

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF PSALM 127

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Proper exegetical study of Psalm 127 is often clouded by unnecessary baggage. Presuppositions have torn this psalm away from its historical situation. These presuppositions hindered the understanding of the psalm and the resolution of specific problems in the psalm.

By way of a contextual analysis that is confirmed and developed through an exegetical study of this psalm, a proper focus for exegetical study can be achieved. The Hebrew text is clear of any textual difficulties. It is the LXX that has created textual difficulties which can be cleared up by proper exegesis. This wisdom psalm is composed of two aphorisms that are unified in one psalm. These two aphorisms or proverbs seek to describe and prescribe the way to achieve the good life. The psalm evidences a eudaemonistic or prudential wisdom flavor. The *Sitz im Leben* is probably seen in the pilgrimages of the Israelite to the annual feasts in Jerusalem. The authorship and date are tied together. The trustworthiness of the psalm titles, the nature of wisdom literature, and biblical evidence point to a Solomonic authorship and a date around 971-941 B.C. It is important to note that wisdom literature does not indicate lateness.

The dictum of Yahweh's sovereignty is spelled out in verses 1-2. If the activity of life providing shelter and security is done without acknowledgement of Yahweh in the attitude of the worker, the thing which is done is evil. **אִשׁוֹ** speaks primarily of wickedness, that which is done against the will of God. The dictum of God also speaks to the livelihood of man. The life that stretches that day beyond normal limits because of anxiety or licentiousness is declared evil. **אִשְׁנָא** means sleep as traditionally understood, is the reward of the diligent worker (Ecc 5:18-6:2). Because of the literary device used, it is unnecessary to seek other meanings for the word **אִשְׁנָא**. The blessing of Yahweh is spelled out in verses 3-5. The themes began in verse one tie in the second proverb. Sons become a heritage of earthly parents who are like arrows to be used by the mighty warrior. In time of need the father can depend on them for support against unfair judiciary practice in the city gate.

The beauty of the psalm is not only in the meaning of it, but the literary production is truly superb. Many types of parallelism are used along with verbal figures that tie the psalm together and guide one in the understanding of the semantical aspects of the psalm.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ANE	Ancient Near East
<i>ANET</i>	J. B. Pritchard, ed., <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia hebraica stuttgartensia</i>
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
GKC	E. Kautzsch, A. E. Cowley, <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JANESCU</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
LXX	Septuagint
MSS	Manuscripts
MT	Massoretic Text
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In a few terse verses, Psalm 127 delineates the spectrum of God's sovereignty--a spectrum that moves from the realm of judgment to the realm of blessing. The verses which open up this spectrum are superficially familiar to many. They present simple truths that are often used without consideration for the context from which they come. Consequently, the literary beauty and total impact of the psalm are lost.

The psalm is not a difficult one. Yet, there are problems in it that perplex interpreters. The unity of the psalm and the final colon of verse two are problematic areas of this psalm.¹ It is usually the latter problem which draws the most attention. Apart from these two areas of concern the psalm has not been inundated with serious study. Not only does the psalm speak of tremendous theological truths, but, it also provides a sphere in which to see the literary hand of a poet at work. Both of these areas tease the interpreter for further study. Above all of these, the canonicity of the psalm is a major factor for the pursuit of study. It is part of God's word which reveals God and any

¹Patrick D. Miller, "Psalm 127--The House that Yahweh Builds," *JSOT* (1982):119.

study in which one's knowledge of God is expanded is worthwhile (2 Tim 3:16).

The purpose of this thesis is to exegetically understand this psalm as a basis for valid application for the modern day believer. In order to accomplish this goal, introductory matters must be dealt with such as the *Gattung*, *Sitz im Leben*, structure, authorship, and date; an exegetical study of the verses must be undertaken; and finally the application of the psalm is necessary.

CHAPTER I

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The matters dealt with in this chapter should not be viewed apart from the exegetical study. These matters are derived from and confirmed by exegetical study. They are presented here prior to the exegetical study proper to alleviate some unnecessary baggage from the exegetical study and to provide a proper focus for the study.

Textual Critical Note

The text of Psalm 127 is not problematic as it relates to the Hebrew text. The MT is substantiated by the Qumran materials. The Qumran texts are filled with many lacunae in regards to Psalm 127, but what is found agrees with the MT.¹ The LXX, however, presents some problems.

¹J. A. Sanders, *The Dead Sea Psalm Scroll* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 40-41. Cf. John M. Allegro, *Qumran Cave 4, DJD* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 51-52 and D. Barthelemy and J. T. Milik, *Qumran Cave 1, DJD* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 71. It should be observed that an orthographic variant exists between the two texts. The Qumran text uses a *waw* instead of the *holem*. Comments on this variant can be found in David Noel Freedman, "The Massoretic Text and the Qumran Scrolls: A Study in Orthography," in *Textus*, vol. 2, edited by C. Raben (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1962), pp. 87-102. This difference supports the text rather than detracts from it. Even though the Essene scribes decided to adapt the plenary spelling, this did not change the meaning. Furthermore, it shows the scribes were willing to change the text, but they did not

There are a number of variants which appear to be misunderstandings of the MT or interpretations of the MT. These differences will be brought to light in the next chapter. The outcome of these variants will be readily seen as the meaning of the psalm is unfolded.

Gattung

The *Gattung* of Psalm 127 has been generally classified as a wisdom psalm.¹ Yet, there are some who see wisdom influence but are unwilling to classify it as a wisdom psalm.² Walter Kaiser has compiled two lists from various authorities which delineate the distinctive style and themes of wisdom psalms.³ Using these lists one can readily identify Psalm 127 as a wisdom psalm. Drawing from the list of stylistic distinctives, Psalm 127 evidences a few of these distinctives: (1) A "blessed" saying (אַשְׁרֵי) is used in verse five; (2) A comparison is found in verse four; (3) Admonitions are accounted for in verses one and two; (4) The

where many recent scholars would do so. This would support the earlier text.

¹A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, in *New Century Bible* (London: Oliphants, 1972), p. 866. Artur Weiser, *The Psalms* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 764.

²Roland E. Murphy, "A Consideration of the Classification 'Wisdom Psalms,'" in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, edited by James L. Crenshaw (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1976), p. 464.

³*Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), pp. 165-66.

use of wisdom vocabulary such as "vanity" and "sons";¹ (5)

The employment of proverbs of which this psalm is composed.²

Westermann amplifies this proverbial idea with these comments,

These three 'psalms (127:1-2; 127:3-5; 133)' could appear in the book of Proverbs without changing a word, and no one would imagine that they were supposed to be psalms.³

The use of thematic criteria according to Kaiser would classify this psalm as a wisdom psalm.⁴ Themes such as "the contrast between the 'rasha ' and 'saddiq '" and "practical advice as regards conduct" find expression in this psalm.⁵

The literary form associated with "wisdom literature" can also be broken down into different styles. Psalm 127 would fall into the didactic genre.⁶ C. Hassell Bullock would group this psalm with the "lower" wisdom contained in the Old Testament. This lower wisdom would be contrasted

¹James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), p. 184.

²Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message*, translated by Ralph D. Gehrke (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House), p. 115.

³Ibid.

⁴Kaiser, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 166.

⁵Murphy, "A Consideration," p. 460. Also cf. Pius Drijvers, *The Psalms: Their Structure and Meaning* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), p. 230.

⁶Leupold Sabourin, *The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning*, vol. 2 (New York: Alba House, 1969), p. 257.

with the "higher" wisdom such as the book of Job.¹ Higher wisdom is reflective. It takes an issue and probes it from various angles.² Lower wisdom is more eudaemonistic in nature. It seeks to "describe and prescribe the way to achieve the good life,"³ which would include moral obligations.⁴ Walter Kaiser notes that this psalm falls into a "prudential type of wisdom writing consisting of smaller units of thought which are disconnected and often isolated contextually."⁵

Clarifying the *Gattung* of this psalm helps in understanding it. Being a wisdom psalm, it mingles the religious expression of the individual (i.e. a psalm)⁶ and the means to live life skillfully (i.e. wisdom)⁷ with the goal of instruction (i.e. didactic). Its eudaemonistic motif is developed and defined in the content of the psalm which will be explored in the next chapter.

Horace D. Hummel gives an appropriate perspective on

¹*An Introduction to the Poetic Books of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), p. 140.

²*Ibid.*, p. 25.

³*Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁴Kaiser, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 178.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁶Cf. John J. Davis, "The Psalms: Studies in the Hebrew Text" (Winona Lake, IN: Grace Theological Seminary, 1977), p. 3.

⁷Cf. Bruce K. Waltke, *Understanding the Old Testament: A Syllabus* (Grand Rapids: Outreach, Inc., 1976), pp. 29-30.

the role of wisdom literature.

In a word, the main dogmatic category for properly approaching wisdom is the 'third use of the Law.' It represents an alternate mode of expression and type of approach to the illustration of faithful living found in the 'legal' sections of the Pentateuch, and thoroughly harmonious and compatible with it. It concentrates on those aspects of living which the believer shares with all men, and where the motivations or any uniqueness will often be unapparent to men.¹

Sitz im Leben

Roland E. Murphy is correct when he states, "All things considered, however, it must be admitted that the precise life setting of these poems [wisdom psalms] eludes us."² He speaks of the original setting of composition. But perhaps some light can be shed if the *Sitz im Leben* is expanded to include the use of the psalm.

The first hint of the possible use of the Psalm is found in the inscription of the Psalm **שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת**. Psalm 127 falls into a group of fifteen psalms (120-134) which contains this same inscription. The meaning of **שִׁיר** is not disputed. The meaning BDB assigns to it is "song"³ and there is no reason to doubt this meaning.⁴ Doubt arises, however, in regards to **הַמַּעֲלוֹת**. It is often translated "degrees,"

¹*The Word Becoming Flesh* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), p. 396.

²Murphy, "A Consideration," p. 461.

³P. 1010.

⁴Weston W. Fields, "Solomon's Most Excellent Song" (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological seminary, 1979), p. 14.

"ascents," or "goings up."¹ These meanings are within the lexical range suggested by BDB.²

An extended treatment of this subject is beyond the scope of this thesis. Cuthbert C. Keet's work, *A Study of the Psalms of Ascents*, overviews this subject and is beneficial for a more indepth study.³ Of the various views, four explanations have possibilities: (1) This particular term denotes a peculiar rhythmical structure of these psalms; (2) The psalms were sung upon the fifteen steps leading from the court of the men to the court of the women; (3) These psalms were sung by exiles on their return from Babylon; (4) These fifteen songs were sung by the pilgrims as they went up to Jerusalem for the three great annual feasts (Ex 23:17; Deut 16:16; 1 Kgs 12:28).⁴

The fourth view is the generally accepted view today, but is far from being unrefutable. Adopting this view would suggest a cultic use of Psalm 127. Mowinckel suggests that Psalm 127 be included with those psalms that appear to be

¹A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Fincastle, VA: Scripture Truth, n.d.), p. xxviii.

²P. 752. The root can be traced to עלה which adds further dimension to the meaning.

³(Greenwood, SC: The Attic Press, 1969), pp. 1-17.

⁴J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (George Bell and Sons, 1.878; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), pp. 87-88.

non-cultic.¹ Furthermore, Mowinckel denies the possibility of any of these fifteen psalms being associated with "pilgrimages."² The content of Psalm 127 implies the acknowledgement of Yahweh as supreme and would not be difficult to see this psalm being sung by the pilgrims as they journeyed to the temple to worship their sovereign God.

The second hint is contained in the phrase **לְשִׁלְמָה**.

This phrase will be discussed more completely in the following section. But some of its ramifications can be pursued here. Accepting the validity of this expression, it would not be difficult to see this psalm composed for or by Solomon to remind him in his activities³ that God is the ultimate builder. Another situation in which this psalm might have been composed is for the use in scribal schools. Solomon might have developed schools to train his nobles in the way of Yahweh to counteract the secular teachings in which they were also trained.⁴

In summary, the *Sitz im Leben* is not readily obtainable. However, the suggested situations, if retained, would

¹Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. by D. R. Ap-Thomas (New York: Abingdon Press, 1967), vol. 1, p. 111.

²Ibid., p. 209.

³See 1 Kings 9:10-26.

⁴Barry D. Halvorsen, "Scribes and Scribal Schools in the Ancient Near East: A Historical Survey" (Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, May 1981), pp. 149ff.

not present any serious objections by the writer to elucidate the setting of the psalm.

Structure

Unity of Psalm 127

Diverse opinion exists on the unity of this psalm. Some hold that this psalm is actually two separate psalms and must be treated as such.¹ Others see the psalm as unified but made up of two original psalm fragments.² A third view is that the psalm is an original unified psalm composed of two aphorisms.³

Three avenues can be used to bolster the unity of this psalm. First the thematic aspect of the psalm undergirds its unity. Both proverbial sayings speak of the sovereign nature of God. He is the one who determines what is worthwhile (v. 1) and He is the one who decides to give reward (v. 3). Other variations of this theme are seen underlying the two sections of this psalm. Kidner states, "Both parts proclaim that only what is from God is truly strong."⁴ Scroggie sees "the underlying thought throughout

¹E.g. Charles Briggs, *The Book of Psalms*, vol. 1, 2, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 458.

²W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: S. P. C. K., 1962), p. 517.

³A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, in New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1972).

⁴Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), p. 441.

is the uselessness of all human effort which does not rely on the will, power, and goodness of the Lord."¹

Second, the literary and semantic expressions bond the psalm together. From the literary vantage point, Mitchell Dahood observes,

the alliteration of 'b' sounds in vs. 1a, *yibneh bayit* . . . *bonayw bo* is echoed by vs. 5b, *yebosu* . . . *y^edabberu* . . . '*oyebim bassa.'ar*; and the repetition of 's' (=sh) sounds in vs. 1b, *yismor* . . . *saw' saqad somer* recurs in vs. 5a, '*asre* . . . '*ser* . . . *aspato*.²

Semantically, there are a number of subtle attractions that hold the psalm together. In verse one the city is mentioned which creates a semantic bond with verse five which speaks of the gate of the city.³ This member-class relation shows off the *inclusio* technique of Hebrew poetry. Another semantic bond between the two sayings is the concept behind the words יָיָן (v. 2) and שָׁכַר/נִחֲלָה (v. 3). Yahweh is one who possesses something to give. Another connection is seen in the ideas of "house" and "sons." It is in the house that sons are born and reared. It is only natural to see these concepts as associated.

Conceivably, the best treatment on the unity of this psalm is found in Patrick D. Miller's article. He brings

¹William Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms* (London: Pickering and Inglis Ltd., 1948), p. 245.

²*Psalms*, vol. 3, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1970), pp. 222-23.

³*Ibid.*, p. 222.

together both the thematic and semantic avenues when he so appropriately says,

Placing this picture or these verses (3-5) following verses 1-2 leads to a hearing and understanding of the second part of the Psalm in the light of the first. One does not enjoy sons as blessing unless the 'house' that is built in and through them is built by and under the Lord. The *banah-banim* connection holds together the two parts of the Psalm in a single hold. But the admonition of the first part has moved to a positive assurance and declaration. The transition is in the final colon of verse 2 which clearly belongs to the first part of the Psalm but anticipates the second part by the moving from speaking of Yahweh's gift (*natan*), which is the subject of the second part of the psalm and indicated immediately by referring to children as *nah^alat yhw^h* and *sakar*. When Abraham hears from Yahweh that his *sakar* will be very great, he asks: 'What will you give me seeing that I go childless?' The *banim* like the *sena'* are activities under Yahweh's direction. That gift is a rich blessing for those who receive it.¹

A very striking feature of this psalm is the literary schematic. Observing some of the key terms in the text, an interesting pattern unfolds. Beginning with verse one, the word pair house/city opens up the Psalm. **בֵּית** lies in the first line of the first proverb. Its semantic relative **בָּנִים** also lies in the first line of the second proverb. The author is tying the two sayings together. Following this same rationale, **עֵיר** appears in the second line but cannot be divorced from the word pair, so that its position cannot be secondary to **בֵּית**. Its semantic cousin is found in the last line of the second saying and of the entire psalm. It seems that the following aphorism is controlled and contained by

¹Miller, "The House," pp. 127-28.

the first verse. Continuing this analysis with the last line of the first proverb, the verb **יָחַד** appears. But its semantic friends appear in the first line of the second saying, again tying the two aphorisms physically together.¹

A third avenue that strengthens the homogeneity is Psalm 128. It was no accident that Psalm 128 was juxtaposed to Psalm 127. Their content is very similar. Their juxtaposition provides insight into the meaning of Psalm 127 and specifically into its unity. Verses 2-3 of Psalm 128 incorporate similar motifs as in Psalm 127. **בְּיָת** and **בְּנִים** are combined in Psalm 128 showing the compatibility of the two strophes in Psalm 127. Enlarging the thematic field in Psalm 128 we see the activity of man (v. 2), the city of Jerusalem (v. 2), and the blessing of Yahweh (v. 5) all intermingled which demonstrates the feasibility of the unity of Psalm 127.²

Moving outside the biblical sphere, additional material can be found to support the apparent divergent themes in Psalm 127. There are a few ANE hymns that combine the thoughts of "houses," "cities," and "sons (or children)." It should be noted that examples of these hymns do not place these ideas side by side, yet, they are in the same hymn showing they can be tied together.

¹See Appendix I for physical layout.

²Cf. Miller, "The House," p. 128.

Miller points out a Sumerian hymn for the goddess Nisaba that uses the notions of divine involvement in the activities of building houses¹ and cities and the giving of fertility to the womb.² Another example that reminds its recipients that deity is involved in the building of houses and involved in the lives of children is the Hittite "Ritual for the Erection of a House." Again one should note the interlude between the mention of house³ and children.

In conclusion, there is a strong foundation for the unity of the psalm. The underlying themes, the literary and semantic facets, the relationship with Psalm 128, and the ANE material all provide sure footings for the unity of the Psalm. However, orthodoxy will not be questioned if the unity of the psalm is denied, unless the prevailing motives are less than orthodox. Breaking the psalm apart destroys the beauty of thought which permeates the two strophes.

Outline of Psalm 127

Outlines are good for seeing the overall picture of literary pieces. Although, many times they fail to allow one to see the delicate inner workings of the composition. This outline is offered to see the gross structure of the

¹"House" is missing in this text, but noting other hymns of similar nature allows house to be inserted.

²Miller, "The House," pp. 121-22.

³"House" is used cultically, referring to the temple and is translated "temple."

Psalm and to help show how the Psalm flows together.

Theme: The Sovereign Activity of God

I. The Dictum of Sovereignty (vv. 1-2)

A. The Dictum on Shelter (v. 1)

B. The Dictum on Livelihood (v. 2)

II. The Blessing of Sovereignty (vv. 3-5)

A. The Definition of Blessing (vv. 3-4)

B. The Result of Blessing (v. 5)

Authorship and Date

In this psalm the authorship and date are inter-related. Both issues simultaneously confirm or deny each other. Therefore it is not profitable to isolate the two, but rather allow each to speak in harmony on the specific items of discussion. Three lines of reasoning are foundational to the solution of authorship and date.

Psalm Titles

The first line of reasoning centers on the general subject of the psalm titles. If the psalm titles are reliable, this conclusion will bolster the significance of **לְשִׁמְחָה** in Psalm 127. The response to the headings has been primarily from two directions. First, the titles are considered late and unreliable.¹ Second, they are reliable historically

¹Mowinckel, *Israel's Worship*, p. 103.

and of value.¹ A third mediating position also exists. This position regards the headings as preserving certain Jewish traditions. These traditions will fluctuate as to their trustworthiness.² This issue is not within the scope of this thesis. However, in summary, four arguments can be briefly stated to show the credibility of the headings.

1. There is Biblical evidence that David was a sacred poet (Amos 6:5; Ezra 3:10; Neh 12:24; 1 Chr 6:31; 16:7).
2. An inductive study of Psalm 90 shows Mosaic authorship.
3. There are evidences from Ugaritic and the Ras Shamra that Psalms are not post-exilic, but early.
4. The witness of Christ and the Apostles to the Psalms confirms the titles' information.³

These four pieces of rationale demonstrate select psalm rubrics as reliable. Consequently, if these specific superscriptions are historically accurate, then there is reason

¹Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), pp. 443-45.

²R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), pp. 897-903. Also cf. Christoph Barth, *Introduction to the Psalms* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 6.

³Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Psalms: A Syllabus* (Grand Rapids: Outreach, Inc., 1972), p. 8. Also see Gleason Archer, *Old Testament Survey*, pp. 443-45.

to see other titles as being accurate. In turn, Psalm 127's preface can be of value for resolving the authorship of the Psalm.

Wisdom Literature

The second line of reasoning revolves around the nature of the Psalm. It was concluded that Psalm 127 belongs to the family of wisdom literature. This conclusion will have a bearing on the question of authorship. This second point deals with time periods. It has been held that wisdom literature arrived on the Israelite scene rather late.¹ Perhaps the earliest date would be put in Hezekiah's time around the eighth century according to critical opinion.² These late dates are attributed to the theory of evolutionary development of the Israelite's religion which was initiated by Wellhausen. As this theory relates to the psalm under study, this particular psalm would fall into the category of "learned psalmography."³ Briefly what this jargon says is that Psalm 127 is very late. Psalm 127 is non-cultic but demonstrates a literary link with the other

¹Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), p. 25.

²R. B. Y. Scott, "Solomon and the Beginnings of Wisdom in Israel," in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, edited by James L. Crenshaw (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1976), p. 101.

³Sigmund Mowinckel, "Psalms and Wisdom," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, edited by M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), p. 206.

cultic psalms. Whereby Psalm 127 is a piece of literature that was produced by scribes that learned poetic composition from the preceding poetic material of the former cultic era. Furthermore, the wisdom style which was late, probably later than the cultic origin of the psalms, gives evidence of a learned trait employed in the writing of psalms.¹ Consequently, the conclusion reached through this type of rationale is that "the headings 'by David,' 'by Moses,' 'by Solomon' tell us nothing, therefore, of the real authors."²

In essence, what the preceding has said is that because of the wisdom element, Psalm 127 cannot be dated early and the heading "by Solomon" is not credible because of its early historical allusions. Now the question must be asked, does Psalm 127 need to be dated late because of the wisdom element? In answering this question, another question needs to be answered, Does wisdom literature need to be dated late? The answer to this question is no. Yielding to the limits of this paper a laconic ratiocination can be given to support this answer.

Before building a proper foundation to support the superstructure of an early date, some debris needs to be cleared away. An examination is needed of the infrastructure of the opposing position so that the benefits of it

¹Cf. Mowinckel, "Psalms and Wisdom," pp. 205-8, pp. 213-17; and *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, pp. 95-103.

²Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, p. 103.

will not be hindered by the shortcomings. In this investigation, data from the study of the psalms and of wisdom literature will be used. These two areas are related from a literary standpoint and from a methodological standpoint. Also both areas relate to the present study of Psalm 127.

The basal case for the lateness of wisdom literature rests in the viewpoint of Scripture. Comments such as, "was based partly on folk tales and the writer's fancy"¹ and "the romantic and fanciful elements"² reflect two writers' opinions of the account of Solomon's literary achievements in Scripture. But more importantly they indicate the appraisal of Scripture. Without the acceptance of the soundness of the Word, one can follow his own inclinations or those of others and formulate his own hypothesis.

Without this control the second level in the infrastructure can be easily exposed. Those writers in the wisdom movement recognized the importance of Mowinckel's work. But much of Mowinckel's work is based upon the subjective element. He says, "the age of an individual psalm must be decided on 'internal grounds,' from what may be more or less clearly read out of it . . . !"³ As seen before, any

¹R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1941), p. 383.

²Roland E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature and Psalms* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), p. 17.

³Mowinckel, "Psalms in Israel," p. 153.

historical allusions (i.e. psalm titles) are disregarded unless they fit in one's system. This is what is done with the writings associated with Solomon. Even though Solomon is mentioned in a book, for example Proverbs, Solomon's potential authorship is disregarded because of the preconceived notion of the origin of wisdom.¹

This preconceived notion leads into a third substratum of a late date for wisdom literature. Mowinckel delimits the use of internal grounds by stating that due regard is given to ". . . what is otherwise known to us about the spiritual and religious history and state of Israel at different times."² The interrogative that naturally comes to mind is, What is known? In discussing the origins of Wisdom literature, Roland Murphy suggests a couple³ and then makes this comment, "How does one 'prove' that these are the likely origins? There are no sources that uncover this for us. These [suggested origins] are only inferences, but not unreasonable ones."⁴ The point here is that like Murphy, others seek elsewhere, ignoring the data in the Scriptures. So, apart from Scripture, what

¹See: R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs-Ecclesiastes*, in AB, (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965), pp. 10-13.

²Mowinckel, op. cit.

³He suggests the family or tribe and the court school.

⁴Murphy, "Wisdom Literature," p. 18.

is known? Israel's religion developed in lineal fashion, from the primitive to the sophisticated, the Wellhausen approach. So just as Mowinckel will not admit that all but a grudging few are post-Davidic because the cult was not matured until the Solomonic temple,¹ at which time there was reason to put the psalms into literary form. Most of those who late date the wisdom materials do so because Israel at an early period was not capable of such literary thought.²

In transition the denial of Scripture has opened up the imagination of scholars to develop models of origin which are losing ground to recent Biblical research--research that is confirming the veracity of Scripture.

Derek Kidner in his commentary on the book of Proverbs summarizes the conservative reaction to the research going on in the area of Wisdom.

. . . A growing knowledge of Egyptian and Babylonian teachings from the millennium before Solomon, and of Phoenician literature from fourteenth century Ugarit (Ras Shamra) had made it clear that the content of Proverbs (whatever the date of its editing) is at home in the world of early Israel rather than post-exilic Judaism, in its thought, vocabulary, style and, often, its metric forms. The idea that the wisdom movement in Israel belonged to the late Persian and early Greek period is seen now to have been 'a curious myth' of our times, and Gunkel's form-criterion (which is belied by these early literatures) a 'strait jacket' too long endured.³

¹Mowinckel, op. cit., p. 152.

²R. B. Y. Scott, "Solomon," p. 266.

³Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, pp. 25-26. Cf. also Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible in its World* (Downers Grove, IL:

Some of these materials that Kidner mentions have been available to some of the most prolific writers on the wisdom movement. R. B. Y. Scott takes note of the Egyptian witness to wisdom literature in 1955 but concludes that Israel was not mature enough to react to this literature.¹ Ten years later, this same author begins to shift in his conclusions. He first stated the improbability of Solomonic usage of wisdom literature, but in 1965 he sees some probability that “ . . . the Wisdom movement flourished at the court of Solomon and under his patronage.”² It seems the conclusions being drawn now could have been drawn earlier, but the attestation was not strong enough to warrant different conclusions.

But both Kidner³ and Scott⁴ were writing about the same time but with seemingly different conclusions. So why the different conclusions? Undoubtedly presuppositions were at the heart of the matter. Scott still seems impressed by the thesis of evolutionary development in the religion of Israel.

