

Israel's Place in the Plan of God
 The Songs of Ascent, Psalms 120—134
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Psalm 128

Israel's Rehabilitation In The Land Of The Fathers

1. Blessed is everyone that feareth Jehovah, That walketh in his ways.
2. For thou shalt eat the labor of thy hands: Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.
3. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine, in the innermost parts of thy house;
 Thy children like olive plants round about thy table.
4. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed that feareth Jehovah.
5. Jehovah bless thee out of Zion: And see thou the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life.
6. Yea, see thou thy children's children. Peace be upon Israel.

Psalm 128, like all of the Songs of Ascents, focuses attention on Israel's restoration to fellowship with Jehovah and rehabilitation in the land of the fathers. It begins with the following prayer: "Blessed is every one that feareth Jehovah, that walketh in his ways." This pronouncement pertains to material blessings.

Untold blessings were promised to Israel when he came out of Egypt if only he would be faithful and true to God. At Sinai God made wonderful and unparalleled promises to the nation if only it as a group would be faithful and true to Him. On this point one should study carefully Exodus, chapter 23:20-33. This promise was given at Mount Sinai and means exactly what it says. Palestine would have been a modern Utopia, "Paradise Regained," if only the people had hearkened to the voice of God.

One should note the promise that is found in verse 25 of this chapter: "I will take sickness away from the midst of thee." This promise means that God would not allow any sickness to break out among His people had they been faithful to Him.

Moreover, He would have driven out all the Canaanites and would have given them their land in absolute possession.

When the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month of the second year of the Exodus, God spoke the contents of the Book of Leviticus to Israel from the door of the tent of meeting (Leviticus 1:1ff.).

Leviticus, chapter 26, gives an outline of the course of Israel's history through the centuries as it would be and as facts and records of the past show that it has been. In the first thirteen verses of that chapter, however, the Lord promised marvelous things to the nation upon the condition that it would be obedient to Him. For instance, He promised the rains in the proper seasons, bumper crops, and exemption from attack by foreign hostile powers. These promises are so very far-reaching and all-inclusive that nothing that pertained to the physical, material, and the spiritual welfare of the people was overlooked.

At the end of the wilderness wanderings, when Israel was encamped in the Plains of Moab, east of the Jordan, the Lord reiterated the promises found in Leviticus, chapter 26, and Deuteronomy, chapter 28,

the first sixteen verses of which also tell of the marvelous things God would do for Israel if only the nation would be faithful and true to Him.

But the historical records show that Israel constantly lapsed into idolatry, plunging deeper and deeper into sin. Then God was forced by the existing conditions to bring some judgment upon the nation. Finally, He had to spew the people out of the land and scatter them among the nations of the world, because of their sins. That for which they were finally, in A.D. 70, expelled from the land and scattered among the nations, was their rejection of their longed-for Messiah, whom they did not know, and whom they blindly rejected.

Promise To The Godly Israelites

In the first four verses of Psalm 128 we find the promise that God makes to the faithful, godly Israelites. Every one who fears God, worships Him, and walks in His ways is blessed. The promise of being blessed does not necessarily include the acquisition of great wealth. In fact, wealth very frequently constitutes a curse to man instead of being a blessing.

According to verse 2, the one who thus is a worshiper of God and is walking daily with Him shall eat of the fruit of his own labors. He shall be happy and all will be well with him. This promise does not mean that he will never have any sorrow, trouble, heartache, disappointments, and persecution. As a matter of fact, all who will live godly and walk with the Lord shall suffer persecution (II Tim. 3:12). Concerning that proposition there can be no doubt, but everything that comes into the life of the faithful servant of God will be touched by the hand of God's blessing and made to contribute to the welfare of such a one—both temporary and eternal (Rom. 8:28).

The Lord promises that the man who is just, a worshiper of Him, and who walks daily with God, shall have a wife who will prove a blessing to him (vs. 3). She will be fruitful, according to the command that God gave in Genesis 1:27ff. The barrenness of a Hebrew woman was considered a curse from God. The ideal Hebrew woman is set forth in Proverbs 31:10ff. The children who are born into such a home are promised to become "like olive plants round about thy table." This beautiful simile sets forth very graphically the type of children born of such parents and reared under such circumstances—in a spiritual, godly environment.

"Behold, thus shall the man be blessed that feareth Jehovah." Such are the promises that God made to the individual Hebrews who would walk by faith with Him daily.

Promises To Be Fulfilled In The Great Kingdom Age

As stated above, the land of Palestine would have been a modern Utopia, or "Paradise Regained," had Israel only been obedient to God; but, since he has not been, blood, sweat, and tears have through the centuries been the portion of the Chosen People. They have been cast out of their land and have been scattered among the nations. When, however, Israel, in genuine repentance and with an unswerving faith, acknowledges the national sin—repudiating it before the world—and pleads for the Messiah to return, He will do so. When Israel does this, the long-rejected Messiah will return, lift the curse from the earth, bind Satan and all the evil spirits (putting them where they cannot influence humanity), and will take the reins of government in His own hands, reigning in righteousness over all the world. Then those ideal conditions that were in Eden originally, before the Fall, will become the universal rule throughout the

entire earth. A beautiful picture of the ideal conditions that will exist at that time is given to us in Isaiah 65:17-25. Thus paradise will be regained for all peoples.

A Closing Prayer

In Psalm 128:5,6 the inspired writer prays God's blessings upon the reader. Probably as the spokesman for the priesthood in actual life, he prays for the individual Israelite who comes to him, in obedience to the priestly command and petition of Numbers 6:22-26.

This petition, "Jehovah bless thee out of Zion ..." (vs. 5), assumes that Jehovah will be in Zion in the future, and that He will from there bless the individual who thus comes to Him, worships Him, and walks in His way. Jehovah dwelt—at least symbolically—in the Temple in Jerusalem in the form of the Presence of the Shekinah of Glory. Thus the faithful Israelite thought of God's sending forth His blessing upon them out of Zion.

This same petition is offered in different words in the parallel statement: "And see thou the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life." There were unexcelled privileges and advantages at Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish nation that were not to be found anywhere else in the whole land. Of course, when the king and the priesthood became corrupt, the good did not flow from Jerusalem as it did under normal conditions. The writer, knowing the blessings of the worship of God, prayed that the good of Jerusalem might be the portion of the individual Israelite.

Moreover, the psalmist prays for God's blessings to be upon the children and upon their children's children (vs. 6). The prayers of godly parents in behalf of their children and their grandchildren—when they are offered by men and women who really know God—do not go unheeded. Oh, that parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents would pray in behalf of their posterity!

"Peace Be Upon Israel"

The peace of God will descend upon Israel when he returns from his rejection of the Messiah, acknowledges and repudiates his national sin, and pleads for him to return. Then—and then only—will peace come to Israel and to the world (Hosea 5:14-6:3). Let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem and do what we can to bring about this blessed result. (Ps. 122:6).

Draw nigh, draw nigh, Immanuel,
 And ransom captive Israel,
 That mourns in lonely exile here,
 Until the Son of God appear.
 Draw nigh, draw nigh, O David's Key,
 The heavenly gate unfolds to thee;
 Make safe the way that leads on high,
 And close the path to misery.
 Draw nigh, draw nigh, O Lord of might,
 Who once, from Sinai's flaming height
 Didst give the trembling tribes Thy law,

In cloud, and majesty, and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!"