

## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 121

### *A Song of the Steps.*

**T**HIS PSALM ALSO BEARS on those living in Babylon. *I lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from where will come my help* (v. 1): beset by many and varied sorrows, I cast my eyes in all directions in my desire to enjoy some assistance. *My help is from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth* (v. 2): but I know that, while I shall enjoy no human help, God's benevolence alone is sufficient for me. To bring out the efficacy of the help, he went on, *The maker of heaven and earth*: he who formed these things by a word is capable of meeting my needs, too. At this point the inspired author explains what needs to be done for them: *May he not let your foot slip, nor the one guarding you slumber* (v. 3). If you continue to have firm hope in him, he is saying, you will receive complete care from him. He employed the phrase *nor the one guarding you slumber* in human fashion by analogy with those keeping careful guard over flocks and armies and cities. For he indicated the fact that the divine nature is free from passion by what follows.

(2) *Behold, he will not slumber, nor will the one guarding Israel go to sleep* (v. 4): the guard is naturally wakeful, whereas you totter, and for his part he will treat neglect like a kind of slumber; he will no longer take care of you, giving free rein instead to those choosing to devise schemes.<sup>1</sup> *The Lord will guard you, the Lord your protection at your right hand* (v. 5). This he said also in the fifteenth psalm, "I foresaw the Lord ever before me, because he is at my right hand lest I totter."<sup>2</sup> So at this place, too, [1880] he is saying that he is at your right hand and will protect and guard you and accord you complete providence.

1. The comment does not seem to bear on the drift of the verse, or the psalm as a whole.

2. Ps 16.8.

(3) *By day the sun will not burn you, nor the moon by night* (v. 6). They say the moon is not only wet but also hot, and burns bodies like the sun. [The psalmist] means instead, *By night and by day you will enjoy providence from him and be kept clear of harm. He reminds them also of past history: when they were freed from the slavery of the Egyptians, they were covered by the cloud and suffered no effects of the sun's rays.*<sup>3</sup> *The Lord will guard you from all evil, the Lord will guard your soul. The Lord will guard your coming in and your going out, from now and forever* (vv. 7–8). In these words he indicated the manifold providence of God: when it is present we prove stronger than the hostile enemy and avoid the snares of people seen and unseen.<sup>4</sup>

3. Not quite the function of the cloud spoken of in *Exodus* and *Numbers*. Theodoret seems aware of ancient ideas of the moon's harmful potency, though (*pace* Dahood) taking the verse in a more benign fashion.

4. Again the psalm is dispatched curtly, despite the spiritually fertile sentiments of the psalmist, which could—had Theodoret been inclined—have been applied at some little length to the lives of his readers. He hardly shares Weiser's response: "This psalm produces by the simplicity of its language and piety a deep impression that continues until this day."

## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 122

### *A Song of the Steps.*

**W**HEREAS THE INSPIRED AUTHOR applied the previous psalms to those who were discouraged, the one to hand [he applied] to those already in receipt of the good news of return and engaged in the longed-for journey. Rejoicing and dancing, in fact, they say to one another, *I was pleased with those who said to me, We shall go to the Lord's house* (v. 1). This is the voice of piety: they exult and are glad at the prospect, not of recovering their houses but of seeing the divine house. *Our feet are standing in your halls, O Jerusalem* (v. 2). Already, he is saying, we seem to be standing in those sacred halls and performing the divine rituals.<sup>1</sup>

(2) *Jerusalem built as a city, to be part of it at the same time* (v. 3). Symmachus, on the other hand, put it this way, "Jerusalem built as an interconnected city": now deserted and with scattered houses, it will flourish again and be populated, and will recover its former ramparts. *There it was, in fact, that the tribes went up, tribes of the Lord, Israel's testimony to confess to the name of the Lord* (v. 4). The tribes were divided in the time of Rehoboam, and ten were separated from the Davidic kingdom; but after the return a single rule prevailed, everyone trekking to Jerusalem in keeping with the divine Law to offer to God [1881] the customary worship.<sup>2</sup> So at this point the inspired author prophesies this, that the tribes will recover their former unity and converge

1. This might seem an appropriate place to make some remark about the Christian liturgy; but Theodoret is in no mood to expand on the text. Any eschatological sense would be a luxury at this time.

2. The picture of national unity after the return from (Judah's) exile in commentary on these verses does not take account of the annihilation of Israel in the eighth century; north and south were no longer on equal terms to reconstitute a confederacy.

on Jerusalem, singing God's praises in customary fashion. He used the term *testimony* of the divine Law, which explicitly bade Israel come together at the place chosen by the Lord God. *Because there thrones were set up for judgment, thrones for David's house* (v. 5). After prophesying divine things, he prophesies also human things: since in Jerusalem not only the divine Temple had been built but also the palace, and to there also all flocked to settle the matters of dispute, necessarily the inspired author forecast this as well, that the ten tribes would not make their way to Samaria. Instead, just as in David's time they had that permanent tribunal, so too after the return all would gather there.

(3) *Pray for what is for the peace of Jerusalem, prosperity for those who love you* (v. 6). Symmachus, on the other hand, put it this way, "Embrace Jerusalem, those who love you will have tranquility," that is, enjoying profound peace, embrace the occupation of Jerusalem: those loving her will pass their lives in complete satisfaction. *May peace be in your might, and prosperity in your towers* (v. 7). Symmachus, on the other hand, put it this way, "May peace be in your rampart, tranquillity in your palaces." The divine David prays for good things for it so that its ramparts, its palaces and the houses in it will enjoy complete peace.

(4) *For the sake of my brethren and my neighbors I spoke peace of you. For the sake of the house of the Lord our God I sought good things for you* (v. 9). This is my prayer for you, he is saying, not myself as one living in you—for how could he, after all, having long before reached the end of his life?<sup>3</sup>—but in my longing that related tribes should attain peace, and in my desire that the house of my God should recover its former glory.

3. On this and the former verse Theodoret, willy-nilly, has had to make some passing reference to David as the putative author.

## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 123

### *A Song of the Steps.*

**T**HIS PSALM, TOO, REVEALS the piety of the righteous people of that time.<sup>1</sup> *I lifted up my eyes to you, who dwell in heaven* (v. 1): despising all human help, I await your aid, O Lord, and depend on your providence, knowing you to be Lord of the heavens. He said he dwells in heaven, not as though confined to a place, but as rejoicing in the unseen powers that inhabit heaven. [1884] *Behold, as servants' eyes are on the hands of their masters, as a servant girl's eyes are on the hands of her mistress, so are our eyes on the Lord our God* (v. 2). Just as attendants watch their lords' hands, he is saying, for the reason that they receive the basis of life from that source, so too we, O Lord, expect to receive from you the enjoyment of good things. It was not an example of tautology, of course, for him to mention the servant girl,<sup>2</sup> but to show the intensity of feeling: servant girls are more important than servants in so far as they share the company of their mistresses in their chambers, and usually pay them constant attention and long for a kindly attitude from them. *Until he has pity on us*: far from placing a time limit on our hope, we wait until we are accorded leniency.