Fresh inquiry is confirming an early date for wisdom

Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), pp. 92-107.

¹R. B. Y. Scott, op. cit., p. 266.

²R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs*, p. xxxiii

³Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, copyrighted in 1964.

⁴R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs*, copyrighted in 1965.

literature. With an early acceptable date, one can agree with J. H. Eaton in regards to Psalm 127.

The tentative nature of Mowinckel's identification of such psalms (Pss. 1, 19B, 34, 37, 49, (73), 78, 105, 106, 111, 112, (119), 127) is significant. For the lateness of the psalms in question is far from certain. It is likely that the Wisdom schools were active in the vicinity of the Temple from Solomon's time: Wisdom style can hardly be a proof of lateness.¹

The early date which is attested to by Scripture is now coming into vogue. If Scripture would be given its proper place, heuristic conclusions would cease. Also this early date strengthens the historical significance of the rubric of Psalm 127 and opens up another field of data for the solution of authorship and date, the Scriptures.

Biblical Evidence

This section should be seen in connection with the preceding. Simply because it is labeled "Biblical evidence" does not isolate it as the only line of reasoning demarcated as dealing with the Bible. This division seeks to take the data available in the Psalm itself and compare it with other data in the Scriptures. In other words, letting the Bible speak for itself.

Psalm 127 is attributed by the MT to Solomon. The preliminary issue is the meaning of לְשִׁלְמֹה. This phrase

¹J. H. Eaton, "The Psalms and Israelite Worship," in *Tradition and Interpretation*, edited by G. W. Anderson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

appears in the DSS¹ but not in the majority of LXX mss.² Rahlfs' edition of the LXX contains this superscription.³ There is no question to the lexical meaning of **לְמַנָּה**. It refers to King Solomon (971-941 B.C.).⁴ The enigma is the use of the **ל**. GKC observes the **ל** used in the capacity of *Lamed auctoris*--introduction of author.⁵ He further states that this was a customary idiom of other semitic dialects.⁶ This use has been substantiated by Ugaritic studies.⁷ Grammatically it is permissible to see authorship in this phrase. However, it is possible to see this psalm composed "for" Solomon too.⁸ This is Dahood's preference, who in turn sees this psalm as a royal psalm.⁹ Sequentially, this royal character gives the psalm a pre-exilic date.¹⁰

¹J. A. Sanders, *Psalms Scroll*, p. 40.

²Charles Briggs, *Book of Psalms*, p. 458.

³A. Rahlfs, ed., *Septuagint* (Stuttgart: Wurtembergische Bibleanstalt, 1971), p. 144.

⁴BDB, p. 1024.

⁵GKC, p. 298.

⁶Ibid., p. 420.

⁷Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), p. 92.

⁸Lamed of advantage. See Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976, reprint 1980), p. 48.

⁹Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms*, pp. 222-23. The royal character is seen in the verbal clue, **אֲוִיבִים**, p. xxxviii.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 223.

Apart from this phrase there is no direct statement of authorship. Yet, by comparing this psalm with other Solomonic passages some circumstantial evidence appears for Solomonic authorship.

This evidence encompasses several items. (1) The term "house" in verse one has been referred to as Solomon's temple.¹ (2) The nomina "beloved" in verse two is a reflection of 2 Samuel 12:25 where Solomon was called *יְהוָה יְדָבָר* -- "beloved of Yahweh."² (3) The evidence of Solomon's wisdom (1 Kgs 3:4-28; 2 Chr 1:1-12; 9:1-8, 23). (4) The association of Solomon with extant pieces of wisdom literature (Prov 1:1-6; 10:1; 25:1; Song of Solomon; identification of Koheleth of Eccl as Solomon).³

Most commentaries will acknowledge these pieces of evidence. But the conclusions vary. Some will see these as evidence for authorship,⁴ while others will see them as reasons why Solomon's name is used on this psalm by the Massoretes.⁵

¹A. A. Anderson, *Psalms*, p. 867.

²G. Rawlinson, *Psalms*, in *The Pulpit Commentary* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., n.d.), p. 227.

³Weston W. Fields, "Ecclesiastes: Koheleth's Quest for Life's Meaning" (Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1975), pp. 16-81.

⁴John P. Lange, ed., *Psalms*, in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, trans. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), p. 619.

⁵Delitzsch, F., *Psalms*, in *Commentary on the Old*

The worth of each piece of data varies from one to another. At this point of the thesis, it is not feasible to discuss each one in depth. It is sufficient to state that the evidence of Solomon's use of wisdom is appealing enough to assign the authorship to Solomon.¹ In addition, the activities of Solomon's building program² can be easily seen as the background for verse one. Others have seen the time of Zerubbabel as the setting for the Psalm, during the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem.³

In summary, there is more than enough Biblical evidence to identify the composer of the Psalm as Solomon. This aspect will be admitted by most commentators. It is the Septuagint's lack of לְשִׁלְמֹה and the late date of wisdom literature of the old Testament that prevents most from acknowledging Solomonic authorship. It has been demonstrated sufficiently that the inscription of Psalm 127 is credible and wisdom literature can be dated to Solomon's time. Therefore, the identification of Solomon as author is not hindered. The desire for some to see the Psalm composed "for" Solomon do so for the same reasons as those who deny Solomon's authorship. It will be admitted, that it is

Testament, trans. by James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprint 1975), pp. 295-96.

¹Dahood, *Psalms*, p. 223.

²1 Kings 9:10-26; 2 Chronicles 8.

³F. Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 202.

possible, that the composition was written for Solomon during his life, but it is an unnecessary view.

Consequently, the authorship gives the date of composition. The general time span of Solomon runs from 971-941 B.C. It would probably be safe to date the psalm in the midst of the tenth century B.C. For this would have been the greatest building period of Solomon's rule.

CHAPTER II

EXEGETICAL STUDY PROPER

Introduction

Artur Weiser says in his commentary on Psalm 127,
Since the psalm is couched in general terms it is not possible to assign it to any particular historical situation; it belongs to the timeless world of the proverb.¹

There is truth to what he says, but the logical outcome of his words is that any interpretation of this psalm is permissible within reason. This is the exact opposite of what this section seeks to do. It is correct to say that the timeless factor of the proverb speaks to all ages, but all ages do not interpret the proverb. This chapter seeks to elucidate the meaning of this psalm. By assigning the psalm to Solomon, historical direction is given to the exegetical process. Solomon does speak in general terms, but these terms find meaning in history and culture. It should be remembered that wisdom seeks to deal with life. The activities of one life may be similar to another because of the nature of the activity.

Exegetically, Psalm 127 is not difficult in general. But verse two does perplex the exegete. Also this psalm presents a literary elegance that captivates the exegete

¹Artur Weiser, *Psalms*, p. 764.

tugging for exploration. In order to understand the psalm, to resolve its perplexities, and to digest its literary refinement, a methodology is needed to control the exegetical trek. For the sake of the writer a three pronged plan is to be implemented. Each verse will be dealt with individually but not in isolation. Each verse will be divided as such: (1) grammatical studies; (2) semantical studies; and (3) interpretational summary will bring both avenues together.

Verse One

אִם-יְהוָה לֹא-יִבְנֶה בַּיִת שְׂוֹא עֲמָלוֹ בִּזְיוֹ בּוֹ
אִם-יְהוָה לֹא-יִשְׁמֹר עִיר שְׂוֹא שְׂקָד שׁוֹמֵר

Grammatical Observations

It is immediately realized that this passage exudes poetry. The semantic hint of שִׁיר and the *parallelismus membrorum* of verse one indicate a poetical passage. Taking note of this fact will alert the interpreter to certain grammatical features which may seem incongruous with Hebrew prose, but admissible in Hebrew poetry.

One of the primary characteristics of Hebrew poetry is parallelism¹ which is very evident in lines two and three.² The first half of these lines exhibits what Adele

¹George Buchanan Gray, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, reprint 1972), p. 7.

²Line numbering according to MT found in BHS.

Berlin calls "morphological and syntactical repetition."¹

The word order, the parts of speech, and even semantical aspects are parallel. The lines can be roughly diagrammed as such,

Line 2a object + verb + neg. + subject + part.

Line 3a object + verb + neg. + subject + part.

Both lines follow usual Hebrew word order except that the subject occurs at the beginning of the line in the emphatic position.

Although similarities are evident so are dissimilarities. The main variants occur in the verb and objects of the lines. It is these differences that motivate Berlin to categorize these two lines as parallel. The first difference is found in the verbs. They are lexically different, or what Berlin would call lexically parallel.² The objects of the verbs are different in gender and meaning. Again these differences highlight the parallel structure.

The parallel structure of the apodosis of these two lines is continued into the protasis, but not dominant. No formal connectives are used to combine the two parts of the conditional sentence, only juxtaposition. Once more the syntactical parallelism can be diagrammed to show off the literary style of Solomon.

¹Adele Berlin, "Grammatical Aspects of Biblical Parallelism," in *HUCA* (1980): 20-21.

²*Ibid.*, p. 20.

Line 2b PrePh + subject + verb + Adverb. acc.

Line 3b (gap) + subject + verb + Adverb. acc.

From a class standpoint the apodosises are identical. The lack of the prepositional phrase in line three could be due to the phenomenon of "gapping."¹

The dissimilarities of these lines are first seen in the participles. **בִּנְיִן** has a 3ms pronominal suffix and is grammatically linked to **בָּנִי**, its antecedent. It is also plural whereas **שׁוֹמֵר** is singular. This difference in number is probably due to the inherent nature of the activities. There are more builders than watchers, perhaps only one watchman.

In the apodosis **אֲשֶׁר** is found in the emphatic position. It is a masculine noun functioning as an adverbial accusative.² Particular attention should be given to this remote part of speech given such a prominent position in the sentence.

Semantical Studies

The grammatical parallelism is only superceded by the semantic parallelism in this bi-colon of verse one. The parallelism, is one of the most outstanding features of this psalm. The psalm develops all three aspects of parallelism as will be seen. Those three include: (1) grammatical

¹Michael O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980) , pp. 122ff. and 402-4.

²Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, pp. 81-82.

parallelism; (2) semantical parallelism; and (3) rhetorical parallelism.¹ As noted two of the three are evident in this first verse. Even though most recent studies on Biblical parallelism seek to define Hebrew poetry on syntactics, the driving force is the meaning which the poet is conveying.

James L. Kugel has received some criticism for his simplistic elucidation of Biblical parallelism, but he is basically right when he states that the B-clause of the line continues the A-clause thought by echoing it, defining it, restating it, etc.,--that is, carrying A further in meaning.² Psalm 127 reveals this concept. However, the poet of this psalm uses the grammatical medium to convey and emphasize a particular truth. This style of parallelism is not only a literary tool, but a pedagogical tool. Solomon didactically seeks to incorporate religious truth into life.

עֵר/בֵּית

The truth that the psalmist desires to communicate lies in the realm of semantic parallelism. One of the predominant clues to parallelism is word pairs.³ The word pair in verse one includes the words **בֵּית** and **עֵר**. There is a

¹Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 2.19.

²James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 51.

³William R. Watters, *Formula Criticism and the Poetry of the Old Testament* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), p. 42.

member-class union that naturally draws these words together. Dahood brings both Ugaritic support and scriptural attestation together, giving credence to the corollary usage of these words.¹ The psalmist uses this word pair to cultivate a merismatic situation with which to confront his audience. Solomon does not use these words as a basis for thought maturation, but draws them into the truth he seeks to teach. These two words help isolate the sphere of life which Solomon, the poet, addresses.

To determine what these words mean, it is necessary to widen the scope of study to include other related words in the two lines. **בִּיָּת** and **עֵיר** are objects of two verbs **בָּנָה** and **שָׁמַר**, respectively. Lexically, they are not difficult words. **בָּנָה** comes from **בָּנָה** "to build."² **שָׁמַר** is from the stem **שָׁמַר**, which can be translated "keep, watch, preserve."³

The second half of these lines contains similar ideas. Whereas the leading clauses identify Yahweh as the actor, the following clauses seek to identify the human counterpart and his role in life. Again the terminology is not unusual. In line 2b the author describes the activity of building **בִּיָּת**. **עָמַל** simply means to labor.⁴ The

¹Mitchell Dahood and Tadeuz Renar, "Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs," in *Ras Shamra Parallels*, vol. 1 (Roma: Pontificium Institution Biblicum, 1972), p. 330.

²BDB, p. 124.

³BDB, p. 1036.

⁴BDB, p. 765.

participal identifies those who do the labor, presumably their trade is construction. In line 3b, a protection agency is described by שׁוֹמֵר שָׁקֵד. שׁוֹמֵר identifies a "keeper" whose job it is to alert the inhabitants of עִיר to danger.¹ His activity is to watch and be alert as denoted by שָׁקֵד.

In brief the author is comparing the activities of God with those of man. Those activities center around the word pair עִיר/בֵּית or more particularly the phrases בִּנְיָה בֵּית and שָׁמַר עִיר. The use of the tetragrammaton narrows the semantic field of these two phrases.

In reference to בִּנְיָה בֵּית, Patrick Miller has limited its meaning to four possibilities:

1. Building Zion (Jerusalem), Yahweh's sanctuary
2. Building the temple or the palace
3. Building the Davidic line/house
4. Building anyone's line/house.²

All four suggestions are found in scripture but their applicability to this passage needs to be questioned.

The first suggestion is not demanded by context and no suitable explanation is given for its connection with this psalm. The aspect of Jerusalem can be relegated to the discussion on עִיר. The second meaning has been used to

¹Cf. Song of Solomon 3:3; 5:7. Also see Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 293, especially his comment on "שָׁקֵד."

