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## Psalm 129: A Song of Ascents.

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**Psalm 129**  
**A Song of Ascents.**  
(NRSV)

- 1 “Often have they attacked me from my youth”  
—let Israel now say—**
- 2 “often have they attacked me from my youth,  
yet they have not prevailed against me.**
- 3 The plowers plowed on my back;  
they made their furrows long.”**
- 4 The LORD is righteous;  
he has cut the cords of the wicked.**
- 5 May all who hate Zion  
be put to shame and turned backward.**
- 6 Let them be like the grass on the housetops  
that withers before it grows up,**
- 7 with which reapers do not fill their hands  
or binders of sheaves their arms,**
- 8 while those who pass by do not say,  
“The blessing of the LORD be upon you!  
We bless you in the name of the LORD!”**

**Psalm 129** is a combination of thanksgiving and imprecatory lament. Verse 1 is a device used by the priest or leader of worship inviting the entire congregation to recite the liturgical lines that follow. The “me” is the corporate “me” of Israel, not that of any individual; hence the reference to “my youth” in verses 1-2 is the nation speaking about its historical beginnings (the bondage in Egypt), not any individual recalling the personal sufferings of his youth. Thus the first four verses recall how Israel had suffered severely at the hands of her enemies (the task-masters in Egypt), but how the LORD in his righteousness had rescued them from the wicked. Verse 3 likens the welts of whip-lashes across the back to the furrows of a plowed field, and verse 4 speaks of cutting the cord that holds slaves in subjection.

Israel’s outrage against her enemies derives not merely from her suffering in cruel slavery, but also from the close bond that the Covenant at Sinai had created between the LORD and his Chosen People. This meant that an attack upon the People of God was viewed as an attack also upon God himself. Any attack upon Mt. Zion (verse 5), where the Temple was located, was by that fact also seen as an attack upon the God resident in the Temple. That is why Israel prays for the defeat of her enemies; the downfall of Israel’s enemies was the sign of the victory of the LORD.

The imagery of verses 7-8 is obscure. A good guess is that the Psalmist prays in verse 6 that the enemies be like grass on roof-tops, which never comes to any fruition both because it lacks an adequate root system and because the searing heat of the noon-day withers it. A further fate of such grass (verse 7) is that no reaper or harvester would think of trying to make a crop of it. So little value do the enemies possess! And, finally, the normal reciprocal greeting/blessing of harvester and passers-by (verse 8) are not spoken with the enemies.

As we have often noted before, it is appropriate for Christians to pray for the victory of God-in-Christ over His enemies and ours. But it is God's victory over human rebelliousness, the victory of repentance, the victory of conversion from being God-haters to being God-lovers that we desire for our enemies. As strongly as we may be tempted to love our neighbors but hate our enemies, Jesus trumps such conventional wisdom with his teaching and command in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:43-44), "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

**Prayer to accompany Psalm 129:**

Lord Jesus, when our sins had plowed long furrows on your back, your death broke the bonds of sin and Satan forever. Bless your Church, wounded in its members, and strengthen it by your power and grace, that it may praise you now and forever. Amen.