(2) *Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us* (v. 3). The repetition reveals the ardor of the request.<sup>3</sup> *Because we have had more*

1. Again a curt understatement compared with Weiser's discovery in the psalm of "moving tenderness," "a disposition of heartfelt and profound piety," "one of the finest examples of piety, expressed in prayer—simple, truthful, natural and sincere."

2. The pace may be breakneck, but the *akribeia* of the biblical author—and the commentator—has to be vindicated.

3. If Theodoret earns our commendation for moderation, this paucity of comment, even if respecting a principle enunciated in the preface, is an immoderate example of it. He could well heed the saying, "All things, including moderation, should not be taken to excess."

*than enough of contempt. Our soul has had more than its fill* (vv. 3–4). We beg your mercy, he is saying, not as worthy to attain it, but for having become objects of deep ignominy. *The reproach of the affluent and the scorn of the arrogant*. Symmachus, on the other hand, put it this way, “Our soul is fed up with the mockery of the affluent and the disparagement of the arrogant”: we are distressed with the haughty Babylonians mocking and jeering at us. According to the Septuagint, however, it should be understood this way,<sup>4</sup> *The reproach of the affluent and the scorn of the arrogant*: reverse the situation, Lord, he is saying, and inflict our troubles on those now boasting of the good fortune in which they find themselves.

4. As is his frequent practice, Theodoret entertains the alternative rendering from Symmachus, but returns to the LXX—without a clear distinction emerging between them. Perhaps in an equal contest the “inspired” Seventy have to be awarded a decision on points.

## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 124

### *A Song of the Steps.*

**A**FTER THE RETURN from Babylon, all the neighboring peoples were disappointed at the Jews' liberation and together declared war on them. Assembling savage nations, they deployed forces at one time against them in the hope of wiping out even their very memory. But in response the God of all came to the assistance of his own and cut down all their enemies. Most of the prophets say this—Joel, Ezekiel, Micah, Zechariah, and many others in addition to them. Here blessed David also prophesies it.

(2) *Had not the Lord been with us, let Israel say, had not the Lord been with us when people rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive* (vv. 1–3). Do not attribute the victory to your own power, he is saying: God was responsible for it. [1885] So dance for joy and tell one another, If we had not been granted divine assistance with so many adversaries besetting us in concert, we would not even have been granted burial, and instead would have been consumed alive as though by wild beasts. *When his anger was raging against us.* By this he indicated the envy and hostility of the neighboring nations: they were mortified to see the Jews' freedom.

(3) *Then the water would have overwhelmed us, the torrent passed over our soul; then our soul would have passed over the irresistible water* (vv. 4–5). He said it all in figurative fashion. Since he said, *then they would have swallowed us alive*, he shows the extraordinary dimensions of the forces, hurtling against them like a torrent and calculated to cover them all over. The image of the torrent was an appropriate one for him to employ:<sup>1</sup> as the tor-

1. Though not disposed to dwell on these psalms, as we have seen, Theodorét does not forgo the opportunity to highlight the psalmist's literary artistry.

rent is built up from much rainwater and becomes very powerful, so those attacking Jerusalem at the time were built up from many and varied nations. They were wiped out, however, by a just decree, as the inspired author teaches.

(4) *Blessed be the Lord, who did not give us as a prey to their teeth* (v. 6). He indicated together both the enemies' ferocity and God's assistance, mentioning *teeth* to show their ferocity. *Our soul like a sparrow was rescued from the snare of the hunters* (v. 7). In gratitude they admit also their own weakness, comparing themselves to a sparrow, proclaiming God's power, and revealing the strength of the enemies: they call them hunters. He also teaches the manner of salvation,<sup>2</sup> *The snare was broken and we were freed*: we not only enjoyed salvation but also saw the ruin of the foes. *Our help is in the name of the Lord, maker of heaven and earth* (v. 8): for this reason we despise all human power, having the Maker of heaven and earth as our helper, whose mere name is sufficient for salvation for us.

2. Theodoret must feel there is an embargo on giving such verses an eschatological, even Christological, interpretation, possibly because of the traditional association of the Songs of the Steps with historical events. Even the use of v. 8 in Christian liturgy does not prompt a comment.



## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 125

### *A Song of the Steps.*

**T**HOSE WHO WON that victory sing the triumphal hymn and proclaim the force of hope in God. *Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Sion* (v. 1): whoever is fortified with hope in God will remain unmoved like Mount Sion, undisturbed, illustrious, the cynosure of all eyes. *The one who dwells in Jerusalem will not be moved forever*: the one who dwells in [1888] Jerusalem must live according to the laws of Jerusalem; to those dwelling in [it] this way and trusting in the effect of the Law the inspired author promised stability. *Mountains surround it, and the Lord surrounds his people* (v. 2): just as the mountains surround the city, so divine care is a guard around the godly people. *From now and forever*: God's power is not temporary but eternal, and he bestows it on those who give importance to his service.

(2) *Because the Lord will not allow the rod of the sinners [to rest] on the inheritance of the righteous* (v. 3). Through the prophet Isaiah God used "rod of anger" of the Assyrians: "Alas, rod of my anger and my wrath," he said to the Assyrians, "in their hands. I shall send my wrath against a lawless nation, and bid it make spoils and booty of my people."<sup>1</sup> In other words, I chastise the worthy as I used a rod on the Assyrians. So the inspired author means here, too, that the Lord of all will exercise a just verdict and not allow the rod of lawless people to be inflicted on the company of the righteous. Then he teaches [us] also the reason: *Lest the righteous reach out their hands to wrongdoing*. In case those who attend to duty, he is saying, think that everything is

1. Cf. Isa 10.5–6. Theodoret seems uncertain here as to whether the Assyrians were the means or the object of divine wrath.

without order or governance, turn to what is worse, and experience harm from it.