²Miller, "The House," p. 124.

explain Solomon's connection with the Psalm. The word "house" has been used by the writers of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles to refer to the temple.¹ This explanation has definite implications for the ultimate truth Solomon wants to convey. But it, too, is not demanded by the context. Usually when "house" refers to the temple there is a modifier connected with it. For example the phrase is often used "the house of the Lord" which is many times rendered "the temple of the Lord."² In Psalm 127 this modifying phrase is not used.

The third proposal is only acceptable as far as it is connected with Solomon. But the link of David with the Psalm is not particularly clear. Granted Solomon is in the Davidic line, but there is no reason to specify Davidic intimations into this Psalm.

Of all four, the fourth has reason to be held up as the meaning of **בֵּית בָּנָה**. Furthermore, the suggestion that **בֵּית** contains two ideas--the physical structure³ and the dynastic "house"⁴--is contextually apropos. The literary genius of the author is revealed by the use of "house." This general meaning is preferred because of the nature of

¹1 Kings 6:1; 2 Chronicles 3:1.

²The NIV renders **בֵּית לַיהוָה** as "the temple of the Lord" consistently.

³Cf. Genesis 33:17; Deuteronomy 8:12.

⁴Cf. Deuteronomy 25:9; Ruth 4:11.

the didactic saying or proverb.¹ Verse one presents the first half of the first proverb in this Psalm. As characteristic of the proverb, generalizations are the tenor. The didactic saying does not address specific situations.² Another reason which fits with the other suggestions is Solomon's background in building. A third reason is that the nouns **בֵּית** and **עִיר** are indefinite. It is generally recognized that Hebrew poetry avoids the definite article. But in this context the article is used frequently. So if the nouns were to be definite, statistically the article would have been used.³

These same arguments are applicable to the word **עִיר**. Although there is a remote possibility that "city" refers to "Jerusalem." The heading of the psalm, defined as relating to the pilgrimages, would indicate Jerusalem was the goal of the journey.⁴ Also the juxtaposition of Psalm 128 would give some credence to Jerusalem. It is preferable to see "city" as a generalization.

¹Roland E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature, in The Forms of the Old Testament Literature* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981), p. 5.

²Ibid.

³Six out of the nine lines contain the article. Also it is realized that the burden of translation deems the use of an article.

⁴Miller, "The House," p. 124.

אִשָּׁו

Before an interpretative analysis is made of the verse *en toto*, another key word in this verse and in verse two needs to be explored. אִשָּׁו is a word of dictum, in this psalm as elsewhere. The lexicon defines the word as "worthless, vanity."¹ Other meanings attached to the word are, "unsubstantial, worthless, unreal,"² "failure,"³ "futile,"⁴ "pointless,"⁵ and "wickedness."⁶ It is not the same word used in Ecclesiastes.⁷

In contrast to the word אִשָּׁו in Ecclesiastes, אִשָּׁו seems to have moral connotations. It is used in Exodus 20:7 to characterize the improper use of Yahweh's name. In Isaiah 59:4 it is translated "lies." The aspect of simply something not worth doing without moral connotations is the least common usage.⁸ Perhaps a general definition of the word could be, "that which does not have positive effect."

¹BDB, p. 996.

²*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v.

"אִשָּׁו," by Victor P. Hamilton.

³Dahood, *Psalms*, p. 223.

⁴Weiser, *The Psalms*, p. 127.

⁵Kidner, *Psalms 72-150*, p. 441.

⁶Gerhard Lisowsky, *Koncordanz zum Hebraischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Wurthtembergische Bibelanstalt, 1958), p. 1406.

⁷Kidner, *Psalms 72-150*, p. 441.

⁸Cf. Jer 4:30.

This effect could apply both to the physical sphere as well as the spiritual sphere. In Exodus 23:1 נִפְשָׁה is used to describe a report as false. The report did not produce a positive effect. In Jeremiah 6:29 נִפְשָׁה is used to describe the actions of Israel, their actions were worthless, for they did not purge out the wicked from among them. The case is a physical situation where a positive effect was not produced.

The word is often used to speak of deceit. Psalms 144:8, 4 and 26:4 are passages where "deceit" is an acceptable translation. The moral connotation is brought into the picture at this point. An interesting passage which uses נִפְשָׁה is Malachi 3:14. The context is moral in nature and is speaking to the people of their sinful behavior and words. Amidst their sinful words are "It is futile to serve God." The idea is that the people did not gain anything from their service, but they have the arrogance to belie God's desires.

The primary meaning of this word is moral in nature. Whereas Ecclesiastes speaks of transitoriness, brevity and the like without moral connotation, when Solomon uses the word here it speaks of the moral implications of the action-involved. It is permissible to go so far as to say that this "vanity" that Solomon speaks of is "wickedness." The most common usages of נִפְשָׁה are in contexts that speak of the desires of Yahweh. When those desires are not met, נִפְשָׁה is declared. In other words, when God's will is not done,

sin-wickedness is the result.

Interpretative Summary

Psalms 127:1 initiates the topic of the proverbial sayings. The topic is the sovereignty of God. The topic is developed in two admonitions which make contact with the world in which the audience of the psalm lives. The use of the word pair sums up the life situation that plays a vital role in the peoples' lives. The life situation is composed of two universal preoccupations--the erection of shelter and the provision of security.¹

It is not hard to see Solomon as the author of this psalm. For he was the master builder and military genius. The use of "house" and "city" bring into view stone houses cramped inside a walled existence.² One of Solomon's goals was to build up the defense of the land.³ Even though the situation was peaceful, the threat of war still existed. Where the house provided shelter it was the city that provided security with its watchman stationed throughout, making his rounds through the night.⁴

When Solomon speaks concerning building and security,

¹Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, p. 440.

²Frank S. Frick, *The City in Ancient Israel* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 25-42.

³2 Chr 8:1-10.

⁴Song of Solomon 3:3, 5:7.

he has the experience from which to draw.¹ And his experience prepared him to utter the dictum of God's sovereignty. Without the acknowledgement of Yahweh's sovereign will, all that is done is in vain. But what does Solomon mean by this statement? Is it a physical calamity that will result from disavowing God? Or is he speaking of an eschatological judgment?

Looking at Israel's history in the Old Testament, physical calamity would show the worthlessness of the activity. A building project that was undertaken against the acknowledged will of God was the tower of Babel.² It was a project consummated without the sanction of God; it was in vain. The project was physically interrupted. But probably the freshest experience for Solomon was his own undertaking of the building of the temple. His father acknowledged the rule of God and did, not seek to build the temple. But God's will was to allow Solomon to build the temple. It was within the will of God; it was worthwhile for Solomon to build.

But the question arises, What of the building enterprises of the wicked who build apart from a proper attitude toward God? Perhaps this psalm does not deal with man in general. This psalm is found in the psalm collection that is used to acknowledge God by those who are of Him.

¹Cf. 1 Kings 3:1-11.

²Gen 11:1-9.

This collection has in mind those who understand the Will, not those who contradict it. Like those of Malachi that knew what was right, but openly refused to serve God. What awaits these? The judgment of God. Here the eschatological picture enters the scene. Psalm 37:28 speaks of the sovereign pronouncement of God regarding protection.

For the Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones.

They will be protected (שמר) forever, but the offspring of the wicked will be cut off.¹

There is no question as to the eschatological future of those who shrug off Yahweh's security. What ever security is arranged for in this life will be of no avail in the end.

When the author declares that those who work, without the proper attitude are laboring in vain, he is saying that they are doing that which is in contradiction to God's will. From that standpoint it is evil. The psalmist is not so concerned with the prosperity² of the action, but rather the corollation of the individual or community to the will of God.

It should not be a burden for the individual to submit to the sovereign will of God. Within the same collection of psalms exists a psalm that exalts the divine watchman. Psalm 121 divulges the comforting theme, "The Lord is

¹All quotations will be taken from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

²Weiser, *Psalms*, p. 764.

my guardian."¹ He is the guardian that never slumbers and who is there in time of need. Yahweh is not only the Supreme Guardian but also the Supreme Architect. The psalmist declares in Psalm 89:2,

I will declare your loyal love is established (בְּנִיָּה) forever.²

Psalm 127 is a wisdom song of admonition in verse one. But an admonition that promotes a blessed prognosis. The themes of verse one will continue throughout the Psalm. The psalmist leaves the figure of the city and the house and develops a minor theme inherent in verse two. This minor theme revolves around the labor that is also prevalent in the activities of building and watching. The theme of the city as noticed before will be brought back into view in verse five. In verse four the concept of the house will be drawn into the composition. More particularly the idea of lineage contained in "house" may tie verse one in with verses three and four.

Verse Two

שׁוּא לָכֶם מִשְׁכֵּימִי קוֹם מֵאַחֲרֵי־שֶׁבֶת
אֶכְלִי לֶחֶם הָעֶצְבִּים כֵּן יִתֵּן לִידֹדוֹ שִׁנָּא

Grammatical Observations

Grammatically, verse two presents no problems. Yet,

¹D. Wayne Knife, "The Lord is My Guardian," *Spire* 10 (Spring 1982):10.

²Author's own translation.

it is an interesting verse from the grammatical perspective. Unfortunately, the syntactical arrangement presents some semantical problems. Or does it? The enigma of this verse occurs in line 5b. Basically, the word **נִשְׁנֶה** causes the stir among commentaries. Part of the solution or at least guiding hand toward the solution lies in the grammatical features of this verse and also in the entire psalm.

The strong parallelism of verse one is not as dominant in verse two, but still present. Verse two exhibits a more subtle family of parallelism which is referred to as rhetorical parallelism.¹ Once the subtleties are recognized, the parallelism of the verse stands out markedly. Within this family of rhetorical parallelism emerges a genus which is often called climactic parallelism.²

Climactic parallelism is a literary tool to capture one's attention too. "Climactic parallelism or stair-case parallelism involves the repetition and development of a group of two or three words in successive lines."³ In Psalm 127 the first two lines have developed the word **נִשְׁנֶה** as a key concept. In a climactic instance the Psalmist switches word order and throws **נִשְׁנֶה** first to alert the reader. Kugel sees **נִשְׁנֶה** as an "interruptive vocative."⁴ The thought of the

¹Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, p. 222ff.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 225.

⁴Kugel, *The Idea*, p. 32.

the lines is progressing smoothly and expectedly until an interruption. The sudden switch in literary structure startles the recipient and forces him to reanalyze the thought before him.¹

This literary interruption is only the beginning of the literary genius in this psalm. The rhetoric in this psalm continues into the genus of chiasmic parallelism.² The immediate recognizable chiasmic element is seen in the apparent word play between אֶשׂ (line 3a) and אֶשׂ (line 4b).³ אֶשׂ is the object of אֶשׂ, which reverses the word order. Delitzsch interprets אֶשׂ as an adverbial accusative.⁴ If taken as an adverbial accusative it is proper to speak of it as an accusative of time which would indicate duration of time.⁵ Grammatically this is allowable but not demanded.

The significance of אֶשׂ is diametrically stated in literary fashion. The poet has used word order and paronomasia to convey his truth. But the author is not finished. Orthographically he could not align his words any closer. Where man reaps אֶשׂ, God gives אֶשׂ. This play on words

¹Edward Greenstein, "Two Variations of Grammatical Parallelism in Canaanite Poetry and Their Psycholinguistic Background," *JANES* 6 (1974):87-104.

²Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, p. 225.

³Dahood, *Psalms*, p. 223.

⁴*Psalms*, p. 293.

⁵Theophile J. Meek, "The Hebrew Accusative of Time and Place," *JAOS* 60 (1940):224-25.

should give direction to the semantical studies of this passage. Grammatically, the passage demands that interpretation begin with **שָׁנָא** rather than end there last and try to fit into a preconceived plan.

This chiasmic arrangement not only applies to the words but to syntactical units. Part of the solution to the puzzle of verse two lies in the grammatical structure of the verse. This is not minimizing the necessity of dealing with the meaning of **כִּי** and **שָׁנָא**. But, it is necessary to see the placement of the clause in question (line 5b) in the entire psalm, more particularly in the first half of the psalm.

Before developing the chiasmus of this verse any further, a couple of observations are pertinent. The first is the words that close lines 4 and 5. Apart from their semantic corollation, there is an orthographical similarity that translates into alliteration. Both words begin with **ש**. Is this only a coincidence? Solomon intentionally chose this word. It is fair to say that he chose it to coincide with **שָׁנָא** because of the orthographic similarity of **שָׁנָא** with **שָׁנָא**. Solomon could have chosen another word to use such as **נִי**. Also this corollation helps decide dogmatically that **שָׁנָא** is a *nomina verbalia* from the verbal stem **שָׁבַת**.¹ **שָׁנָא** is a noun when traditionally defined semantically parallels **שָׁבַת**

¹BDB, pp. 991-92.

and with its grammatical symmetry.

The second observation concerns the psalm as a whole. Looking at every line except lines four and five, a phenomenon appears. Every line except these two is a complete thought.¹ That is, if one were to pull each line out of the psalm, the basic understanding would still be discernible. The entire thought may not be comprehended *en toto*, but enough of it would. Why should the author abandon this practice for these two lines? He does not have to and a plausible literary scheme can be seen.

Line four out of context can be readily understood as a complete thought. "Vanity is to them who arise early in the morning and who delay rest." There is no conceptual vagueness present. Line five can also be understood as a complete unit of thought. If one allows for poetic license where structural elements are often abandoned, difficulties diminish.

