

Israel's Preservation and Israel's Peace

Psalms 124 & 125

Psalm 124 - *"If it had not been the LORD who was on our side," let Israel now say—"If it had not been the LORD who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, When their wrath was kindled against us, then the waters would have overwhelmed us, the stream would have gone over our soul; then the swollen waters would have gone over our soul."*

Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowler. The snare is broken, and we have escaped.

Our help is in the name of the LORD who made heaven and earth."

Background Notes for Psalm 124

Psalm 124 is a psalm about **Israel's preservation**. The title says that David wrote this "Psalm of Ascent." Some have questioned the Davidic authorship of this psalm, saying it must have been written by one of David's descendants because of questions regarding the occasion. During David's reign, they say, when was Israel about to be swallowed up alive (v3) by a raging flood (v4-5)? And under David, when was Israel threatened with being torn apart as by a wild beast (v6)? Answer: if you read the biblical record closely, you'll see that all this could have occurred on a number of occasions - from the time of David fighting Goliath and the Philistines, throughout the establishment of his kingdom.

We read about David's wars with surrounding pagan nations in 2 Samuel 8 and 1 Chronicles 18-20. 2 Samuel 10:6-10: *"When the people of Ammon saw that they had made themselves repulsive to David, the people of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Beth Rehob and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand foot soldiers; and from the king of Maacah one thousand men, and from Ish-Tob twelve thousand men. Now when David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the army of the mighty men. Then the people of Ammon came out and put themselves in battle array at the entrance of the gate. And the Syrians of Zoba, Beth Rehob, Ish-Tob, and Maacah were by themselves in the field. When Joab saw that the battle line was against him before and behind, he chose some of Israel's best and put them in battle array against the Syrians. And the rest of the people he put under the command of Abishai his brother, that he might set them in battle array against the people of Ammon."* The Lord gave David the victory here, but without the Lord's help Israel would have been swallowed up by the enemy.

In Psalm 124:7, we read *"Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowler."* Fowlers were persons who caught birds in a trap or snare. When did this happen during David's time? One possible occasion was when he fought

the Philistines in the Valley of Rephaim, as recorded in 2 Samuel 5 and 1 Chronicles 14. *“Then the Philistines once again made a raid on the valley. Therefore David inquired again of God, and God said to him, ‘You shall not go up after them. Circle around them, and come upon them in front of the mulberry trees. And it shall be when you hear a sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, then you shall go out to battle, for God has gone out before you to strike the camp of the Philistines.’ So David did as God commanded him, and they drove back the army of the Philistines from Gibeon as far as Gezer. Then the fame of David went out into all lands, and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations” (1 Chronicles 14:13-17).*

Doctrinal Point for Psalm 124

The key to Israel’s preservation is the Lord’s protection.

If the LORD had not been on our side (v1-2), then Israel would have been swallowed up alive (v3) and overwhelmed and drowned (v 4-5) and torn apart (v6) and ensnared (v7). If it had not been for the Lord, all of these things would have taken place. But the Lord, the Creator of the heavens and the earth (v8) protected Israel. The key to Israel’s preservation is the Lord’s protection.

Notice - the key to Israel’s preservation **is** the Lord’s protection - not just **was** the Lord’s protection in times past. It’s still true. Think of how the Lord has continued to preserve the Jews as a distinct people. They have survived massacres, programs, gas chambers, and worldwide anti-Semitism. Under such conditions, any other nation or people group would have either been extinct or assimilated by now. **But not Israel!** Why? The key to Israel’s preservation is the Lord’s protection.

Practical Application for Psalm 124

Thank the Lord for the little word “IF”!

“If it had not been the LORD who was on our side...” Israel would be long gone and forgotten if the Lord had not preserved and protected her.

Where would we be ... if our sovereign Lord had not shown us grace and mercy? ...if the Lord had not come to earth for us? ...if the Lord had not gone to the cross for us? ...if the Lord had not provided a way of salvation for us? ...if the Lord had not promised to come back for us? ...if the Lord had not arranged circumstances so that we would hear the gospel and be saved? On and on we could go with various scenarios in our lives if the Lord had not sovereignly controlled all the circumstances. And He still does! *“We know that in all things God works for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28)* If God was not for us, we would be lost forever.

Thank the Lord for the little word “IF”!

Psalm 125 - *"Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people from this time forth and forever. For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity. Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts. As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them away with the workers of iniquity. Peace be upon Israel!"*

Background Notes for Psalm 125

Psalm 125 is a psalm or song of ascent about **Israel's peace**. The last sentence of this psalm of ascent, *"peace be upon Israel,"* shows us that while this psalm can certainly be applied to all believers who faithfully trust the Lord, in context it specifically refers to the nation of Israel.

This psalm encourages the godly remnant of Israel with the truth that God's people are **secure** because the Lord surrounds them. Their security is likened to the protecting mountains that surrounded Jerusalem. *"Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people from this time forth and forever."*

In these verses the psalmist was not speaking about the modern city of Jerusalem that has spread out over the surrounding hills, but the small ancient city of Jerusalem, or Mount Zion, the City of David, for which those surrounding hills provided protection in those times.

Doctrinal Point for Psalm 125

The key to Israel's peace is her return to the Lord.

In verse 3 we see that ultimate security and peace in Israel is assured: *"For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity."* Although God has allowed foreign enemies of Israel to dominate the nation down through history, yet her ultimate security is promised. The scepter of wickedness will not rest - that is, rest permanently - on the land of the righteous.

In verse 3 Israel is called *"the land allotted to the righteous,"* or the land of the righteous. The present secular state of Israel today could certainly not be called the land of the righteous - but it will be in the future! From the prophetic Scriptures we know that in the future there will be a spiritual restoration within the secular state of Israel - *"those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts."*

Not every Jewish person will become a believer, but many will, according to the prophecy in Zechariah 13. One-third of the nation will turn back to the Lord. These believers are those who are *"upright in their hearts"* (Psalm 125:4). But two-

thirds of the people will not turn back to the Lord. They are the ones who are judged in Psalm 125:5: *“As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them away with the workers of iniquity.”*

Notice - verse 5 is **not** saying that Christians today can lose their salvation if they backslide. This verse is speaking of those in Israel who will not turn to the Lord.

Zechariah 13:8-9: *“And it shall come to pass in all the land,” says the LORD, “that two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die. But one-third shall be left in it. I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested.*

They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘This is My people,’ and each one will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’”

The key to Israel’s peace is her return to the Lord.

Practical Application:

Don’t say that you couldn’t resist!

There’s a great principle of how God deals with the believer in verse 3, which should be an encouragement for all of us. *“For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity.*

The divine principle here is that God limits His test of our faith to what we can endure. The Lord will not allow the *“scepter of wickedness”* to come upon us to a point where we don’t have the power to resist, and that’s the point of the end of verse 3. This is the same promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13: *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”*

The Bible says that we will never be tested in our faith or tempted to sin beyond our ability to resist. Don’t say that you couldn’t resist!