidence in the future, regardless of the scale of the military crisis. The precise sense of the idiom "to devour the flesh" is uncertain; it might imply "speech" (viz. slanderous speech; cf. RSV and see v 12 below) or it might be a metaphorical description likening the enemies to wild beasts, who hope to devour the flesh of the fallen. But these enemies, as opponents of the king, were also opponents of God and hence *fell* (or were defeated) in battle. (N.B.: if the perfect tenses of v 2d were translated as implying the certainty of future action, then the whole verse could be taken with v 3 as expressing the psalmist's confidence in future victories.) The military language emerges most explicitly in the synonymous parallelism of v 3; no military threat can undermine the psalmist's confidence.

In the second part of the statement of confidence (vv 4-6), the focus changes, and the psalmist makes one of the most single-minded statements of purpose to be found anywhere in the OT. The expression "one thing I have asked" has no parallels among the biblical numerical sayings; see further W. M. W. Roth, "Numerical Sayings in the Old Testament. A Form-Critical Study," *VTS* 13 (1965) 70. The central point of this single request is stated in v 4c: "to dwell in the house of the Lord;" the statement should not be taken literally, as if referring to a temple servant who would actually live perpetually within the temple precincts. It refers rather to living permanently in God's presence; such a life was regularly punctuated by actual visits to the temple, such as that in which the psalmist was engaged. This central thrust in vv 4-6 is intimately related to the substance of vv 1-3. It was deliverance from military threats that would make possible the permanent dwelling in God's house; and it was faith in God, renewed in his house, that contributed to fearlessness in the face of military threats.

The psalmist specifies two consequences that would follow from his permanent residence in God's presence. (1) He would be able "to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord," not to be interpreted literally, but as implying the extraordinary experience of God's beauty and glory as symbolized in the temple, specifically in the Ark. (2) He would be able to "inquire in his temple" (see v 4, note c). The military context may provide the specific nuance of the expression; the king, prior to departing for war, would be able to enter the temple and to seek an oracle from God pertaining to his military plans. But the expression may have more precise implications with respect to the actual liturgy in which the king was participating; he was about to sacrifice (v 6) and sought guidance from God, and v 14 (see below) may contain the oracle for which he made inquiry.

The desire to dwell in the Lord's house is elaborated still further in v 5; the house (*booth//temple*) symbolized the divine protection which gave rise to the psalmist's great confidence. The temple was the king's asylum in time of trouble, not in a literal sense, but in the more figurative sense of the word "refuge" (v 1). It was both a refuge in which he could be protected "on the evil day" (presumably the day of danger, when enemies attacked) and a "rock," as stronghold, giving strength in the face of enemy attack.

Verse 6 must be interpreted with respect both to the liturgical proceedings and to the implications of those proceedings for the king's reign and military affairs; the word "now" may carry this double nuance. The immediate sense of "now" emerges in the liturgical context; the king was now about to offer sacrifices and praise to God as a part of the liturgical proceedings. But the sacrificial offerings were related to the divine activity; the king's "head will be raised up" (v 6a), referring to the anticipated divine protection and victory in battle (see Ps 3:4 and *Comment*, where the same kind of language is used). The sacrifices about to be offered "in his tent" (a poetic description of the temple, rather than an indication that the psalm was composed prior to the construction of the temple) are linked with "joy" (נִצְרָה), a word which may carry the nuance of "battle cry, victory cry." The sacrifices, in other words, appear to have been associated specifically with the king's role as warrior and they anticipate (with both prayer and joy) the coming victory shout that could only be a consequence of the divine aid.

A prayer for divine aid (27:7-13). The prayer is expressed in common language, reflecting no doubt the cultic background to the psalm's composition; but the formulaic language is of such a kind that there must inevitably be uncertainty as to the extent to which the psalm's language may be used for interpreting the specific background and setting of the prayer. The following formulaic expressions should be noted (based on Culley's tables in *Oral Formulaic Language in the Biblical Psalms*, 35-96): (1) v 7 (see 64:2 and 141:1); (2) v 9a (see 102:3 and 143:7); (3) v 9d-e (see 38:22); (4) v 11a (see 86:11 and 119:33); (5) v 11b-c (see 5:9); (6) v 12 (see 41:3); (7) v 14a, c (see 37:34) and (8) v 14b (see 31:25).

The movement of the prayer is from the general to the particular; the general opening petitions (vv 7-10) culminate in two particular requests in vv 11-12. The general petitions express the psalmist's determination to seek God's face, as he had done in the past (vv 8-9a); but the determination is modified by the recognition that a divine answer would be an act of graciousness (v 7b) and that the petitioner's qualifications (moral and otherwise) might result in God's turning from him in anger (v 9b-c). It is thus a prayer of determination, modified by humility and a sense of unworthiness. But the psalmist also conveys clearly that there is none other than God to whom he can turn. His parents have forsaken him (v 10a); the expression should not be interpreted literally, but should be understood in terms of the king's role as God's son (see Ps 2:7). Thus, the Lord functions as a parent to the king, and the petition is based in part on the intimacy of that relationship (v 10b).