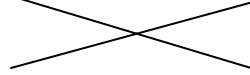
The first difficulty arises from the string of participals. Most translations take them to grammatically relate back to לָכֵן.² Consequently they are not seen in

¹A quest for the determination of what constitutes a line in Hebrew poetry has been undertaken in past years. Parallelism, metrics, syntactic constraints have been suggested for line determination. Is it possible to define a line by the conceptual pattern?

²American Standard Version, New English Bible, Jerusalem Bible, New International Version, New American Standard Bible, Revised Standard Version.

separate contexts. However, if the structure of verse two is seen in a chiastic fashion, the separating of the third participial phrase is not too harsh a measure. A rough diagram can be used to display the concept proposed.

Line 4 nominal clause + participial phrase (2)



Line 5 participial phrase¹ + nominal clause

In this display the author uses the chiastic structure to contrast the thought of the lines. Specifically, the contrast involves two different subjects and two different life styles.²

If this is the case, one would expect some sort of a disjunctive, such as ׀, to proceed אֲזַל. But given the poetic nature of the material, this grammatical anomaly is not surprising.³ This lack of connective is evident in the conditional sentences of verse one, where the protasis is connected to the apodosis by juxtaposition.

Also the syntactical particle ׀ is not a problem if it is seen as relating back to the participial phrase in the same line. There is no reason to pursue the textual variant

¹Gray, *Hebrew Poetry*, p. 76. He points out the use of a participial phrase in a chiastic arrangement.

²The separation of lines is a concept adapted from the article, Samuel Diaches, "Psalm cxxvii.2, *ExpTim* 45 (1933):24-26. C. Keet draws attention to this article. However, it seems to have fallen on deaf ears. Diaches develops the separation of the lines semantically, but fails to identify the grammatical plausibility for separation.

³Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, p. 213.

of יָי, ¹ for כֵּן makes perfect sense in this clause.²

Semantical Studies

Introduction

The problem of verse two has caused one commentator to express, concerning Psalm 127:2b, that it "has probably caused as much difficulty to translators and interpreters as any in the whole book of Psalms."³ The problem is not of such a nature that a plausible explanation is impossible. Verse two is so designed that the semantical elements and grammatical elements point to the word שֵׁנָא. This is the controlling concept in the verse. The meaning of the various clauses and phrases need to be interpreted in light of this word. Therefore, the semantical studies will begin with this word and in turn deal with the other semantic facets as they relate to שֵׁנָא.

¹J. A. Emerton, "The Meaning of SENA in Psalm CXXVII 2," *VT* 24 (1974):16, 19, 30. Also a textual variant appears on לִידִּדּוֹ. The LXX, Jerome, etc. support plural and is preferred by some, e.g. Edward Edwards, "A New Interpretation of שֵׁנָא לִידִּדּוֹ יִתֵּן כֵּן (Psalm cxxvii.2b)," *ExpTim* 54 (October 1942-September 1943): 25. The singular reading can be explained by the fact that switching between plural and singular is common. See: Daiches, "A New Explanation," p. 25.

²In a recent publication, Psalms 101-150, in *Word Bible Commentary*, edited by David A. Hubbard (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), Leslie Allen on page 176 supports the separation of lines three and four into separate thoughts. It is based primarily on metrical evidence, but he does incorporate grammatical considerations.

³Edwards, "A New Interpretation," p. 25.

It is both an unprofitable and prodigious task to interact with all the various views.¹ It seems that the views studied may lead to similar conclusions but always have a little different nuance to them and this makes it difficult to properly respond to each one. Therefore, the method proposed here is to present a feasible explanation, then to deal with some major views that have been proposed.

שָׁנָא--*a resolution*

Most, if not all, biblical students see the traditional meaning of **שָׁנָא** to be "sleep." It is the Aramaic spelling of **שָׁנָא** which also means sleep.² Kirkpatrick astutely observes, "If it were not for the exegetical difficulty, no one would hesitate to take "sleep," as the Ancient Versions take it, as the object of the verb giveth."³ He is absolutely correct.

Of the proposed answers to this puzzling verse, two primary perspectives of its meaning emerge. On the one hand the verse is dealt with from the perspective that **שָׁנָא** means "sleep." The other perspective seeks to solve the puzzle by seeking to define **שָׁנָא** differently. The former position is the correct realm to work in. For the meaning of **שָׁנָא** as "sleep" is well attested and presents minimal difficulty

¹Emerton discusses quite a few, but misses, Samuel Daiches' article.

²GKC, p. 82.

³Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 752.

from the lexical standpoint.

The difficulty of this verse arises from the context of the verses 1-2. Verse one deals with the labor of man and contrasts that with Yahweh's work. Then most see this work motif carried on into verse two. The motif is usually seen in the three participial phrases generally translated,

Vanity is it to those of you who rise up early and go
late to rest,
Eating bread of anxious toil.¹

On top of the work motif is the result of that motif--bread. So the problem set forth is the relationship of "sleep" to "work" and its product. The particle **כִּי** sets up a comparative aspect which indicates that what God gives to his beloved must compare to "the bread of toil."² The meaning of "sleep" does not compare in quality to that which is produced by work.

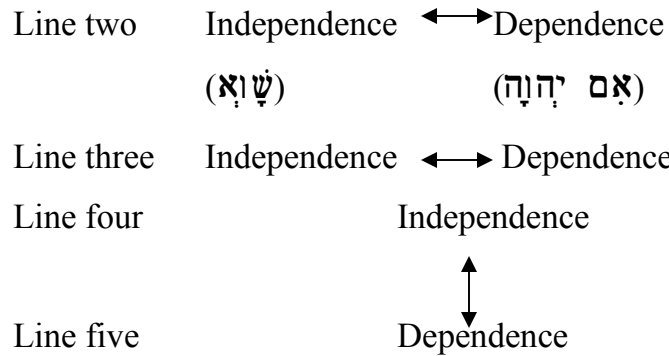
The first response to this issue is that **שְׁנָא** does not *compare* to **לֶחֶם** but that it *relates* to **לֶחֶם**. It is correct to see that the work motif continues into verse two. But as the work of man was critiqued in verse one, it is critiqued in verse two.

As the sovereignty of God is taught in verse one, an underlying implication of sovereignty is also seen in the first verse. That implication is the dependence of God on

¹Miller, "The House," p. 120.

²Emerton, "SENA," p. 20.

man. Verse one contrasts the independence of man with the desire for dependence. And this secondary theme is evident in verse two. Conceivably the first two verses could be thematically diagrammed.



When the psalmist cries **שׁוֹא**, he is uttering a pronouncement on the lifestyle of the person as he does in verse one. In line four the psalmist is describing a lifestyle that is vain, not in accord with the desires of Yahweh. The participial clauses **מִשְׁכְּיָמִי קוֹם מֵאַחֲרֵי שְׁבֹת** express relative clauses which elucidate the phrase **לֵכֶם**. They are not difficult to understand.¹ **קוֹם מִשְׁכְּיָמִי** denotes the activity of arising early. **מִשְׁכְּיָמִי** is a hiphil participle which could denote a causative aspect.² Those described by this word determine to arise early so as to get an early start. The second relative clause, **מֵאַחֲרֵי שְׁבֹת**, contrasts with the former clause. It looks at the other end of the day and speaks of delaying rest, cessation of activities.³ This meaning would

¹**מִשְׁכְּיָמִי קוֹם** is not a common syntactical structure. But Patrick Miller notes that the construct is not unique (cf. 2 Kings 6:15, 1 Sam 16:17), "The House," p. 131.

²GKC, pp. 350, 145.

³BDB, p. 992.

parallel the traditional meaning of שָׁנָה.¹

Both these participals are active and indicate a continuing action² or habitual practice. The habit that is described is one that extends the day. The reasons for this extended day are two. Both fit with the context. First, Samuel Daiches sees a connection between this line and Isaiah 5:11.³ This reference contains both participles that are found in the present study. The passage in Isaiah describes men who extended their days for the sake of drinking. These men idled their time away on drinking. Daiches paraphrases Psalm 127:2a like this,

'It is vain for you who rise up early and sit up late (and drink strong drinks, or, do nothing useful).' This is no good. You neither work nor sleep. You idle away your days, and at night you have no rest.⁴

This rationale has good potential if this idleness is contrasted with "the bread of toil." עֵצֶר is defined by BDB as "hurt, pain, toil."⁵ It is used in Genesis 3:17 when Moses writes, "In toil you shall eat of it (i.e. ground)." The bread here is that which is procured with toil and trouble.⁶ This bread of toil can be compared with the

¹The view that שָׁנָה is from שָׁנָה is possible. See F. Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 293.

²Thomas Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 19.

³"A New Explanation," p. 25.

⁴Ibid.

⁵P. 780.

⁶Delitzsch, p. 293. Also cf. Prov 14:23; 5:10 for the use of עֵצֶר for labor.

"bread of idleness" in Proverbs 31:27.¹ This verse states,

She watches over the affairs of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Here work is contrasted with idleness in the excellent wife of Proverbs 31. So the concept of idleness is very appropriate. It would draw a negative response such as אִשָּׁה. The only problem with this view is other supportive evidence of these two participial phrases used this way.

The opposite of this idleness is found in line five where work is valued and the result of "toil," or that which is expected because of the curse, is "sleep." Conceivably this sleep is the sweet sleep of Ecclesiastes 5:12a.

Qoheleth says "The sleep (נִשְׁנָה) of a laborer is sweet." So Daiches concludes that line 5 is saying the same thing as Ecclesiastes 5:12a. Also by understanding the verse as such, כֵּן can be taken as "thus." "Those who eat the bread of labour--thus (through the labour, by which they eat their bread) he gives to his beloved sleep."² So "his beloved" of line 5b refers to those who eat the bread of toil.

Perhaps the psalmist is indicating the independence of man by showing the idleness of man. Or another remote idea is that the man who understands what has been said in

¹Emerton, SENA, p. 17.

²Daiches, "Psalm cxxvii.2," p. 25. Or as a resultant clause--the result of toil is God-given sleep. Cf. Psalm 48:6 for result or consequence usage of כֵּן. See A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax*, p. 201.

verse one, sees no reason to work because God will provide.

A second possible explanation for the extended day is that man needs to extend his day to such a point to meet his needs. An extension so far that sleep is squeezed out of his routine. Anxiety is what rules the life. Again, an independence from God causes an unnatural reaction to life. It is those who expected to labor for their bread knowing where it came from, to these God grants sleep. The ability to end the day without anxiety. So the psalmist maintains a contrast in this view between the quality of work. One type of work is declared vain. The other is considered proper and sleep is the reward.

In Ecclesiastes 5:12ff. a similar theme appears. As mentioned earlier Ecclesiastes 5:12 speaks of the sweet sleep of the laborer no matter what the results of labor are. But the verse continues and speaks of the rich man who can not find sleep. The men in verse two of Psalm 127 put off rest, perchance they cannot find. Their abundance als a result of their labor does not permit sleep. The passage in Ecclesiastes develops the work motif and speaks of the results of work in 5:18-6:2,

Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him--for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work--this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart. I have seen another evil under the

sun, and it weighs heavily on men, God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.

Psalm 127:2 speaks of a similar idea of the man who extends his day because he is not satisfied and unable to enjoy that which he reaps because God is not fitted into his attitude. This is in contrast to the man who toils and does that which is expected but has considered God in his work and God gives him sleep. The ability to enjoy life is reflected in the sleep he experiences.

This view is both semantically feasible and grammatically allowable. The contrast developed between these two aspects fits the context very well and does not distract from the entire psalm.

אֲשֶׁר--*other explanations*

Other views accept **אֲשֶׁר** as only an object of **יָתֵן**. In these views the three participial phrases are seen together. Perowne reacts to the generally held position of God giving to his beloved bread--the necessities of life--in sleep or during their sleep. He sees this position as unacceptable because "bread" must be supplied and because of the questionable use of the adverbial accusative.¹ So his conclusion is this:

I am inclined, therefore, to prefer the rendering "So He

¹GKC, p. 374.

giveth His beloved sleep,' though it is no doubt difficult to explain the reference of the particle 'so.' I suppose it refers to the principle laid down in the previous verse, there being a tacit comparison, 'as all labour is vain with out God's providence, as He builds the house, as He watches the city, so He gives the man who loves him and leaves all in His hands, calm refreshing sleep.'¹

He later says,

God's 'beloved' are not exempted from the great law of labour which lies upon all, but the sting is taken from it when they can leave all results in a Father's hand, with absolute trust in His wisdom and goodness.²

Perowne's words sum up the general feelings on this passage by those who hold to sleep as the meaning of שָׁנָא, even though different twists are taken in interpretation such as the adverbial accusative.

The positions that hold to the meaning of sleep, find support in Proverbs 10:22 which reads, "The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, and he adds no trouble (בְּצָר--toil) to it." This phrase is often taken to mean that God gives without labor.³ But does this verse have to mean this? Emerton believes that human effort is not spoken about in this verse.⁴ Or can it mean that God gives wealth that will

¹J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976, reprint: from 4th ed., George Bell and Sons, 1878), pp. 395-96.

²P. 395.

³F. Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, in Commentary on the old Testament*, trans. by James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 223.

⁴Emerton, "Sena," pp. 20-21. He further comments,

not cause pain or sorrow as in Ecclesiastes 6:2? This verse can be taken either way and is not determinative of this verse.

Another option some have taken to resolve the problems of this verse is to emend the text. The only reason for this procedure is that **שְׁנָא** does not make sense.¹ In response to emendation, Emerton is correct in saying, ". . . it is better not to resort to conjectural emendation unless there is no satisfactory alternative."² Sense can be made out of the received text and the textual attestation also favors **שְׁנָא**.³

The most recent solutions for the text are seen in Dahood's⁴ and Emerton's⁵ works. Both seek to find a different semantic root for **שְׁנָא**. Dahood suggests that **שְׁנָא** means "prosperity."⁶ The translation fits the context very well

"It may be doubted whether the idea that God blesses men when they do nothing would have been congenial to the ethos of Israelite wisdom literature, to which this passage (i.e. Prov. 10:22) belongs." There may be some truth to this. But it must be remembered that Psalm 127 deals with God's sovereignty. If He chooses to bless a man who does nothing that is His prerogative (cf. Deut 6:10-12).

