

## PSALM 124 RESCUE AND PROTECTION

Having had enough of contempt (Psalm 124.4), this fifth of the Songs of Ascents, asserts that deliverance from hostility and opposition is possible.

### *God for us (1-5)*

These verses recall a past deliverance. The writer does not describe what happened; whether an event in the history of the Babylonian exile or the resistance the returned exiles from their enemies thwarting the building of the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah (Nehemiah 4.). It fits the terror of the Exile and its aftermath.

The psalmist describes the impact in images and similes; of engulfing waters, powers before which we are helpless. Poetry is so much more powerful. We can easily respond to the terrible sense of powerlessness against an overwhelming flood, a tsunami, because we are responding to common feelings of terror and helplessness.

Or perhaps in vv6-7 they felt like trapped animals before a predator or caught in a trap set to provide a meal for a human table. Again terror and helplessness are common feelings.

The psalmist is certainly talking about an historical event; "...when our enemies attacked us." (2) The enemy was human enough and real enough. The enemy posed a threat to their very existence. The enemy's attack posed a question: what shall we do? But it posed other questions too. Who are we? Whose shall we be? The threat challenged them with a question about themselves. Who shall we trust? Horses, arms, violence, trickery and cleverness? Or...?

No. The lesson they learned is that the people of God cannot live as “humankind without God” because the in the politics of “humankind” they will be overwhelmed and destroyed.

### ***Praise to God who is for us (6-7)***

Deliverance leads to worship and witness. Every deliverance we experience deserves witness and confession to the fact that God is for us.

This is the fundamental fact of salvation. God is for us. God is actively for us. God sets us free from the trap and the predator.

These verses explore new pictures for salvation. We are set free from terror and helplessness. We are set free to be fully alive. We have escaped; we are free. That is the good news. We need to meditate day and night on that image. It is beautiful. God has not cramped us in a religious prison: he has let us free like birds.

### ***Our help (8)***

Therefore the pilgrims declare that their help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. Here theology, God is creator of all, visible and invisible, meets spirituality and discipleship lived out in history, and is the foundation of unreserved trust in the Lord. The theology emphasises the absolute distinction between the Lord and the movers and shakers of human history and politics who believe that they control all things. God is the maker of heaven and earth and no-one else. This God is their God. (See Isaiah 40.12-26 God the Creator and Isaiah 41 God the Lord of history).

This verse climatically affirms the answer to the implied question underlying the Psalm: Where or who is our help? The idea of God as help is a constant theme in the Bible and speaks of a strong presence without which humankind would be unprotected and vulnerable (Ps 108.12)

### ***Further Reflections***

Verse 8 is so familiar to us that we fail to grasp its profound and radical implications. To profess that God is our fundamental help means to profess that we are not sufficient to create and secure our own lives and future. We need help. Most people are quite hesitant to admit this for it undercuts one of our primary principles-God helps those who help themselves.

Psalm 124 teaches that God helps those who cannot help themselves. It is these God sets free like birds. This is what lies at the heart of the gospel: the grace of God. Discipleship and servant hood have their foundations in the confession that we owe our lives to God.

The fundamental trust that God secures our life and futures- God is for us and God is our help-is what empowered Jesus to bear a cross as a suffering servant. It is what empowers the people of God to serve even when that means suffering at the hands of those who oppose God's reign and God's will.

The worshipping community is defined as chosen and constituted by the Lord of heaven and earth. The unqualified trust in God and God's help is the defining characteristic of the Christian community, its belief and behaviour.

When John Calvin designed a liturgy for Strasburg and Geneva during the reformation he began it with the words, “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” He understood that these words stated the truth about the congregation gathered for worship as well as any verse could.

***Questions:***

What role does thanksgiving play in our lives and worship? The people of God never live beyond trouble and the need for God’s help (see also Ps. 108.12). What do you think? How can our worship better express our living trust in the God who is a strong presence?

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” Romans 8.31 Are we willing to live and worship in that trust?