T. Ishida (*Royal Dynasties,* 147) has assigned the psalm to the period of Josiah's achievement of national reunification around Jerusalem as cult center. However, there may have been some degree of idealization of Jerusalem's role present in the text from the beginning. The relative particle ש in vv 3–4 may be a dialectal feature rather than a sign of lateness. G. Wanke (*Zionstheologie,* 106–17) has claimed that the Songs of Zion, in particular Pss 46, 48, 84, 87, are essentially post-exilic, but his position has not gone unchallenged (cf. H.-M. Lutz, *Jahwe, Jerusalem und die Völker zur Vorgeschichte von Sach. 12:1–8 und 14:1–5.* [WMANT 27; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968] 171–77, 213–16; Kraus, *Psalmen,* 499).

The poetic structure of the psalm has been variously analyzed. At least three scholars have divided it into five pairs of bicola (J. A. Montgomery, *JBL* 64 [1945] 383; S. Mowinckel, *Real and Apparent Tricola in Hebrew Psalm Poetry* [Oslo: H. Aschehoug, 1957] 101; E. Beaucamp, *RSR* 56 [1968] 211). There is obvious support in the material for such pairing of lines, but can they be grouped more closely? Dahood (*Psalms III,* 203–4) favors a tripartite division, vv 1aβ–4a, 4b–5, 6–9. More appealing is an analysis into an introduction of two lines, vv 1aβ–2, and two strophes of four bicola, vv 3–5, 6–9 (J. Schildenberger, *Estudios Eclesiásticos* 34 [1960] 683). This division accords well with Gunkel's analysis of form, cited above. Both of the main strophes begin with references to Jerusalem. The introductory strophe and the final one are bound together inclusively not only by mention of the temple, בית יהוה in vv 1, 9 (Dahood, *Psalms III,* 207), which is echoed by בית דויד "house of David" in v 5, but also by the first plural suffixes of vv 2, 9 and by direct address of Jerusalem. The last strophe is marked by sixfold alliteration playing upon the name "Jerusalem" (שלום "peace" three times, שאלו "pray, ask," ישליו "prosper securely," שלוה "secure prosperity"). Apart from the foregoing, step-parallelism occurs in adjacent cola in vv 4–5. Seybold (*Wallfahrtspsalmen,* 24–25, 62–63, 88) has judged vv 4aβ–b, 5b and 9 to be secondary because of their generalizing or theological content, but these parts do not jar with the other material in a pilgrim's version of a Song of Zion (for the royal reference of v 5b cf. 84:10 [9]), and the inclusive nature of vv 1, 9 has an original ring.

Explanation

A pilgrim, come to worship in Jerusalem at one of the festivals, captures in song his joyful fascination with the scene and the occasion. With a full heart he glances back, around and forward. He traces his joy to the time when local leaders announced a communal pilgrimage to the temple. He had anticipated this visit so keenly, and now at last he and his fellow-pilgrims are here.

Echoing the more formal Songs of Zion, the psalmist admires the massive, fortresslike structure of the city, which evokes the theme of impregnability, celebrated in Zion theology. In praise of Jerusalem he cites its role as religious center of the federation of tribes, which were bound together in a common allegiance to Yahweh. It had taken over from earlier cultic centers the function of intertribal sanctuary. As such it was responsible too for the administration

of justice (cf. Deut 17:8–13). This role had passed to the Davidic dynasty, to be guarantor under God of law and order in Israel (cf. 101:8; 2 Sam 8:15; 15:2–6; Jer 21:12; Mic 4:14 [5:1]).

It was customary to offer greetings of peace (שלום) on entering a home or community (cf. 1 Sam 25:6; Matt 10:12–13). Here it is especially appropriate: it echoes a popular play upon the name of Jerusalem (cf. Heb 7:2; contrast Luke 19:41–42). The psalmist urges his fellow-pilgrims to bring their prayers of greeting that the city may be enabled to live up to its name. The welfare and safety of Jerusalem were the key to the blessing of the whole community. The boon of peace and prosperity for the capital would radiate out over Yahweh's people, "those who love" Jerusalem. All members of the covenant community would benefit from the welfare of the holy city, the touchstone of blessing. At its heart lay the temple dedicated to the God of the covenant. If it was to be a worthy setting for this jewel, the city merited stable prosperity.

So the psalmist, in impassioned address to the beloved city, expresses his good will and devotion. As the first and last verses especially make clear, this devotion is God-centered. It is a reflection of the crucial importance of the theocratic institutions of temple and monarchy. They stood as material manifestation of the care and claim of the covenant God for and upon every member. Jerusalem was the focus of national unity, a unity which was grounded in worship and issued in the harmonious ordering of life. True brotherhood was realized at this center of the community, where God's revelation of both his grace and his moral will was enshrined (cf. Heb 12:22–13:16).

Grace to Help (123:1–4)

Bibliography

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Translation

[1] One of the processional songs.[a]
I look up to you,
enthroned[b] *in heaven.* (3+2)

[2] *Just as the eyes of slaves*
look to their master's hand,[a] (3+2)
as the eyes of a slave girl
look to her mistress's hand,[b] (2+2)
so our eyes look to Yahweh our God
till he gives us liege aid.[c] (3+2)

[3] *Give us liege aid, Yahweh, give us liege aid,*
because we have had more than our fill of contempt. (3+3)

4 *More than our fill have we had* (3+2+2)
of the mockery of the carefree,[a]
the contempt of the arrogant.[b]

Notes/Comments

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

1.b. For the appositional -*y* morpheme see GKC § 90m and D. A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence,* 69–76. The motif of Yahweh's heavenly kingship was one of the cultic traditions of Jerusalem (H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen,* 1022, cf. 94–98).

2.a. The relationship between hand and eyes has been variously explained, in terms of looking for the hand to desist from punishment, to give the slightest gesture of the master's commands or to give food. This last interpretation is to be preferred (A. F. Kirkpatrick, *Psalms,* 743; H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 544; M. Dahood, *Psalms III,* 209; Kraus, *Psalmen,* 1022). The description of Yahweh in 104:27–28 as a father figure dispensing food to his household is to be compared; an even closer parallel appears in the adaptation of the passage in 145:15–16 (עיני . . . אליך יד . . . "eyes . . . to you . . . your hand"). Total dependence for the supply of needs is the point of the similes, which suits well the prayer and situation of vv 2b–4.

2.b. Gunkel, (*Die Psalmen,* 544) observed that it was likely that there would be a number of male slaves in a household but only one woman slave (cf. Hagar in Gen 16).

2.c. For the significance of the stem חנן "be gracious" see K. W. Neubauer, *Der Stamm CH N N,* 101–2. He found the passage to be a key one for his thesis that the stem basically reflects a relationship of solidarity between master and servant, to which appeal may be made to conform in loyalty.

4.a. Gunkel (*Die Psalmen,* 545), Kraus (*Psalmen,* 1021) *et al.* read לשאננים with one Heb. ms. and LXX in view of the preceding definite article prefixed to the construct state in MT (cf. GKC § 127g). G. R. Driver (*HTR* 29 [1936] 192) suggested repointing הַלְעֵג as a hiph'il infinitive construct הַלְעֵג. However, there is evidence which suggests that the construction in MT was permissible (see Dahood, *Psalms III,* 210, and literature cited there), in which case the minority tradition is to be dismissed as an easier reading.

4.b. K לְגַאֲיוֹנִים (so Vrs) is generally preferred to Q לגאי יונים "proudest oppressors." For the adjectival יון- ending see 124:5 and P. Joüon, *Grammaire* § 88Me. Gunkel (*Die Psalmen,* 545) *et al.* (cf. *BHS*) delete the last two words as a variant to the previous pair, but an irregular tricolon is unexceptionable (cf. Kraus, *Psalmen,* 34) and vv 3–4 are marked by repetition.