¹W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: S.P.C.K., 1962), p. 518.

²Emerton, "SENA," pp. 20-21.

³Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 753.

⁴*Psalms*, vol. III, pp. 223-24.

⁵"SENA," pp. 25ff.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 25.

according to Emerton. But Emerton has problems with the etymology of the root Dahood suggests for שָׁנָא.¹ In a rejoinder, Dahood levels some convincing arguments against Emerton's suggestion for a root that would give שָׁנָא the meaning of "high estate or honor."² Of both solutions, Dahood's etymology and meaning would be preferable. It would fit with the context--"human effort alone is in vain, for it is God who gives prosperity."³ But is it prosperity that the Psalmist is concerned about when he speaks of vanity? It does not have to be or if so it would not be the common semantic realm of the usages of the word שָׁנָא.

But again, שָׁנָא as it is traditionally understood does not have to be abandoned; it makes viable sense in this passage.

Interpretative Summary

Verse one has demonstrated that Yahweh is sovereignly in control; His sovereignty demands submission. Man is to be dependent on Yahweh. Independence translates into vanity. Verse two continues the themes of sovereignty and dependence. Those who exercise independence by trying to do

¹Mitchell. Dahood, "The aleph in Psalm CXXVII 2 sena," *Orientalia* 44 (1975):103-5.

²Emerton, "SENA," p. 24.

³Dahood suggests that שָׁנָא is a divine name. This is unconvincing and is not necessary for the passage. Yahweh serves as a natural antecedent to שָׁנָא.

much work themselves, extend the day beyond natural limits. The work is an anxious work that has become a lifestyle for them. This lifestyle has also been brought under the sovereign dictum of God and it is declared vain. It is in contradiction to the will of God to live a lifestyle that ignores the existence of God. It is those who toil--do the expected labor for substance--that receive the blessing of God. Their action is of such a nature that it conforms to the will of God. For these the blessing is sleep. Sleep that escapes those who live a life of independence *en contra* to those who live lives of divine dependency.

Viewing verse two as two complete thoughts allows one to perceive the literary beauty of the passage. This perspective highlights that gift of Yahweh which is opposed to the dictum of Yahweh. As the passage continues, this gift of Yahweh alerts and links the next strophe in the mind of the recipient.

Verse Three

הִנֵּה נִחַלַּת יְהוָה בְּנִים שָׂכָר פְּרִי הַבֶּטֶן

Grammatical Observations

Verse three begins a section where the exegetical problems are minimal. The grammatical perspective of verse three presents some interesting concepts. Concepts that continue the sovereignty of God and challenge the freedom of man.

Verse three promotes the sovereignty of God on a positive note. The psalm began with conditional clauses that translated into admonitions. But verse three starts with a different tenor which is indicated by the deitic particle הִנֵּה.

הִנֵּה is a structural marker in this psalm. This word is an interjection that draws the attention of the reader to a particular item.¹ The content of the psalm changes here, and the placing of this particle here is appropriate. It sets off the second strophe of the psalm. One of its basic functions is to syntactically point out noun clauses.²

Two noun clauses follow the particle. The first consists of a bound structure and a noun. It is the bound structure that helps link the strophes of the psalm together. It is the semantical aspect that brings out the unity. In the bound structure, Yahweh defines נַחֲלַת. This genitive indicates possession³ which would fit with the meaning of נַחֲלַת. The predicate of the sentence is בָּנִים. Being a substantive it is emphatically linked to יְהוָה נַחֲלַת.⁴ The two grammatically speak of the same thing.

The subject of the second clause is שָׂכָר. The

¹Dennis J. McCarthy, "The Use of w^ehinneh in Biblical Hebrew," *Biblica* 61 (1980):330-42.

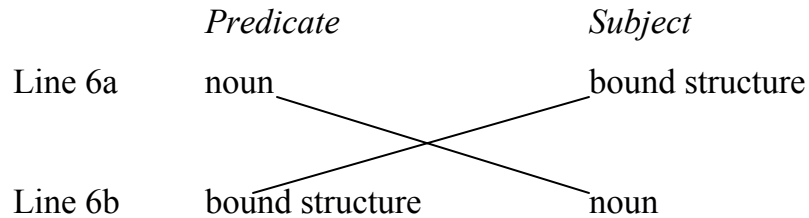
²GKC, p. 469.

³Williams, *An Outline*, p. 11.

⁴GKC, p. 452.

predicate is a bound structure. The genitive **וְהַבֶּטֶן** is a subjective genitive which looks at the activity of the womb.

In this verse perhaps there is some structural chiasmus evident.



This might be pushing the parallel phenomena, but there are possibilities.

Grammatically, through simple juxtaposition, an equative existence is evident between the two clauses as well as within the clauses themselves. Thus, these two clauses should not be isolated, for they have semantical value for each other.

Semantical Studies

"Inheritance of the Lord" is a good translation.

However, the word for "inheritance" must not be confused with the modern terminology. The primary meaning "is possession, rightful possession rather than succession."¹ So initially Yahweh's possession is in view. But the concept of inheritance gives the idea that someone is receiving something which is congruent with the passage. In verse two

¹*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Inheritance," by F. M. Blaiklock.

God gives sleep and this eleemosynary theme is picked up by verse three which is modified by the second clause. Since it is God's possession, He is free to decide what portion is to be allotted.¹ So the sense that an inheritable right is in view is incorrect. It is God's possession and he alone is responsible for its being passed along. It becomes an inheritance when God gives his possession out.

That which is seen as the inheritance of the Lord is בְּנֵי. The primary meaning of this word is "sons."² The context of verse four and five point to the strength of sons and their value because of this. Yet, the general nature of the proverb would include the extension of meaning to include the classification of children.

In the Old Testament the birth of sons was highly prized. It is evident that the promise (Gen 16:11; 17:16, 19; 18:10; etc.) and birth (Gen 16:15; 21:2; 41:50-52; etc.) of a son were very important events in the life of a man and his wife.³ Amidst his woes, Jeremiah cries out, "Cursed be the man who brought my father the news, who made him very glad, saying, 'A child is born to you--a son!'"

This exaltation of the birth of the son is emphasized

¹*A Theological Wordbook of the Bible*, s.v. "Inherit," by C. E. B. Cranfield.

²Miller, "The House," p. 131.

³*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. "בֶּן," by Jan Bergman, Helmer Ringgren, and H. Haag.

by the clause "a reward is the fruit of the womb." Dahood correctly states that the suffix on לַיָּדוֹ does double duty and shares it with שָׂכָר.¹ So it would be the Lord's reward.

The blessing of the womb would be that which is received by Yahweh. The term fruit indicates the product of the womb as the product of the tree is fruit. Psalm 128 picks up this theme, "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table." This psalm magnifies the blessing of sons. In Deuteronomy, the presence of sons is seen as a blessing and their absence a curse.² This concept of the blessing of the womb is seen in the customary blessing bestowed on brides. Genesis 24:60 expresses, in respect to Rebekah, "Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of your enemies."³ So when the psalmist speaks of the blessing of the womb, he does so in contextual setting that rejoices at the birth of a son, or children.

Interpretative Summary

The sovereignty of God continues but in a positive manner. For now Solomon declares that it is Yahweh who

¹*Psalms*, vol. 3, p. 22.

²Deut 7:13; 28:4, 11; 30:9; 28:18.

³T. Mendelson, "The Family in the Ancient Near East," *BA* 11 (1948): 38ff.

gives fruit of the womb. It is his possession that he freely gives to whom he chooses and it is a reward. Something that is desirous. But since it is God's decision to give and ultimately the sons are the possession of God this should alert the parent that sons or children deserve special attention. They are not to be taken for granted nor abandoned--physically or emotionally. Parents, especially the father, have the responsibility of taking care of that which is God's.

It should be a joyous opportunity to receive children in one's family. It must be remembered that the saints of the Old Testament highly cherished children. This should be true of the New Testament saint too.¹ But, in contrast, the life of the Old Testament saint was concerned about the physical blessing of his life. Whereas the New Testament emphasis is on a spiritual concern.² This does not mean the Old Testament concept was a shallow belief for the physical blessing is connected with the return of the Messiah. But in both contexts it is the sole free choice of God to bestow blessing of the womb. The childless couple should not be despondent. Children are not the only blessing given by God. A wise and beneficial God has decided not to bring children into their lives. For now the New

¹Matt 19:20; Eph 6:1.

²Col 3:1-4.

Testament family can concern themselves with the New Testament emphasis of spreading the gospel.¹

Verse Four

כְּחֲצִים בְּיַד־גִּבּוֹר כֵּן בְּנֵי הַנְּעוּרִים

Grammatical Observations

The fourth verse of this psalm is free of grammatical problems. The grammar of this verse sets up a comparative thought, with the use of כֵּן and כֶּ. GKC notes that when כֶּ is used with כֵּן, they should be viewed not as conjunctives but as substantives with their following genitives.² This would produce a translation such as "the like of arrows in the hand of a mighty man are sons of one's youth." This simply defines the figurative language a little more clearly.

The second clause can be interpreted a couple of ways as indicated by the grammar. הַנְּעוּרִים can be seen as an adjective or a subjective genitive. It is either describing בְּנֵים or indicating the involvement of the גִּבּוֹר of verse five.

Semantical Studies

The figurative part of the simile here in verse four involves military terminology. The first of the terminology mentioned is חֲצִים. "Arrows" were no doubt in use during

¹Luke 14:25-27.

²P. 499.

Solomon's time, even though they are not specifically mentioned. But reliefs of surrounding empires show the prominent and decisive usage of the bow and arrow.¹ With the advancement of the chariot in Solomon's army, evidence indicates the archer was associated with them.²

These arrows play a vital role for the soldier as indicated by גִּבּוֹר. As Roland DeVaux notes, the word גִּבּוֹר was "applied to a warrior of noted valor usually specified by name, a 'hero,' a 'brave.'"³ So the man that Solomon brings into the picture is a warrior or champion. A man that is not of the common stock, but one that is noticed. This figure of arrows in a warrior's hands indicates strength. The arrows are the warrior's decisive force that sustain his existence. The use of this figure of arrows as a sign of effective strength is seen in Psalm 45:5. Verse four sets up the power motif,

In your majesty ride forth victoriously in behalf
of truth, humility and righteousness;
Let your right hand display awesome deeds.

Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the
king's enemies;
Let the nations fall beneath your feet.

Arrows in the hand of the warrior are intended to be used by

¹Yigael Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands* (London: Weiden and Nicholson, 1963), p. 295.

²Roland DeVaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), pp. 243-44.

³Idem, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1971), p. 125.

the warrior. They are for the benefit of the warrior.

The arrows of the passage are the "sons of youth." Most authors, like Kimhi, take this bound structure to refer to the sons of a man's youth rather than youthful sons.¹ This phrase is contrasted with the "sons of old age" in Genesis 37:3. So we have sons born in the vigor of their father's years.² If the sons are born in the young days of the Father, they will be able to defend him in his old age.³ The adjectival use of הַנְּעוּרִים should not be ignored. For maintaining the congruence of metaphor here, the designation of youthful sons, those of vigor and youth would fit the context. The figure in this verse indicates that the warrior is intending to use them. They are not to remain idle. The arrows also must function as they were intended to. In order for the mighty man to win his battle, what is better than a large strong stock of arrows from which to fight? Youthful sons full of vigor would provide such a stock. They would have the strength to perform the tasks set before them. Admittedly, the term הַנְּעוּרִים is not definitive in its temporal setting, but this would not rule out sons of any

¹Joshua Baker and Ernest W. Nicholson, editors, *The Commentary of Rabbi David Kimhi on Psalms CXX-CL* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), p. 27.

²Oesterley, *Psalms*, p. 519.

³Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 753.

age that would be beneficial to the father.¹ As verse five continues, they would still be able to support their father at any age. Taking note of Psalm 128:3, sons are referred to as "olive shoots." Looking at the similarities between Psalm 128 and 127, it is not unreasonable to see that the sons in 127:4 are youthful, full of vigor.²

Interpretative Summary

Verse four builds the unity of the psalm. For it develops the theme of the family which is probably linked to "house" in verse one. So as God prospers the building of the house he also prospers the family. The prosperity of Yahweh is revealed in the sons. For they, being youthful, have the strength to support and accomplish the tasks set before them by their father. As the warrior controls the arrow, so should the father his sons. It is his sons that will make an indelible mark in the life of the father. So the blessing given by Yahweh in verse three is described in verse four in terms that any father would understand--any father, that is, who knows the Giver of sons.

¹*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Youth," by W. White, Jr.

²The LXX translates τῶν ἐκτετιναγμένων . Most likely the authors misunderstood the root נָצַר--to shake--instead of נָעַר--youth.

Verse Five

אֲשֶׁר־יִהְיֶה הַגִּבּוֹר אֲשֶׁר מָלֵא אֶת־אֲשָׁפְתּוֹ מֵהֶם
 לֹא־יִבְשׁוּ כִי־יִדְבְּרוּ אֶת־אֲוִיבִים בְּשַׁעַר

Grammatical Observations

Verse five is the capstone of the second proverb and the final unifying substratum to the psalm. This verse is primarily a declarative sentence that describes a certain type of man.

