

# Lamentations 4:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

As for us, our eyes as yet failed for our vain help: in our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save us.

## Analysis

False hope remembered: "**As for us, our eyes as yet failed for our vain help: in our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save us.**" The Hebrew odeinah tikhlena eineinu el-ezratenu havel bemitsapenu tsippinu el-goy lo yoshi'a confesses misplaced trust. Tikhlena eineinu (תְּקַלֵּנָה עַיִנָּנוּ) "our eyes failed") indicates exhausting watchfulness that yields no result. Havel (הַבָּל, "vain, breath, vapor") describes empty, worthless hope.

"In our watching we have watched" uses repetition (bemitsapenu tsippinu, בְּמִצְפָּנוּ צִפְפָּנוּ) emphasizing intense, sustained vigilance. They looked desperately for military aid. "A nation that could not save" (goy lo yoshi'a, גּוֹי לֹא יָשִׁיעַ) refers to Egypt—the foreign ally Judah trusted instead of God. Yasha (יָשַׁע, "save, deliver") is ironic—only God saves, yet they looked to Egypt.

Theologically, this verse illustrates the futility of trusting human alliances over divine covenant. Isaiah 31:1-3 condemned this: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help...but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD...Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit." When believers trust created things rather than Creator, disappointment is inevitable. Only God saves; all other hopes prove vain.

## Historical Context

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The historical referent is Judah's alliance with Egypt during Babylon's siege. King Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, trusting Egyptian support (Ezekiel 17:11-15). Jeremiah consistently opposed this policy, urging submission to Babylon as God's appointed judgment (Jeremiah 27:12-15, 38:17-23). But political leaders preferred Egyptian military might over prophetic counsel.

Egypt did send an army toward Jerusalem, causing Babylon to temporarily lift the siege (Jeremiah 37:5). This created false hope—watchers on Jerusalem's walls saw Egyptian forces approaching and believed deliverance had come. But Jeremiah 37:7-8 prophesied: "Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel...Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire."

This prophecy fulfilled exactly. Egypt's army withdrew without engaging Babylon seriously (Jeremiah 37:11). The hoped-for savior proved unable or unwilling to save. Jerusalem's watchmen, who strained their eyes looking for Egyptian relief, watched in vain. The siege resumed, and eventually walls were breached (2 Kings 25:3-4). The lesson: human alliances fail; only God delivers. Yet this lesson remains difficult to learn—every generation is tempted to trust visible military or political power rather than invisible divine promises.

## Related Passages

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**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

## Study Questions

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1. What does 'our eyes failed for our vain help' teach about the exhausting futility of trusting wrong sources for deliverance?

2. How does watching for 'a nation that could not save' illustrate the common temptation to trust visible military/political power over God?
3. In what ways do Christians today sometimes 'watch for a nation that cannot save'—trusting political solutions over spiritual realities?
4. How do Isaiah 31:1-3 and Psalm 146:3 ('Put not your trust in princes') connect to this verse's warning?

## Interlinear Text

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וְכֹל	עִזְרָתְךָ	אֵל	תְּכַל יְהָה	עַזְךָ יְהָה
H5750	as yet failed	As for us our eyes	H413	help
	H3615	H5869		for our vain
				H1892
וְשָׁעָן:	לְאֵגִיד	אֵל	צָפֵן יְהָה	בְּצָפָתְךָ
in our watching	we have watched	H413	for a nation	H3808
H6836	H6822		H1471	
				that could not save
				H3467

## Additional Cross-References

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**Ezekiel 29:16** (Parallel theme): And it shall be no more the confidence of the house of Israel, which bringeth their iniquity to remembrance, when they shall look after them: but they shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

**Isaiah 20:5** (Parallel theme): And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory.

**2 Kings 24:7** (Parallel theme): And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt.