

Psalms of Ascent

Part 5 – Who Can Be Against Us?

Psalm 124

Psalm 124 is a testimony of thanksgiving by the community of God's people in response to God's protection against violent opposition. It was written by David most likely in reference to a period early in his reign during which the Philistines represented a clear and present danger to the people of God. The thematic heart of the Psalm is God's care and deliverance of his people from the designs of their enemies. 2 Samuel 5:17ff shows the nature of the threat presented by the Philistines and David's anxiety his own power to escape it. The Psalmist acknowledges the people's complete dependence upon God to escape the traps laid for them.



This Psalm would have reminded the pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem that the holy city still stands only because of the faithfulness of God. It is a call to remember the Lord's deliverance at a time when the people could easily have been snuffed out.

Psalm 124 serves as a continuing public witness to God. It is sung in the hearing both of Israel and the surrounding nations. The closing declaration is one of praise suitable for daily praise and witness. Acknowledging that if the Lord had not been on their side their enemies would have destroyed them, the pilgrims journeying to Jerusalem praised their sovereign Lord.

Main Idea: When the Lord delivers his people from destruction the proper response is public praise and witness.

Vv. 1-2 – The Psalmist interrupts himself to call upon all the people to join him in public praise of the Lord who had delivered them from their enemies. The acknowledgment of the Lord's deliverance is structured around a series of "if/then" statements which serve the additional purpose of indicating the ultimate fate of those who do not know the Lord.

Vv. 3-5 – These verses complete the conditional clauses set forth in verses 1-2. Using the image of ravenous beasts and a deluge the Psalmist seeks to illustrate the completeness of their destruction had the Lord not been on their side.

Vv. 6-7 – Praise is the proper response to the Lord's deliverance. The implication here is that the Lord does allow his people to experience trouble. He does not eliminate the presence of threats and the trials that come from those threats. Rather he keeps them from destruction.

Vs. 8 – Their Lord is the sovereign Lord of creation. The One who created all things is also He who is sovereign over all things. To praise God as the Maker of heaven and earth is to take comfort in his all-encompassing authority.

1. Trouble is a condition of this world.

- The Psalmist assumes that God's people will live in a world that surrounds them with trouble. The Psalm does not celebrate a lifting up out of a troublesome world. Rather praise is invoked in response to God's faithfulness to preserve his people even though they encounter great trouble.
- While David is almost certainly making reference to a specific time and enemy (the Philistines), this Psalm was to be applied to future generations as they encountered trouble. And Israel's history would provide no small amount of trouble. The same is true of the church,

the new Israel. God's people will always face opposition from without and sin from within. There is no avoiding trouble in this world.

- Psalm 124 should not be read as a blanket promise that God will keep every individual Christian from suffering and death. It must be read first as a promise that, no matter the opposition, God will not allow his people to be destroyed. Consider the church of Jesus Christ. She is a kingdom the size of which dwarfs the Roman and British kingdoms in their heyday. The church numbers in the hundreds of millions and covers the face of the earth. Despite the best efforts of Satan and the world the church continues to multiply even as she is persecuted and harassed.

2. Trouble without God is devastation.

Vv. 1-5

- An "if/then" pattern is fundamental to this section of the Psalm. "***If*** the Lord had not been on our side, ***then***..." The consequences of the conditional "if" are devastating. The Psalmist uses metaphors meant to convey complete destruction. Considering the enemies she faced and the modesty of her own size, the preservation of Israel owed only to God's mercy. Apart from that mercy the trouble Israel faced would have been fatal.

3. Trouble with God is witness.

Vv. 6-8 – "Blessed be the Lord...Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth."

- Psalm 124 is public witness to the power and faithfulness of God. The prompt in verse 1 – "let Israel now say" – is a call for public witness.
- This witness to God's faithfulness is not conditioned upon the absence of trouble but upon God's deliverance through trouble. Israel was harassed by the Philistines for generations. Notice that the image used in verse 7 is of a bird who escapes the snare. The snare is not avoided altogether. The bird is not untouched. Rather a way of escape is provided. In this life God's people will always feel the heat of opposition.
- The Assyrians, a recurring source of trouble for Israel, was often likened to a bird of prey. They were vicious and cruel. The Assyrian King Sennacherib described his attack on Hezekiah as resulting in trapping Hezekiah like a bird in a cage.
- The preservation of God's people through thousands of years of fierce opposition is to be turned to praise for God's supernatural acts of deliverance. As the maker of heaven and earth God is also the maker of the Philistines, the Assyrians, and everything else which opposes His people. Therefore God's sovereignty extends even over those forces which would threaten blot out his people. If there was no opposition then there would be no deliverance and therefore praise to God would be diminished and so to His people's joy in Him.
- Romans 8:31ff