Line eight is composed of a construct unit which is often translated as a simple equative clause, "Blessed is the man." As the line continues a relative clause is added to describe what it takes to be a blessed man.

The relative clause revolves around the idea of sons. A perusal of various translations will show that this relative clause can be translated as follows, "Who has his quiver full of them" or "Who has filled his quiver with them." The restrictive phrase מֵהֶם conveys a partitive sense, that is the idea of separation out of a larger class. The class is defined by הֵם. The logical antecedent is בָּנָי of verse four. Both translations end up with a stative idea, that is the quiver is full of sons. But a distinction is seen in the way the quivers have been filled. The translations offered give a stative idea and a factitive idea respectively. Both ideas are permissible in the Piel,¹ and

¹Williams, *Syntax*, p. 27.

both are applicable to the passage.

One translation looks at the result whereas the other gives the idea of intention. The translation, "who has filled his quiver" gives the idea that the man was purposeful in filling his quiver. An active role of the man is in the picture. The translation "who has his quiver full of them" approaches the idea from a passive standpoint, perhaps a providential perspective. Both are grammatically possible. The semantics of the context will ultimately decide which one is the best.

Some other problems crop up in the verse as it continues. Of the problems here, one has particular significance for this verse.¹ The subject of יִבְּרֹךְ and יִזְכֹּר is הַגִּבּוֹר. But the concord between the verbs and subject seems to be more desirous. To deal with this apparent difficulty, Dahood has offered that the 3ms verb is often seen in the Psalms as a 3mp verbal form.² This would solve the problem and prevent any emendation. However, the LXX has plural verbs in its translations. One wonders how much weight to put on the LXX, but it cannot be wrong all of the time.

Perhaps the plural idea does make sense. The author

¹The other problem concerns the LXX which translates אֶת אֲשַׁפְתּוֹ with ἐπιθυμία. Again perhaps a misunderstanding of the LXX, although "desires" is not altogether inappropriate. Dahood suggests that the congruence of metaphor "arrows" in verse five makes "quivers" a logical choice and rules out "desires" correctly so.

²*Psalms*, vol. III, p. 225.

could be collectively speaking of the father and his sons, for both would be present at the gate so that the father can stand his ground. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand the plural concept in this verse.¹

Semantical Studies

The man which is described in this verse is denoted by the word גִּבּוֹר. Even though this word is used in greater frequency in the Psalm than other portions of the Old Testament, it was unexpected. Girdlestone observes that this term is used to represent a mighty man.² He admits, though, that the term is not always that clear in the book of Psalms. But this meaning (mighty man) may not be too far off for this passage. The LXX does not translate this word in this passage. Perchance the translators saw some literary technique that they were not able to deal with. If they did, they were correct. For what has been seen earlier in the passage shows that the author is capable of some dramatic effects. There is a close orthographic similarity between גִּבּוֹר and the preceding term גִּבּוֹר. This similarity has caused a few to repoint the text in line eight from גִּבּוֹר to גִּבּוֹר. Dahood correctly recognizes that "proposals to repoint *geber*, 'man,' to *gibbor*, 'warrior,' receive a

¹Miller, "The House," pp. 131-32.

²Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 52-53.

setback from the 4QPs Commentary on Psalms" ¹ But if those who set out to repoint the text would pay attention to the text, these changes sought in this passage would not have been taken. For the word גִּבּוֹר is an appropriate word here. It orthographically parallels the word גִּבּוֹר bringing a unified concept. Also the concept of 'mighty man' parallels the meaning of 'warrior' giving good evidence for the choice of this word. So the author again displays his literary genius in this choice of the word. Even though the meaning of the word 'mighty man' is not necessary, the use of גִּבּוֹר for man is acceptable, it brings in an interesting concept of a man who has sons to be seen in the light of strength which fits this context of opposition in the city gates.

The wisdom style is seen in the term "blessed." ² it is interesting to note that it is in the plural אֲשֶׁרִי. The uses of the plural would allow the translation of "Oh the happinesses of the man," or "how completely happy is the man." It has been noted that this expression "denotes the fullness of the man's blessing." ³ This idea fits well with the filling of the quiver.

The blessed man is depicted as the one with a full

¹Ibid., p. 224.

²Murphy, "Classification," pp. 163-64.

³Davis, The Psalms, p. 60.

quiver. The factitive use of מִלֵּא is preferable here. For it is the man who realizes the blessing of God and seeks it. The military figure is continued in this line with the use of "quiver." It is an appropriate figure in relation to the arrows of the preceding. Again the author demonstrates his poetic ability. The quiver in use during Solomon's day or of the military history of Israel is not easily described because of the lack of pictorial reliefs in Israel's history. אֶשֶׁף is a loan word from Akkadian.¹ It is from surrounding areas that pictorial reliefs show the configuration of the quiver. One authority states that quivers were made of leather with a shoulder strap and were long and cylindrical.² They are reported to be able to hold between twenty and thirty arrows.³ Indubitably, the psalmist was speaking about large families.

As the psalmists began with the building of a house so he continues with the theme of building up the family. This dynastic connotation is not out of line with the term "house."⁴ The result of the building of the house is that the blessed man and his family, specifically boys, will not

¹Maximilian Ellenbogen, *Foreign Words in the Old Testament: Their Origin and Etymology* (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1962), p. 45.

²*Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "War and Warfare," by Yitzhah M, argowsky.

³Ibid.

⁴Miller, "The House," p. 127.

be ashamed when they confront their enemy at the gate.

The practical wisdom of the Psalm appears here, for the psalmist brings the contents of this second saying into the daily realm of the man. For it is at the gates that many activities take place. The gate during Solomon's reign was designed primarily for the defense of the city. But his design allowed a space for the prominent affairs of the city to take place. It is where both public and private gatherings could meet. It was the place for social, economic, and judicial activities.¹ According to this psalm, it is a place where the father would find himself.

At the gate the father would often meet his אֹיְבָיִם.

The reference to the 'enemies' suggests a negative activity in which the father would have to show strength. Dahood suggests that יִבְרָרְהוּ continues the military motif. The word would translate as "he shall drive back the enemies."²

There may be some uses of יִבְרָרְהוּ used in this way, but Dahood wants to develop a royal character in the psalm and this suits his purpose. The royal motif is interesting but probably not the focus of the psalm. The most common use of the word בָּרַךְ is associated with speaking.³ This use fits with the context of the psalm. Also the suggestion of the

¹Frick, *The City*, p. 84.

²Dahood, *Psalms*, vol. 3, p. 225.

³BDB, pp. 180-84.

military strength of the father may not be necessary during the time of Solomon. For he kept and modified the standing armies of Israel, which would deal with the enemies at the gates of the city if need be.¹ But most agree that judicial activity is involved in which the father would be backed by his sons to prevent unfair practices. These unfair judicial practices are denounced by the prophet Amos in 5:12,

For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins.

You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

The presence of many sons will prevent the father from being humiliated or ashamed. For he can speak with authority and assurance and need not fear that he will be mocked.

Interpretative Summary

Verse five closes the psalmist's words of wisdom. Wisdom provides practical insight into the lives of the Israelites. The psalmist started out in the realm of shelter and security. He progressed from the external to the internal. Through his literary design he has declared the blessing of sons for the father. So that the father can uphold justice in the presence of his sons.

Just as the warrior is able to use his arrows to accomplish the battle before him. The father has trained his sons well, fashioned them as well tamed arrows. So at

¹Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, pp. 275-90.

the time of need he is able to depend upon them. Surely this has instructive truth for the modern day believer. It is rare any more to find sons that at the pull of the bow string they are there to support their father against the perversion of his faith. But just as the warrior must practice with his bow and arrows to master his weapon so that it is available to him in time of need, fathers need to practice with their sons to train them right also.

But of the general nature of the proverb, it is not out of reach to bring in the entire family itself. There is blessing to be gained from a well ordered family. When the enemies are at the gate, surely the father can rest assured that his children will not depart. As the psalmist began, all is vain unless the Lord is acknowledged in the lifestyle of the family.

Conclusion

Psalm 127 is two wisdom sayings composed by Solomon around the mid-tenth century B.C. It has been seen that the two sayings which appear separate at first really have a unifying structure between them. The unification of the psalm lies predominantly in the semantic sphere where the house and family are seen in connection and the city and gate are of a member class association.

Solomon who with experience speaks of the dictum of God's sovereignty. Those who attempt to deal with life's

necessities of shelter, security, and sustenance without the acknowledgement of God in their lives are striving in vanity. Vanity that declares these endeavors to be wicked and void of spiritual effect. But those who live in submission to God, depending on His guiding, protecting, and feeding hand can rest assured at night that all will be well.

But the sovereignty of God has a positive side also, the blessing of sons. Sons are given from God's possession into the care of the father. So as a mighty archer he can train up his sons properly so that in the time of need, they can be depended upon. They will fly straight and not veer off course. So as the father defends justice, he will come away victorious, a mighty man.

Psalm 127 is a mighty psalm composed by a mighty man. Only if he himself would have listened to his own words as his days drew to a close.¹

¹1 Kings 11:1-13.

CHAPTER III

A SUGGESTED TRANSLATION

Unless God builds the house,
 Its builders labor on it in vain
Unless God protects the city
 Its watchman watches (it) in vain
Vanity is to them who get up early and delay rest
But, those who eat the bread of toil, He gives
 to his beloved sleep
Behold, the inheritance of God are sons
 His reward is the fruit of the womb
Like arrows in the hand of the warrior
 so are youthful sons
Blessed is the man who fills his quiver from them
They will not be ashamed when they speak with his
 enemies at the gate.

APPENDIX I

אם יִהְיֶה לֹא יִבְנֶה בַּיִת שְׁוֹא וְעָמְלוֹ בִּזְוִי בֹו
 אם יִהְיֶה לֹא יִשְׁמֹר עִיר שְׁוֹא וְשָׁקֵד שׁוֹמֵר:
 שְׁוֹא לָכֶם מִשְׁכִּימֵי קוֹם מֵאַחֲרֵי שַׁבָּת
 אֲכָלִי לֶחֶם הַעֲצִיבִים בֶּן יִתָּן לִידֵדּוֹ שְׁנָא:
 הַנֶּחֱלֵת יִהְיֶה בָנִים שָׂכָר פְּרִי הַבֶּטֶן:
 כַּחֲצִים בִּיד־נֶגֶד כֵּן בְּנֵי הַנְּעוּרִים:
 אֲשֶׁר־הַנֶּגֶד אֲשֶׁר מֵלֵא אֶת־אֲשַׁפְתּוֹ מֵהֶם
 לֹא יִבְשׁוּ כִי־יִדְבְּרוּ אֶת־אֲוִיכֶם בַּשָּׁעַר

Link 1

Link 2

Link 3

Unless the Lord builds the house
 its builders labor in vain.
 Unless the Lord watches over the city
 the watchmen stand in vain.
 In vain you rise early and stay up late,
 toiling for food to eat--
 for he grants sleep to those he loves.
Sons are a heritage from the Lord,
 children a reward from him.
 Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
 are sons born in one's youth.
 Blessed is the man
 whose quiver is full of them.
 They will not be put to shame
 when they contend with their
 enemies in the gate.