Form/Structure/Setting

The psalm is a communal complaint. Vv 2–4 fall into this formal pattern clearly as a confession of trust, a petition and a description of the situation of complaint which functions as a motivating force to support the petition. C. Westermann (*Praise,* 55, 80) finds the confession of trust so dominant that he classifies the composition as a communal psalm of confidence. The singular reference of the first verse is most probably to be explained as the personal avowal of a precentor or representative of the congregation before speaking on their behalf (Kraus, *Psalmen,* 1021, *et al.*).

The background to the complaint appears to be a long period of adversity in the light of vv 2b, 4. Generally the psalm's date of origin is set either in the exilic period or in that of post-exilic Judah (cf. Neh 1:3; 2:19; 3:36 [4:4]). It was composed for recitation in corporate worship as a vehicle of encouragement (v 2) and prayer.

The structure of the psalm has been analysed by J. Magne (*Bib* 39 [1958] 190) into two strophes, the first of four lines, vv 1–2, and the second of two lines, vv 3–4. This analysis suits the formal elements well. The first strophe is marked by a chiastic order, A B B′ A′ (עיני . . . אל, אל-יד . . . כעיני twice, עיננו אל). It is linked to the second by two hinges, שיחננו/חננו and יהוה. The second strophe is characterized by a threefold doubling of terms, חננו, בוז(ה) and שבע רב(ת). The last line serves to develop v 3b. From another viewpoint vv 2–4 exhibit step-parallelism. K. Seybold (*Wallfahrtspsalmen,* 33, 61–62, 89) considers vv 1, 3 secondary, added to give precision and directness to an otherwise inexplicit psalm. Since the effect of these deletions would be to rob it of its stylistic artistry, his dismembering is to be regarded as doubtful.

Explanation

The community has long been suffering in adversity. The cultic representative who brings their prayers to Yahweh begins by expressing his own dependence upon God: Yahweh is the heavenly king for whose power human opposition is no match (cf. 2:4; Isa 40:22–23). His personal avowal of trust sets the tone for the communal words which follow. He leads his fellow-worshipers into a declaration of their own reliance upon Yahweh by means of a double simile. A word picture is drawn of a household of master, mistress and slaves, these last depending completely upon the former two for material support. The community acknowledges, and pleads, that the covenant relationship ("our God") places them in the position of slaves before their divine master. They are utterly reliant upon him. The corollary of this relationship is that he has committed himself to support them as his protégés. For this help they have been waiting and will wait on expectantly, conscious that they have no other help save his.

The psalm moves forward in direct appeal to Yahweh, claiming his help in a repeated plea expressing urgency and agitation. The petition is backed by a piteous statement of their situation of distress, to move God to intervene. Their suffering has become too much for them. Their actual adversity is left undescribed, but is reflected obliquely in vv 3b–4. Insult has been added to injury. Their disaster has been aggravated by the brutal jeering of others whose own lives are untrammeled by affliction.

This short psalm gives powerful expression to a reaction to human stress in terms of religious trust and hope. The two final verses resound like a repeated S.O.S. signal sent off by desperate men. But balance is supplied by the introductory strophe which aims to give a new clarity to eyes dimmed by suffering, by pointing to heaven. The precentor bravely leads the way in formulating the answer to the woeful situation. His implicit call to faith opens up a way forward by appeal to the supernatural resources which the God of the covenant can and surely will supply.

The psalm is reminiscent of Ps 94 in that devout leadership redeems a situation of adversity by guiding into paths of hope and by reminding the community of the covenanted mercies of their God. It was doubtless the psalm's opening affirmations of trust that led to its selection for the collection of processional songs. "God is still on the throne" was its reassuring message to pilgrims who longed for the establishment of his kingdom (cf. Heb 4:16; 12:2).