The first of the two specific petitions (v 11) is to be instructed to walk in God's way. If, as has been suggested above, the specific setting of the liturgy was the celebration of an anniversary of the royal coronation, the words may

contain the king's request to be kept firmly to his royal role and task (cf. Deut 17:14-20). To carry out his royal task, however, the king required freedom from the oppression of enemies, and so the second specific petition is closely related to the first; the king prays to be delivered from opponents. It is difficult to be certain whether precise significance should be given to the description of the opponents as "false and violent witnesses," or whether the language simply refers to the clamorous nature of the enemies (cf. Ps 2:1-3). If the language has precise significance, it may be that the background is to be found in a treaty or covenant. As a king in the context of international affairs, the king may have had imposed upon him treaties demanding his subservience to foreign powers; as a king in the covenant tradition of David, he could have allegiance only to God. The commitment to God in covenant could be perceived as a treacherous act by foreign nations, who sought to control the king as a vassal; thus, in poetic language, they are described as witnesses, giving evidence in court concerning the king's breach of treaty obligations. And their words of witness contain within them the threat of violence; from such violence, the king prayed for protection. On the treaty-covenant tension in the military setting of the Hebrew monarchy, see further Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*, 69-70.

The prayer concludes (v 13) with a statement of confidence. Looking to the future, which held in store another year of battle and the problems of ruling a nation, the king is confident that he will survive and continue to see God's goodness. "The land of the living" means no more than the king would survive the attacks of his enemies and still be alive to see God's goodness in this life. It is going beyond the plain meaning of the text to perceive here (as does Dahood, *Psalms I*, 170) a reference to the afterlife; such a view would be anachronistic in the context of Hebrew theology during the monarchy.

A response (27:14). The last words were declared to the king by a priest or temple servant. The words are an answer to the prayer, not merely an injunction to wait for an answer. The answer, in other words, is to wait constantly for the Lord, because he would respond in the future as each crisis and need appeared. The intervening words ("be strong . . . be bold") are also a part of the answer and recall the words of Moses to Joshua at the time when the leadership in the covenant community was being transferred to Joshua (cf. Deut 31:7). Joshua was to be strong and bold because the Lord was definitely going to give him success in the conquest of the Promised Land. Likewise, the king was to be strong and bold, because he would receive the divine aid in ruling his country and conquering his enemies.

Explanation

If it is correct that background to this liturgical psalm is to be found in a royal event such as the anniversary of a coronation, then the psalm provides considerable insight into the continuity required throughout the reign of a monarch in the tradition of the Davidic Covenant. There was a sense in which that covenant was eternal (2 Sam 7:16), yet it was also renewed in the coronation of every new monarch. And within the reign of each king, the covenant

tradition was susceptible to two dangers. From within, there was the danger that the king would forget his covenant obligations and wander from the divinely prescribed path. From without, there was the danger posed by foreign powers; their military threat hung not only over the life of a particular monarch, but also over the continuity of the royal covenant tradition.

Within the kingdom, there were certain structures established to preserve the self-conscious awareness, in the person of the king, of the nature of the covenant tradition. The king would not depart for war without first consulting God and offering sacrifice and prayer. And he would annually renew his coronation commitments, in which the role of his reign was clearly enunciated. It is on this context that the psalm sheds light. It begins with a declaration of confidence, entirely appropriate from the mouth of the king whose throne was established in perpetuity by divine fiat. The statement of confidence is by nature a statement of humility; the words of its proclamation undermined that most dangerous and subtle of attitudes in a person endowed with considerable influence and power, namely the arrogance of self-confidence. The single-minded request of the king, to dwell permanently in God's presence, ensured the proper exercise of his dominion, namely the awareness that he who reigned was also ruled.

But the strength and success of a good monarch in each year of his reign was not rooted only in a conviction about the permanent nature of his dynasty; it was also rooted in a living and constant relationship with the Lord of the royal covenant. Thus the declaration of the opening part of the liturgy moves to the prayer of the second part of the liturgy, and the fitting confidence is transformed into an urgent plea for divine aid in the immediate future. The prayer is answered, partly because it is legitimate within the framework of the covenant, and partly because it is offered humbly in a son's awareness of his need for his father's help.

A Liturgy of Supplication (28:1-9)

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Translation

¹ Of David.

O Lord, I call out to you. (3+3)

O my Rock, do not turn a deaf ear to me,
lest, if you are silent to me,^a (2+3)

I should become like those who go down to the pit.

² Hear the voice of my supplications,
when I cry to you for help, (3+2)