(3) *Do good, O Lord, to the good and to the upright of heart* (v. 4). Having shown God's righteousness, he makes a righteous request: he begs that the good meet with their just deserts. The Lord also said as much: "The measure you apply will be applied to you," and, "Blessed are the merciful because they will have mercy shown them."<sup>2</sup> *Those who turn aside to devious ways the Lord will lead away with the evildoers* (v. 5). For *devious ways* Aquila translated, "complicated ways," Symmachus, "twisted ways," and Theodotion, "perverted ways."<sup>3</sup> Of course, the inspired author asked for nothing unfair—simply that the good enjoy good things, and those who have forsaken the divine path and adopted devious and complicated ways meet with the opposite fate. *Peace upon Israel*. While those experience ruin, they enjoyed peace. You should know, to be sure, that Jacob was given this name after being accorded a divine vision.<sup>4</sup> He therefore shares his name with those whose behavior is of that kind, possessing a pure faith and soul: not all from Israel are Israelites—only those embracing the piety of Israel.

2. Matt 7.2; 5.7.

3. Reference here to the other translators for light on this rare word (Dahood coming up with a similar meaning by reference to Ugaritic) reminds us that Theodoret's perfunctory treatment of the Pilgrim Songs has not involved his customary recourse even to them.

4. Theodoret seems to be relating the granting of the name Israel to Jacob, narrated in Gen 32.28–30, not to the struggle with God preceding (as the name suggests etymologically) but to the vision of God mentioned later and incorporated in the place name Peniel. Close acquaintance with the text, let alone Semitic science, should have preserved him from that misunderstanding.

## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 126

### *A Song of the Steps. [1889]*

**W**HEN CYRUS BECAME KING he bade all Jews to return, but most of them had a poor attitude and in every respect were opposed to the divine laws, and they were unwilling to return. All who had a concern for their ancestral piety, however, and hankered after worship in keeping with the Law made the return [journey] gladly. Accordingly, in this psalm these people recognize their own freedom and exult; and they pray for their kin to attain it.

(2) *When the Lord reversed the captivity of Sion, we were like people enjoying consolation* (v. 1). The word *like* here conveys intensity: we enjoyed great satisfaction when God put an end to punishment and granted freedom to the captives. *Then our mouth was filled with joy, and our tongue with rejoicing* (v. 2): immediately suffused with satisfaction we gave our tongues to hymn singing, Aquila rendering *rejoicing* as “praise” and Symmachus as “blessing.” *Then they will say among the nations, The Lord has been magnanimous in dealing with them:* this made us well-known to all, everyone amazed at God’s magnificence in freeing us from that harsh slavery; and of course we cry aloud, *The Lord has been magnanimous in dealing with us, we have been gladdened* (v. 3): it is absurd [for us], who were deprived of the knowledge of God, to marvel at his loving-kindness in our regard, when having been recipients of his beneficence we were afflicted with ingratitude.

(3) *Reverse our captivity, O Lord, like torrents in the south* (v. 4). Their desire is that the others of their kin enjoy the good things they attained, and they beseech the common Lord to give them a share in freedom as well, so that the great number of people returning may resemble torrents. In calling Jerusalem *south* he took the term from its position; both Ezekiel and Habakkuk

call it that, too.<sup>1</sup> The word suggests something else as well: since the south is a humid wind, it fills the air with clouds and brings on severe rainstorms; and of course since it has the capacity to melt snow, it builds up the torrents with water. Accordingly, he is saying, bid our kin, who are scattered in all directions, come together in this way and make their way like a torrent.<sup>2</sup>

(4) *Those who sow in tears will reap with rejoicing* (v. 5): instead of making our petitions to no purpose, however, it is with the knowledge of the fruit of the tears; those casting seed with them rejoice to see the generous harvest. [1892] *They wended their way, and they wailed as they scattered their seed; on return they will return in joy, carrying their sheaves* (v. 6). He uttered the one thought in different ways, producing greater benefit from the diversity of teaching.

1. Cf. Ezek 40–42; Hab 3.3, in a reading of Theodotus.

2. Theodoret here is trying to get the most out of the psalmist's figurative language.

## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 127

### *A Song of the Steps of Solomon.*

**I**N FORMER TIMES SOLOMON built the divine Temple, but after it was razed by the Babylonians Zerubbabel restored it. I think this psalm is called Solomonic both because it takes its genre from Solomon and because it was a work of Solomon that was being restored. The inspired word, in fact, applies it not to the building of Solomon but to the one built by Zerubbabel after the return.<sup>1</sup> Although they themselves tried to build it at that time, the neighboring peoples prevented them both by waging incessant war themselves and by provoking the kingdom of the Persians against them. The writing of Ezra teaches this more clearly. The company of Zerubbabel, therefore, and Jeshua son of Shealtiel and those along with them who were endowed with piety provide the explanation of this psalm.<sup>2</sup>

(2) *Unless the Lord built a house, it was in vain that the builders labored. Unless the Lord guarded a city, it was in vain that the guard kept watch* (v. 1): let no one, either builders or guards, trust in their own power; let them instead invoke divine aid; with its cooperation, each [task] is easier, whereas if God delays his assistance, vain is people's effort. *It is futile for you to rise early, get up after sitting down, you who eat bread of pain* (v. 2). The form *get up*

1. Theodoret is aware of different approaches to the psalm's drift. Mention of "house" in v. 1 had led some to see the Temple, original or rebuilt, referred to, and the rabbis wanted to see Solomon's building there; modern commentators see the piece as a Wisdom psalm, and so traditionally attributed to Solomon. Theodoret avoids the rabbinic application, preferring to accept both the Wisdom character and yet—if only because of the relationship of these Pilgrim Songs to the return from captivity—allowing reference to the rebuilding of the Temple.

2. Theodoret is thinking of Ezra 2, though he has confused details of "Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak" (Ezra 2.8).

is not imperative but infinitive.<sup>3</sup> He means that everything is futile if the God of all does not cooperate, both rising early and getting up, either for guarding the city or for the building in hand. Hence he urges those who eat their bread with pain on account of the assaults of the enemies to have hope in God.

(3) *When he gives sleep to his beloved ones. Behold, the Lord's heritage is sons, a reward of the fruit of the womb* (vv. 2–3). Here in figurative fashion he called rest *sleep*; sleep gives people repose. So with God granting his peculiar care, he is saying, we shall manage to prevail over the enemies, build without difficulty, live a secure life, sleep without care, and become parents of very many children according to the divine promise; he promised to make our race like sand on the sea shore.<sup>4</sup> [1893] He said it here, too: *Behold, the Lord's heritage is sons, the reward of the fruit of the womb*—that is, the divine promise and the blessing of children is given like a kind of reward to us for hoping in him.

