

Psalms 127:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

Analysis

Solomon's wisdom psalm establishes divine sovereignty over human endeavors through parallel declarations: God must build the house, God must keep the city, or human labor is 'vain' (shav—empty, worthless). This isn't a call to passivity but recognition that apart from God's blessing, even diligent work proves futile (John 15:5). The verse applies to literal construction, family building (verses 3-5), and all human enterprises. It echoes the foundational truth that 'in him we live, and move, and have our being' (Acts 17:28) and anticipates Christ's teaching about abiding in the vine for fruitfulness.

Historical Context

This 'Song of Ascents' (sung by pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem for feasts) attributed to Solomon likely reflects on the temple construction. Solomon learned through experience that wisdom, wealth, and labor apart from God lead to emptiness (Ecclesiastes 2:11). The verse became proverbial in Israel's wisdom tradition.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What projects or relationships are you laboring in that need to be surrendered to God as the true builder?
2. How do you balance diligent work with trust in God's sovereign enablement?

Interlinear Text

אִם	יְהוָה	לֹא	בֹנֶה	בַּיִת	שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר	עֹמֵל	וְ	בֹנֶה
H518	Except the LORD	H3808	build	the house	but in vain	they labour		build
	H3068		H1129	H1004	H7723	H5998		H1129

אִם	יְהוָה	לֹא	שׁוֹמֵר:	עַל	יְרֵמֶה	שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר	דַּלְעֵה
H0	H518	Except the LORD	H3808	keep	the city	but in vain	waketh
		H3068		H8104	H5892	H7723	H8245

שׁוֹמֵר:

keep
H8104

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 16:9 (References Lord): A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.

1 Corinthians 3:7 (Parallel theme): So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

Psalms 124:1 (References Lord): If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say;

Isaiah 62:6 (References Lord): I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence,

1 Chronicles 28:10 (References Lord): Take heed now; for the LORD hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it.

Jeremiah 51:12 (References Lord): Set up the standard upon the walls of Babylon, make the watch strong, set up the watchmen, prepare the ambushes: for the LORD hath both devised and done that which he spake against the inhabitants of Babylon.

1 Chronicles 28:20 (References Lord): And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.

Psalms 121:1 (Parallel theme): I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

1 Corinthians 15:14 (Parallel theme): And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

Psalms 123:1 (Parallel theme): Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.