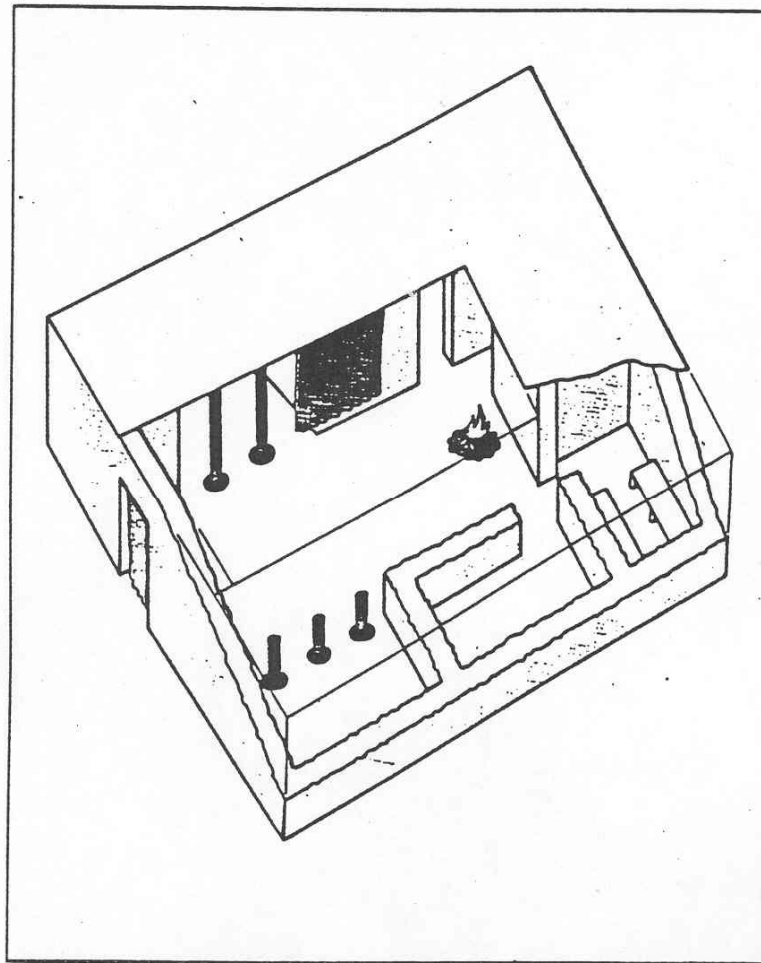
Link 1

Link 2

Link 3

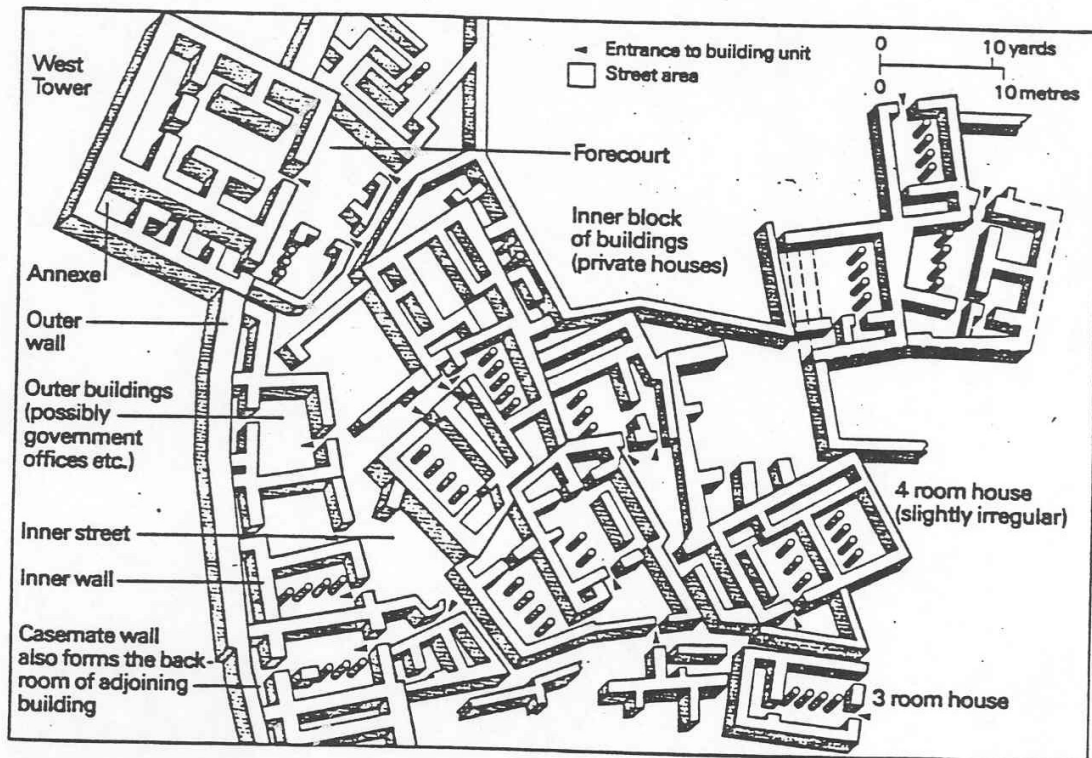
New International Version

APPENDIX II
HOUSE/CITY



*Cutaway reconstruction
of a typical Israelite
house with four rooms
grouped round the central
courtyard. Excavated at
Tell el-Farah.*

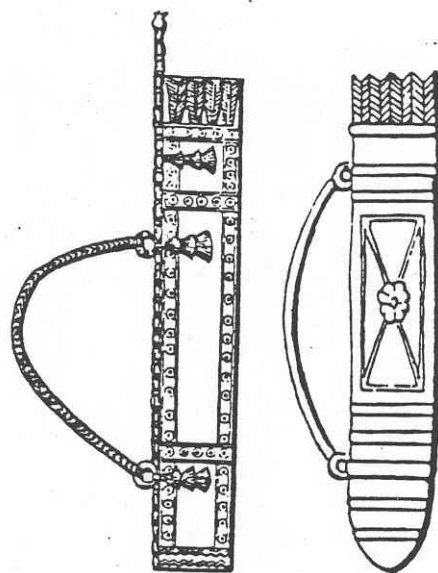
¹*The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "House," by
M. J. Selman.



Town planning at Tell beit Mirsim in 8th-7th cent. BC Palestine. Typical four-roomed houses are grouped in blocks or ranged against the surrounding city walls.

¹Selman, "House," p. 670.

APPENDIX III

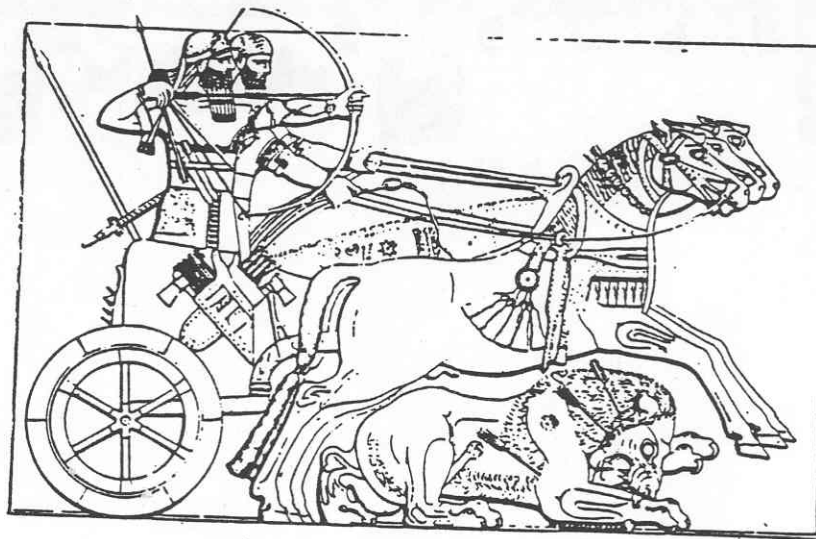


Left: An Assyrian quiver
Right: An Elamite quiver

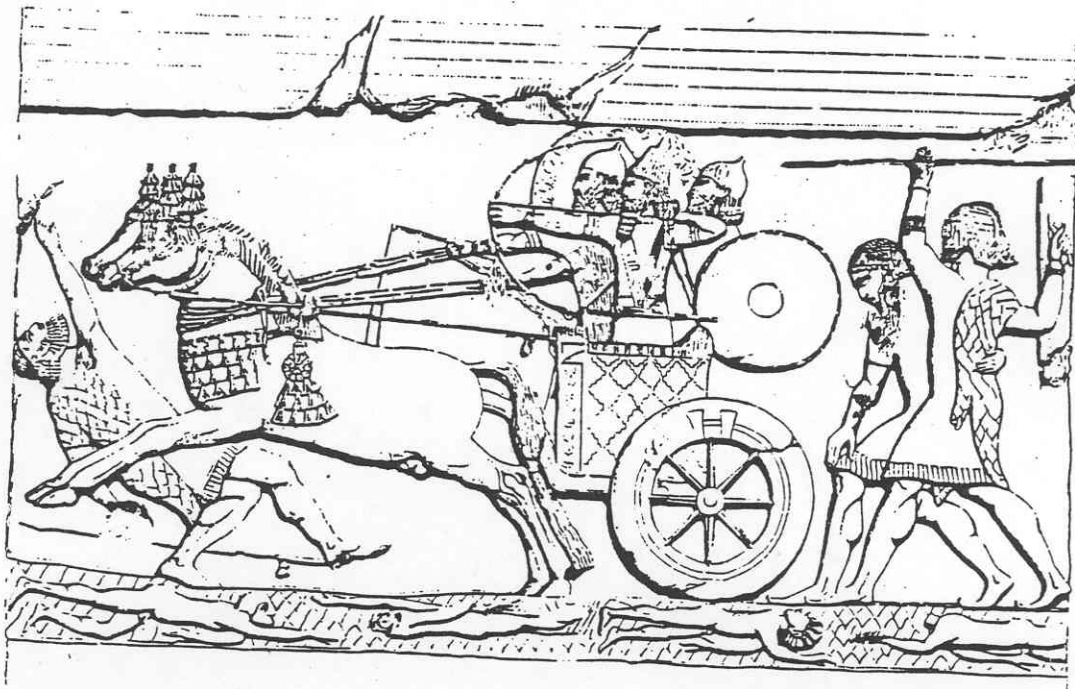


Sennacherib's archers

¹Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, p. 296.



Ashurnasirpal's Chariot

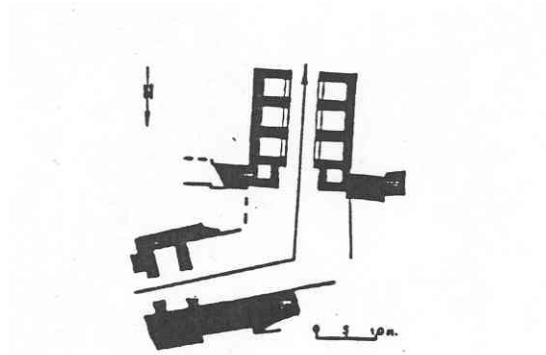


Sargon's Chariot

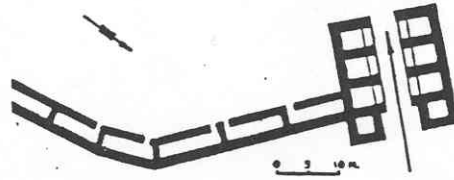
¹Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, p. 300.

APPENDIX IV

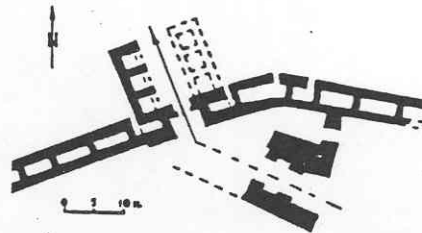
CITY GATE



160. The Solomonic gate at Megiddo.

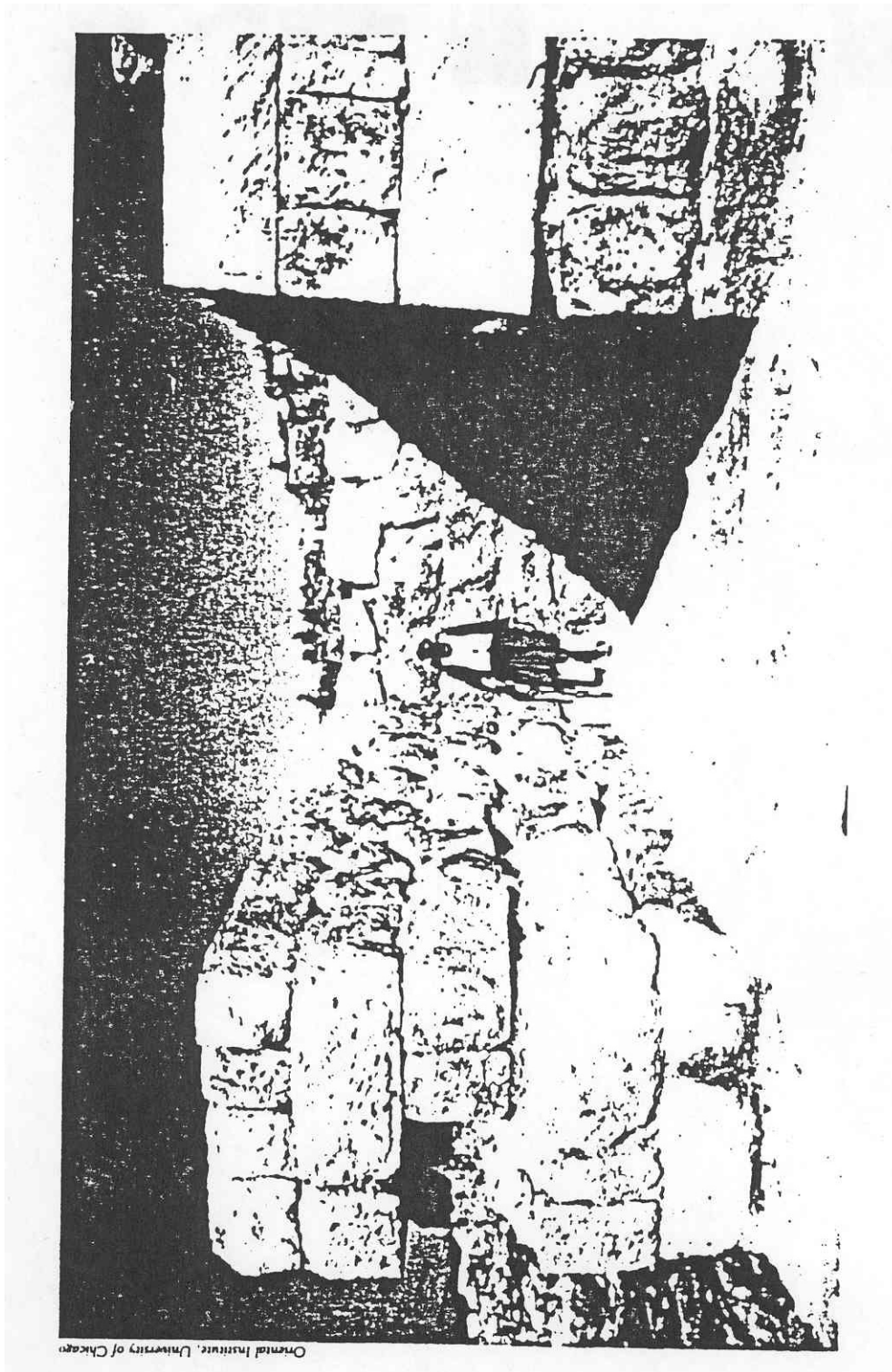


159. The Solomonic gate at Hazor.



161. The Solomonic gate at Gezer.

¹Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, trans. by Timothy J. Hallett (New Jersey: The Seabury Press, 1978).



One of six chambers of the Solomonic City Gate at Megiddo

¹ Valerie Fargo, "Is the Solomonic City Gate at Megiddo Really Solomonic?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9 (October 1983):10.

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