(4) *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the sons of those shaken* (v. 4). Theodotion, on the other hand, said, “As arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are sons of youth,” and Aquila and Symmachus rendered it the same way. He means, By trusting in God we shall be not only numerous but also powerful, like some arrows shot by a warrior; and those who are now weak and suffering extreme hardship—this being the meaning of *shaken off*<sup>5</sup>—will be very strong through enjoying aid from on high. *Blessed is the one who satisfies his desire with them* (v. 5)—that is, with the enemies: not only shall we not be beaten, but we shall even overcome them and be the object of everyone's envy. *They will not be ashamed when they speak with their foes in the gates*, that is, when we hold discussions in front of the gates with the

3. Certainly an infinitive would make more sense, but Theodoret's text seems not to have one.

4. Cf. Gen 22.17. Theodoret is capable of giving commentary on a verse from a Jewish perspective.

5. Theodoret makes an unconvincing effort to rationalize the version of the Hebrew *n̄y* he finds in the LXX (citing, in fact, two forms of it), which has confused it with a similar form. Obviously puzzled, he consults the alternative versions, which avoided such confusion. Unable to deal with the resulting dilemma by recourse to the original, and not even seeking help from the Syriac, he is left with a commentator's last ploy, rationalizing.

legates from the enemies. He said this in keeping with the ancient custom: it was not inside the gates that they received the legates that were sent, but gave their response outside. He showed the invincibility of hope in God in every circumstance.<sup>6</sup>

6. The LXX is further astray with its rendering "desire" for the original "quiver," leading Theodoret further off the track laid by the psalmist. A commentator's limited exegetical skills are a liability for a reader.

## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 128

### *A Song of the Steps.*

**A**FTER SHOWING IN THE PRECEDING psalm for how many good things trusting in God is responsible, here he pronounces blessed those having along with hope divine fear, through which the acquisition of virtue is secured. Necessary for those believing in God is a way of life in keeping with God's will, this being the perfect culmination of piety.

(2) *Blessed are all who fear the Lord* (v. 1). The inspired word declared blessed not the one from Abraham's stock nor from Israel's seed but the person adorned with the divine fear. Blessed Peter also says this in the Acts: "In truth I grasp the fact that God shows no partiality, but in every nation the person fearing him and performing righteousness is acceptable to him."<sup>1</sup> The inspired word also gave a glimpse of the character of the divine fear, adding, *those walking in his ways*: "Not everyone saying to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one doing the will of my Father who is in heaven."<sup>2</sup> So it is typical of those fearing the Lord not to stray from the divine ways but to travel in them without fail.

(3) [1896] *You will eat the labors of your palms* (v. 2). Symmachus, on the other hand, says, "eating toil of your hands," suggesting that the Septuagint called *palms* not the profit but the part of the hands.<sup>3</sup> He means, You will gather the fruits of

1. Acts 10.34-35.

2. Matt 7.21.

3. Raised on a paraphrase of the Hebrew, "You shall eat (the fruit of) the labor of your hands," we have even more difficulty with the challenge facing the LXX, which employs a Homeric term *karpos*, "palm," of identical form with *karpos*, "fruit"; and Theodoret has to remind the reader not to confuse the two. The credit, of course, goes not to him but to the LXX and to Symmachus for avoiding the confusing paraphrase.



the good things sown by you. This is what the divine Apostle also said, "The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."<sup>4</sup> *Blessed are you, and it will be well with you: not by word alone will you be the object of envy and admiration; instead, by deed also will you have good fortune.*

(4) *Your wife like a vine flourishing in the recesses of your house* (v. 3). Since they thought this well-being was a seasonal thing, the text promises them also fertility of wives comparable with blooming vines and heavily laden bunches. *Your children like olive shoots around your table.* In the fifty-first psalm, too, he compared the righteous person to an olive tree, "I am like a fruitful olive tree bearing fruit in the house of God."<sup>5</sup> Here he likened the children of the person fearing the Lord to *olive shoots* for providing the watering from piety and fruit in season, not losing its leaves, like the man declared blessed in the first psalm.<sup>6</sup>

(5) *Behold, this is the way the person who fears the Lord will be blessed* (v. 4): God is a judge of behavior, not race. This is the way he awarded the crown to Job, who descended from Esau; this is the way he led Abimelech to the truth,<sup>7</sup> this way the eunuch, this way Cornelius, this way all the nations. *May the Lord bless you from Sion* (v. 5), according to the view then current: it was thought God dwelt in that place. *May you see the good things of Jerusalem all the days of your life.* Those returning from Babylon, seeing the desolation of the city, longed to see this. *May you see your children's children* (v. 6). It was thought a great blessing to reach extreme old age and see children; so he defines blessings suited to attitudes. Blessed Isaiah, however, taught that it was not in these things that he saw attainment of good: "Let not the eunuch say, I am a dry tree, because the Lord says, To the eunuchs preserving my sabbaths and choosing what I

4. 2 Cor 9.6.

5. Ps 52.8.

6. Cf. Ps 1.3. That psalm does in fact speak of the blessed man, though there (alone) Theodoret makes a point of claiming women are not excluded.

7. If Theodoret has the name right this time, perhaps he is referring to the king of Gerar who had dealings with Abraham and Isaac, and came to a better frame of mind therefrom (Gen 21–22, 26). The eunuch and Cornelius appear in Acts 8,10–11.

wish I shall give within my house and within my wall a famous place and a good name, something better than sons and daughters."<sup>8</sup>

(6) *Peace upon Israel.* Again he prays for the peace of Israel. True peace is peace with God, but the Israel of the flesh lost the one and was deprived of the other.

8. Cf. Isa 56.3-5.

## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 129

### *A Song of the Steps. [1897]*

**T**HIS PSALM, TOO, CONTAINS a prophecy of the gentiles' assaults on Jews after the return. They are taught to say, *Often have they attacked me from my youth, let Israel say, often have they attacked me from my youth: they have not prevailed against me* (vv. 1–2). He calls the life in Egypt and the liberation from there *youth*. Singing the praises of the benefactor he lists the divine favors: From the very beginning many adversaries rose up against me, and attempted to surround me with manifold evils, but through the divine assistance I eluded those wiles. More exactly, however, he relates this to the new people, the victim of many assaults from enemies but prevailing over them all and turning enemies into suppliants.

