

Psalms 108:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.

Analysis

This verse confronts human insufficiency in stark terms: 'Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.' The prayer 'give us help' acknowledges complete dependence on divine intervention. 'From trouble' (Hebrew 'tzar') indicates distress, adversity, or enemies. The second clause explains the urgency: 'for vain is the help of man.' 'Vain' (Hebrew 'shav') means empty, worthless, or false. This is not misanthropy but theological realism - human help, particularly in ultimate matters of salvation and deliverance from enemies, proves insufficient. The verse echoes Psalm 60:11 and reflects a consistent biblical theme (Psalm 146:3, Jeremiah 17:5). It requires humility to acknowledge human limitation and to seek God as the ultimate source of deliverance. The verse implicitly critiques self-reliance and alliances based on human strength rather than covenant with God.

Historical Context

In the context of Psalm 60, from which this section is drawn, Israel had suffered military defeats. David had relied on military alliances and strategy, but found them wanting. The historical context may involve the battles recorded in 2 Samuel 8 and 10, where David fought Aram (Syria) and Edom. Kings in the ancient Near East regularly formed military alliances for mutual defense. However, prophets consistently warned Israel against trusting in such alliances rather than in YHWH. Isaiah warned Ahaz against alliance with Assyria (Isaiah 7:4-9), and Jeremiah condemned alliances with Egypt (Jeremiah 37:7-8). The Israelite experience repeatedly demonstrated that military coalitions and human ingenuity could not replace covenant faithfulness. Even well-intentioned human efforts prove 'vain'

without divine blessing. This verse would resonate with any generation facing overwhelming opposition, whether military (the Assyrian crisis), political (Babylonian exile), or existential (facing death).

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. Why is acknowledging the vanity of human help an essential step toward receiving divine help?
2. In what areas of life are we most tempted to rely on human strength rather than seeking God?
3. How does this verse challenge modern confidence in technology, military power, and human solutions?
4. What is the difference between using human means prudently while trusting God versus placing ultimate confidence in human help?
5. How does recognizing human limitations drive us toward prayer and dependence on God?

Interlinear Text

הָבָה	לְנוֹ	עֲזָרָה	מִצָּר	וְשֵׁי	אֵין	הַעֲשׂוּת	אָדָם:
Give	H0	us help	from trouble	for vain	is the help	of man	
H3051		H5833	H6862	H7723	H8668	H120	

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 31:3 (Parallel theme): Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fail together.

Lamentations 4:17 (Parallel theme): 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.

Isaiah 2:22 (Parallel theme): Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?

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