

# PSALMS

## Chapter 124

*Our Help Is in the Name of the LORD*

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

**If it had not been the LORD who was on our side—let Israel now say—2 if it had not been the LORD who was on our side when people rose up against us, 3 then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; 4 then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; 5 then over us would have gone the raging waters. 6 Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth! 7 We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped! 8 Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.**

**Ps 124** Israel's praise of the Lord for deliverance from powerful enemies—an appropriate sequel to Ps 123. Very likely a Levite speaks in vv. 1–5, while the worshipers answer in vv. 6–8. Like Ps 129 it divides into two well-balanced stanzas. (CSB)

Ascription to David suggests a time of his own conflicts with Saul and the Philistines. Might also recall the struggles of the exodus and the entry into the Promised Land. If used by the pilgrims going up to Jerusalem, along with the other Psalms of Ascents (120–134), then it recalls all that God did in leading Israel to their land. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–5, a threat to the Lord's people; vv 6–7, their escape; v 8, help in the Lord's name. (TLSB)

The 124<sup>th</sup> psalm is a psalm thanking God for protecting his poor little band from the ruthless tyrants. He rescues them from the snares of the poisonous slander. These are as many and great as a great, deep water and flood against the little band. But though their teeth be ever so malevolent and angry, God is greater and knocks their teeth out and breaks the snares and rescues his own from them. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

**124 title** *ascents*. Not all ancient witnesses to the text contain this element, and both language and theme suggest a postexilic date. It may have been assigned to David because of supposed echoes of Ps 18; 69. (CSB)

**124:1–5** Let Israel acknowledge that the Lord alone has saved her from extinction (see 20:7; 94:17). (CSB)

Likely said responsively. The lector could read vv 1–5; the response could be vv 6–8. Or, the cantor could have simply introduced the psalm with v 1 and the remainder could have been said by the people. The invitation for speech in v 1 and the repetition of the opening phrase in v 2 support this second option. *now*. Hbr expresses urgency. (TLSB)

**124:2** *people rose up against us*. Proud and arrogant men (123:4) may attack, but the Lord is Israel's help (v. 8). (CSB)

Recalls the proud, contemptuous enemies of 123:4. From David's time on, Israel's enemies often outnumbered its people. (TLSB)

These could be the Philistines in David's rule. Later in Israel's history this psalm could have been applied to the nations who captured Israel and the Samaritans who opposed Ezra and Nehemiah. Today we can apply it to all attacks against the church and its members. (PBC)

**124:3** *swallowed us*. Like death. (CSB)

Without God's being for them the enemies would have completely destroyed them as thoroughly as if something swallowed them whole. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

**124:4–5** *flood ... torrent ... raging waters* – Conventional imagery for great distress. (CSB)

Imagery could refer to David's experiences with the Philistines or to the opposition he faced from Saul (18:4; 2Sm 5:20). Also, the psalm could refer to the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites. (TLSB)

The oppression of Israel is compared to a flood, a trap, and an attack by a wild animal. (PBC)

**124:6–8** Response of praise for deliverance—with a vivid enrichment of the imagery. (CSB)

**124:6** *who has not given us as prey to their teeth*. As by wild beasts. (CSB)

This indicates that the deliverance was completed in the past and the results continue – he has not given them over to them, and so they were not in their power. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

**124:7** *escaped like a bird from the fowler's*. A most apt figure for Israel's release from Babylonian captivity. (CSB)

Imagery of earthbound people nearly drowned in the flood (vv 4–5) is followed by a comparison of people to birds caught in the subtlety of a snare. The flood's danger is open and frightening; the snare is hidden and tempting. But God delivers from both extremes. (TLSB)

**124:8** In climax, the great confession. The one true God, the King of all creation.). (CSB)

God's providence "includes both God's creation and His watchful care" (Chem, *LTh* 1:166). (TLSB)

**Ps 124** We need this psalm's reminder that our strength and safety come only by God's hand. We are in danger from flood and snare, the overwhelming and the enticing. But God is faithful for His name's sake. He rescues us so that we will continue to bless and call on His name. • Lead us safely, Lord, so we may always give glory to Your name. Amen. (TLSB)