(2) *The sinners did their worst on my back* (v. 3). Aquila and Theodotion, on the other hand, translated it “plowed.”<sup>1</sup> The verse refers to the scourges and the abuses inflicted on the victorious martyrs by the adversaries. These things were also endured by those in the company of blessed Daniel, the remarkable Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, and in the time of Antiochus by the Maccabees. *They prolonged their lawlessness*. Aquila, on the other hand, has “extended,” and Symmachus, “they persisted in doing evil,” meaning, They continued at length warring against me and adding to their own iniquity.

(3) *The righteous Lord cut the throats of sinners* (v. 4). Aquila and Symmachus translated *throats* as “snares,” and Theodotion

1. Dahood observes that the evidently original sense preserved in the Masoretic text, “The plowers ploughed on my back,” moves to a form found at Qumran and in some of the Greek versions, “The sinners ploughed,” and then, as the sense of the metaphor was further lost, to Theodoret’s LXX form. He would not be in a position to do any fruitful cross-checking, of course, beyond noting differences in versions.

as “collars”; each is correct: the God of these cut in pieces the snares which they made for the holy ones, broke the collars encircling them, and cut the very throats of the sinners.<sup>2</sup> *Let all who hate Sion be ashamed and turned backwards.* Let those warring against Sion fall short of their wicked endeavors, he is saying, and be put to flight.

(4) *Let them become like grass on housetops, which withered before being plucked out. The reaper did not fill his hand with it, nor the binder of sheaves his bosom* (vv. 6–7). Some copies do not have *being withered* but “being plucked,”<sup>3</sup> which is what we invariably see happening with crops: no one brings himself to reap the ear while still green, but waits until it is matured and dried, and then applies the sickle. The growth springing up on housetops, by contrast, dries up with the effect of the sun before producing fruit; he prays that the enemies’ forays be like that, and come to an untimely end in a similar way to that.

(5) [1900] *Those who passed by did not say, Blessing of the Lord upon you, we have blessed in the name of the Lord* (v. 8). Those who observe the flourishing crops usually admire the farmers’ diligence, and on passing by they congratulate them as they reap harvests of this kind;<sup>4</sup> but no one ever gave voice to such sentiments to those collecting the grass on housetops.

2. Again the limitations of Theodoret’s exegetical skills appear. Either because he finds the meaning of the LXX rather raw, or just for the sake of it, he assembles the alternative versions of one word, notes the different sense each lends to the verse, but simply (and helplessly) in relativist fashion declares all valid. There is no attempt to look at the original behind the three different versions, or relate them to the metaphor in the previous verse—which, in any case, the LXX has lost.

3. As mentioned in Introduction, section 3, a further resource available to Theodoret in his task as exegete and commentator were other forms of the LXX beyond his local form and the one in the Hexapla; he refers to them as “copies,” as here. In this case one wonders if he is confused in comparing readings, as his text does not correspond to the readings he now cites. He is on firmer ground respecting agricultural lore.

4. Had Theodoret been in a mood to relate these Pilgrim Songs to other parts of Scripture or been aware of such connection, he might have cited—in addition to agricultural lore—a greeting such as that of Boaz to the reapers in Ruth 2.4.

## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 130

### *A Song of the Steps.*

**A** CHORUS OF THE RIGHTEOUS offers this supplication to God; the psalm's opening testifies to this: *Out of the depths I have cried to you, O Lord* (v. 1), that is to say, From the very bottom of my heart I pour out the supplication. The divine Scripture condemns those who employ only their lips: at one place the prophet Jeremiah says to the God of all, "You are near to their mouth, but far from their innards";<sup>1</sup> at another place God himself through the prophet Isaiah condemns Jews in the words, "This people honors me with their lips, but the heart is far from me."<sup>2</sup> In this case those making supplication from the bottom of the heart pour out the prayer. *Lord, hearken to my voice; let your ears be attentive to the sound of my request* (v. 2). He knows God is bodiless, despite using human expressions: he uses terms for the sense of hearing and sight.<sup>3</sup> Our eyes, of course, have the power of sight, and our ears have been equipped with the sense of hearing. What God hears with, on the contrary, he also sees with, and what he sees with he also hears with.

(2) *If you took note of iniquities, O Lord* (v. 3). The choir of the righteous beseeches the Lord not to measure punishments against sins. In this way those of the company of blessed Haniah attributed the transgressions of the people to their own

1. Jer 12.2.

2. Isa 29.13.

3. Despite his extremely concise treatment of this much-loved psalm, which was Luther's favorite and which Weiser sees combining "tender sentiments, simple and sincere language, and a most profound understanding of the nature of sin and grace" (themes not, in fact, developed here), Theodoret does remind the reader characteristically not to fail to appreciate the anthropomorphism at this point. Concise commentary cannot run the risk of having divine transcendence infringed.

person. *Lord, who would stand it?* In other words, If you were to impose the yoke of judgment as justice requires, who would be in a position to sustain the sentence laid down by it? Everyone, in fact, would have to face ruin. *Because with you is forgiveness* (v. 4): you have loving-kindness joined with righteousness, and you are in the habit of employing the former rather than the latter.

(3) *For your name's sake I waited for you, O Lord, my soul waited for your word* (v. 5). For *name* Aquila and Theodotion gave the translation "fear," and Symmachus, "law." Nevertheless, the sense of the expression is the same; he means, Aware of this your goodness (you employed mercy like some law), I do not renounce firm hope as I await [1901] the promise of good things. He called the good promise here *word*; loving-kindness, however, he promised to the repentant.<sup>4</sup> *My soul hoped in the Lord, from morning watch until night* (v. 6), that is, all day; *morning watch* is, in fact, the last hour of the night: the last watchers keep watch until that time. *From morning watch let Israel hope in the Lord* (v. 7). The righteous are not satisfied only to have the wealth of hope in God; instead, they urge all others to a like possession, and declare the advantage stemming from it.

(4) *Because with the Lord there is mercy, and with him copious redemption: full of pity and loving-kindness is the Lord, who furnishes salvation to the repentant. He it is who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities* (v. 8). The verse directs its prophecy to the Lord: he is the Lamb of God in person, who takes away the sin of the world.<sup>5</sup> This was also the way the divine Gabriel spoke to the holy Virgin: "You will have a son, and you will give him the name Jesus, because he is the one who will save his people from their sins."<sup>6</sup>

4. We have seen Theodoret previously acknowledging the penitential psalms of the early Church, of which this is the sixth and one of the most powerful—little though his reader would grasp this from the commentary.

5. John 1.29.

6. A collation of Luke 1.31 and Matt 1.21, involving a rare reference to Mary.

## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 131

### *A Song of the Steps.*

**T**HE INSPIRED WORD GIVES instruction in humility, and presents the person of its devotees as those praying and importuning God. *Lord, my heart is not elevated* (v. 1). Elevation of the heart is harmful not only to the ungodly but also to the holy. The story of the Chronicles teaches this in connection with the pious king Hezekiah, saying, "Because he was brought down from the elevation of his heart."<sup>1</sup> Hence the Lord also exhorts his sacred disciples, saying, "Everyone who humbles himself will be elevated, and he who elevates himself will be humbled."<sup>2</sup> *Nor my eyes lifted up.* Raising the eyebrows, puffing up the cheeks, and looking askance at everyone is typical of the haughty. Those free of this failing do not teach the judge this fact as though he were ignorant [of it], but call him to witness as though aware [of it]. *I did not spend my time with mighty matters.* Symmachus, on the other hand, said "majestic," and Aquila, "magnificent." *Nor with matters too marvelous for me.* Symmachus, on the other hand, said, "Nor with matters beyond me," that is, I kept myself in check, and did not attempt what was beyond my state.<sup>3</sup>

(2) [1904] *Unless I remained humble instead of elevating my soul, like a weaned child with its mother, you would have repaid my soul in due fashion* (v. 2). Symmachus, on the other hand, [says,] "Unless I had made my soul similar and comparable to a weaned child towards its mother, response would have been made to

1. 2 Chron 32.26.

2. Luke 18.14, loosely recalled.

3. With the accent so much on conciseness, one acknowledgment of the alternative versions seems pointless (as Dorival suggests of some on Ps 119, perhaps the work of a copyist), while the other from Symmachus is not a distinct improvement but at least evokes explication.

my soul in like fashion.” If I had not feared you, he is saying, and subjected myself to you like an infant recently taken from the teat and fearful of the mother, and instead had had an elevated mind, I would have deserved to meet the same response.<sup>4</sup> *Let Israel hope in the Lord, from now and forever* (v. 3). The inspired word showed the reason for giving the outline of virtuous behavior—not to rehearse their own virtue by magnifying themselves, but to stir up the others to the same zeal. Hence they exhorted all Israel to cling to the same hope, have it always, and gain the fruits stemming from it.

4. The bishop is not about wringing our withers in commenting on this affecting picture from a very personal psalm, which Weiser rightly calls “a wonderfully tender and intimate little song.” Teaching, yes, and even some New Testament reinforcement—but sentiment, no.



## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 132

### *A Song of the Steps.*

**T**HIS PSALM HAS A CLOSE relationship with the eighty-eighth: in both cases the captives in Babylon petition the God of all, offering in place of petitions the promises made by him to the mighty David and asking to attain pardon. It also contains prophecy of the Savior of the world sprung according to the flesh from the race of David.<sup>1</sup>

(2) *Remember David, O Lord, and all his gentleness* (v. 1): since in our great sinfulness we are bereft of all confidence, we beseech you, O Lord, to remember David, and his gentleness and piety. The previous psalm also made mention of this, and taught clearly his moderation in attitude. *How he swore to the Lord, made a vow to the God of Jacob: If I enter into my tent, if I climb on my bed, if I give sleep to my eyes, slumber to my eyelids, and rest to my temples before I find a place for the Lord, a tabernacle for the God of Jacob* (vv. 2–5). The story of the Chronicles teaches this more clearly: he first asked to build the divine Temple, but when God through the prophet Nathan prevented it and foretold the future building by Solomon, he postponed the building without falling into indolence; instead, he gathered gold, silver, iron, bronze, wood and precious stones. All this, as I said, that book teaches those prepared to read it.<sup>2</sup>

(3) [1905] *Behold, we heard it in Ephrathah, we found it in the plains of the forest* (v. 6). His petition was to build a temple to God, whereas the only-begotten Word of God from the fruit of

1. Mention of the Temple in the body of this Song of the Steps proves too pregnant with New Testament associations for Theodoret to avoid finding a Christological sense and being more expansive in commentary. He also admits to finding historical associations unconvincing.

2. Cf. 1 Chron 17, 22. Theodoret would do a brief study of the work of the Chronicler.

his loins promised to build for himself a temple endowed both with soul and with reason.<sup>3</sup> Hence the inspired text says, *Behold, we heard it in Ephrathah, we found it in the plains of the forest*. The now called Bethlehem is named Ephrathah: Christ the Lord was born there, and in giving the Jews a glimpse of his own body he said, "Destroy this temple." And he calls the place of the Temple in Jerusalem *plains of forest* for being desolate and having no building: there it was that the mighty David, in checking the destroying angel by prayers to God, set up an altar, offered sacrifice, and devoted [the place] to the building of the Temple. Since, however, there were two tabernacles, one of stones and timbers and the other of body and soul, and one was made by Solomon in Jerusalem whereas the grace of the all-holy Spirit composed the other in Bethlehem, and the pious people of that time saw the one but looked forward to the other, the inspired word was right to say, *Behold, we heard it in Ephrathah*—that is, what would be made by the Holy Spirit—we *found it in the plains of the forest*, the one built by Solomon according to the promise of the Spirit.

(4) *Let us enter his tabernacles, let us worship in the place where his feet stood* (v. 7). He changed the time. He means, We go in there and adore, believing the 'Temple' has been accorded a divine apparition; this is the sense of *where his feet stood*. We believe, after all, that the divinity is not only incorporeal but also uncircumscribed. The divine Scripture speaks in more corporeal terms about it, however, accommodating the language to human ears.<sup>4</sup>

(5) *Rise up, O Lord, to your rest* (v. 8). They call worship according to the Law God's *rising up*—not that he is in need of it or finds satisfaction in it, but he welcomes the piety of the offerers. They also beg that his grace be manifested again, and the former glory be given to the Temple. *You and the ark of your*

3. In citing John 2.19, Theodoret is implicitly refuting, as he had done explicitly in commentary on Ps 16.11 (see note 22 there), the denial by Arius of a rational soul in Jesus and by Apollinaris of Laodicea of a rational mind and will. The Johannine reference is also sufficient for Theodoret to conduct his typological argument here of the two temples.

4. Chrysostom himself could not have stated better the principle of Scriptural *synkatabasis*.

*sanctification*. Since in the Holy of Holies the ark stood with the tables of the Law inside, and the mercy seat was situated alongside, and through the latter some indications of the divine manifestation were given to the high priest, he was right to make mention of the ark: the God who made heaven and earth, according to the saying of blessed Paul,<sup>5</sup> does not dwell in temples made by [human] hands. The wise Solomon also prayed this way, "If the [1908] heaven and the heaven of heavens are not sufficient for you."<sup>6</sup> The very God of all also said this, "The Heaven is my throne and the earth my footstool: what sort of house will you build for me? or what is my resting place?"<sup>7</sup>

(6) *Your priests will be clothed in righteousness, and your holy ones will rejoice* (v. 9). Once this happens, he is saying, both that the house is built and the ark is placed again in the innermost sanctuary, the priests will perform worship according to the Law and be made righteous, whereas those not worthy of participation in priesthood and yet attentive to piety will be filled with every happiness. *For the sake of David your servant do not turn your face away from your anointed* (v. 10). He calls the king *anointed* here. Since the kings at that time were impious, they pray on David's account that they be not eliminated from the kingly race.<sup>8</sup>

(7) Then he recalls the promises made: *The Lord swore truth to David, and he will not set it aside* (v. 11). The one promising is free of falsehood, he is saying, he is a fountain of truth, and it is impossible that his promise should not take effect. *I shall set on your throne someone of the fruit of your body*. This promise was singular, and took effect: not only Solomon but also Solomon's successors were granted the royal thrones. Christ the Lord, however, made good the realization of the promise, reinforcing

5. Acts 17.24.

6. Cf. 2 Chron 6.18.

7. Isa 66.1. The Christological color to this Song of the Steps is eliciting a relish for commentary in Theodoret that is shown also by the relative amount of Scriptural documentation.

8. As indicated in his opening remark, Theodoret sees this psalm sung by the community in Babylon—a rare acknowledgment of the liturgical use of a psalm—while he employs oblique expressions about its author, as (we noted) with other Pilgrim Songs.

David's kingship. For the blessed Isaiah prophesied this, [saying,] "A child has been born to us, a son was given to us; his rule is on his shoulder, and his name is Angel of great counsel, Wonderful Adviser, Mighty God, powerful, Prince of peace, Father of the world to come, Amen"; and a little later, "On the throne of David and his kingdom, so as to set it right from now and for eternal time."<sup>9</sup> Christ the Lord, as I said, made good this promise, whereas God gave another one that is not unconditional. He spoke this way, *If your sons keep my covenant and these testimonies of mine which I shall teach them, their sons also will sit on your throne forever* (v. 12). Such, then, was the Lord's promise, whereas their lawlessness interrupted the course of the kingship: once Solomon was involved in impiety, he attracted the divine wrath. For this reason the throne became despotic, and the ten tribes accepted [allegiance to] another king; later even the two [remaining] tribes lost the Davidic kingship.

(8) *Because the Lord elected Sion, chose it as his habitation* (v. 13). From the beginning, he is saying O Lord, you preferred it to the other cities, and made it your dwelling. [1909] *This is my repose forever* (v. 14). You said this, O Lord, he is saying, and promised to take your rest on Sion forever. And this came to pass at the end: even if the former Temple was made desolate owing to Jews' frenzy, yet through divine grace again that spot was thought worthy of being the place of the cross, the resurrection, and the ascension, and from every land and sea all converged there to draw the blessing gushing up. *I shall dwell here, because I have chosen it.* This also came to pass at the end, and a kind of change happened to the buildings. The inspired word made mention of Sion; on it was the place of the cross and the resurrection.

(9) *With blessings I shall bless its wild game* (v. 15). Symmachus, on the other hand, [says,] "With blessings I shall bless its feeding," that is, I shall provide them with an abundance of all good things. *I shall feed its poor with bread:* and to the needy I shall make necessities available. *I shall clothe its priests with salvation* (v. 16). Here he gave the name *salvation* to what he called above

9. Cf. Isa 9.6-7.

*righteousness*, salvation being the fruit of righteousness. *And its holy ones shall rejoice with rejoicing*: the lovers of piety will be made full of all satisfaction.

(10) *There I shall cause a horn of David to spring up* (v. 17). The obvious sense, then, suggests Zerubbabel; but since he transmitted his rule neither to his successors nor even to his children, you would not be justified to call him *horn*, ruling for a short time as he did.<sup>10</sup> The *horn* in fact implies something strong and stable; but since the prophecy does not fit Zerubbabel, the verse prophesies the coming of Christ in the flesh. Blessed Peter also said as much in the Acts: "Since David was a prophet and knew that God had sworn an oath to him to raise up from the fruit of his loins the Christ according to the flesh and seat him on his throne, he spoke with foreknowledge of his resurrection."<sup>11</sup> *I prepared a lamp for my anointed one*. Once more the inspired word calls David's temple *lamp* for receiving into it the light of divinity.

(11) *His enemies I shall clothe with disgrace, but on him my sanctification will flourish* (v. 18). Jews, then, are witnesses of the shame, adopting hostility as they did and reaping the shame [as a result]. *Sanctification*, on the other hand, means the churches in all land and sea, styled the body of Christ the Lord, conveying from him the founts of holiness.

10. Theodoret implies that he would like to have retained the historical or obvious sense, but that the facts oblige him to move to a Christological sense.

11. Cf. Acts 2.30-31.

## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 133

### *A Song of the Steps.*

**U**NDER REHOBOAM [1912] the tribes were split up, ten following Jeroboam and two holding fast to the Davidic monarchy. After the return from Babylon, however, they came together again and loved the harmony, they had the one government and performed in common the worship according to the Law.<sup>1</sup> This psalm, then, prophesies these developments.

(2) *Behold, what a beautiful and charming thing it is for brethren to dwell together* (v. 1). Through experience itself, he is saying, we have learned that nothing gives more satisfaction than brotherly harmony. He calls the tribes *brethren* since the tribal leaders who gave them their names were sons of one father. *Like balm on the head, flowing down on a beard, the beard of Aaron* (v. 2). The high priestly oil was composed of different aromas; none of them of itself emitted such a wonderful fragrance, whereas the combination and mixture of all of them produced as great a fragrance as possible. To this he rightly compared brotherly harmony: the combination of the best deeds produces the aroma of perfect virtue. *Flowing down on the edge of his robe*. The gift of love, he is saying, resembles that balm which covered the head of Aaron, reaching not just the chin but going as far as the part of his tunic around his breast; he called *edge* what we call collar, and Aquila said "garments' mouth" for it. So just as the sacred balm ran on from the head past the chin as far as the clothing and enveloped the priest in fragrance, so the benefit

1. Theodoret does not see this as simply a Wisdom psalm, but insists on finding historical reference for it. And as in comment on Ps 122 (see note 2 there), he has an idealized account of national unity after the return from (Judah's) exile, unaware of the different fates suffered by northern and southern kingdoms.

coming from harmony reaches from the leadership to the subjects.

(3) *Like dew of Hermon falling on Mount Sion* (v. 3). Again he changed to another image, teaching the advantage of harmony; he said it is like the dew carried down from Hermon to Sion. There is so much of it that the jars release drops. Hermon is a mountain—in Palestine, in fact—and some distance from the land of Israel.<sup>2</sup> *Because there it was that the Lord ordained his blessing, life forever*—not on Hermon, but on Sion, where the life-giving dew of the all-holy Spirit was sent down on the sacred apostles, through which all the believers reap the everlasting blessing.

2. Geography is one area where Theodoret feels he has some competence, as we have seen. Perhaps he could have adverted to passages like Deut 4.48 that put Mount Hermon on Israel's northern border. An observation on geography is felt pertinent by him—but nothing of a general nature on the value of harmony in the Christian community from the psalm, which has much to offer on the theme.



## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 134

### *A Song of the Steps.*

**A**LSO THIS [PSALM] RELATES to those returned from Babylon. It also offers advice to all the pious to sing God's praises not only by day but also by night. *Behold, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord* (v. 1): [1913] it is not for everyone to sing, but for those who have embraced the divine service and place much store by the worship of the Lord. In other words, to those who have been affected by the wounds of sin it is appropriate to weep, to lament, and to request the divine loving-kindness. *Those who stand in the house of the Lord, in courts of our God's house.* In urging [them] to sing, he taught also the style of hymn singing. While the divine Paul prescribed the lifting up of holy hands everywhere, it is not least necessary to offer due adoration to God in the consecrated places.<sup>1</sup>

(2) *At night lift up your hands to the holy places, and bless the Lord* (v. 2). Having taught [them] the place, he teaches also the time: the night is suitable for hymn singing, providing great tranquillity and being free from many disturbances. He gives instructions about both the raising of the hands and the prevailing custom. *May the Lord bless you from Sion, Maker of heaven and earth* (v. 3). Lest anyone get the idea that the God of all is confined to Sion, he is right to present him as creator of everything, including all creation in *heaven and earth*: in heaven are angels, on earth human beings and the things made for their sake.<sup>2</sup>

1. We regret that the bishop passes up the opportunity, as we noted of the previous psalm on a key Christian virtue, to speak of the liturgy of Old or New Testaments, for which this psalm provides an obvious occasion.

2. Thus closes the group of fifteen Songs of the Steps, or Pilgrim Songs (though Theodoret's LXX text of Ps 135 may also bear such a title). With the




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exception of Ps 132, which he could not allow to pass without a Christological interpretation, if only because of its citation in Acts, these psalms have consistently failed to move him, commentary being concise, if not curt, and Scriptural documentation conspicuously lacking. This lack of enthusiasm is probably not due to stylistic or structural features in the original pointed out by Albright; to blame may rather be the close traditional association of them with one historical situation, return from exile, as well as the difficulty of tracing them back to David.

## COMMENTARY ON PSALM 135

### *Alleluia. A Song of the Steps.*

 HIS IS ANOTHER HYMN of praise, offered to God in fact by those who had attained freedom. We have already made a comment on "Alleluia."<sup>1</sup> *Praise the name of the Lord, praise the Lord, you his servants* (v. 1). Since the divine nature is invisible and yet he bids [them] sing its praises, he was right to say, *Praise the name of the Lord*. Be content with God's title, he is saying, and do not seek to see what it is not proper to see. *You who stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God* (v. 2). Freed from slavery of Babylonians, he is saying, and enjoying the splendor of the divine halls, sing the praises of the provider of these good things. *Praise the Lord, because the Lord is good* (v. 3): make the goodness of the one you praise the occasion for hymn singing. *Sing to his name, because it is good*: much benefit also comes to you from that.

(2) Then he makes mention of the favors conferred on them. *Because the Lord has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel for his own possession* (v. 4). Symmachus, on the other hand, put it this way, "and Israel as his chosen." He accorded them greater attention, he is saying, styled them his own people, and though having care of all people, [1916] he was mindful of them in a different way. Blessed Moses also said this: "When the Most High apportioned nations, as he separated Adam's sons, he established nations' boundaries according to the number of God's messengers; Jacob became the Lord's portion, his people, Israel his

1. Cf. opening of commentary on Ps 111. This opening comment also suggests that Theodoret's text does in fact have a title reading "A Song of the Steps" like the others, unlike the Hebrew and other forms of the LXX. This would have encouraged in the commentator a like conciseness, and so the liturgical character of the hymn is not developed in commentary.

allotted inheritance."<sup>2</sup> *Because I know the Lord is great, and our Lord is above all the gods* (v. 5). We have learned from experience itself, he is saying, the strength of our God, and the fact that in no way the gods adored by the other nations will be able to be compared with him: nothing, anything which really does not exist is comparable with the one who is and always has been.

(3) Then he gives a glimpse of the power of God from creation. *Whatever the Lord wished he did in heaven and on earth, in the seas and in all the depths* (v. 6). What has been made is a measure not of his power but of his will: he was capable of creating more and much greater things than these, but his will was for this number and kind. Yet all are of his making, heaven and heavenly beings, earth and earthly beings, sea and what is in it. He calls *depths* the boundless mass of water, and spoke of *seas* in the plural since one sea is divided into many oceans—Atlantic gulf, Ocean, Tyrrhenian, Ionian, Aegean, Arabian, Indian, Euxine sea, Propontis, Hellespont, and the other seas more numerous than the aforementioned.<sup>3</sup> *Bringing down clouds from the end of the earth* (v. 7). The waters that naturally fall, in fact, are drawn up by the divine Word to become elevated, watering the whole continent; but he said they are *brought down from the end of the earth* since they are composed of sea water, the ocean gulfs being the boundaries of the earth. *He made lightning flashes for rain*. He gives prior mention to the provision of rain through lightning flashes, and shows the most baffling of all marvels: a fire of lightning flashes coursing through water neither heats it nor is itself extinguished by it. *Bringing out winds from his storehouses*. By winds' *storehouses* he does not mean some kind of deposits; rather, since the air is free of wind and the divine will without difficulty frequently moves it merely by willing to, he spoke of a *storehouse of winds*: once he wishes it, they come from all directions.

(4) After giving a glimpse in this way of the creation and

2. Deut 32.8–9. Theodoret has no qualms about outlining the privileges of Israel as chosen people, though upholding the principle of divine care for all peoples.

3. Again Theodoret shows his propensity to lecture on geography, as also on natural science.