

Psalm 124:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say;

Analysis

The psalm begins with a hypothetical reflection: 'If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say.' The conditional 'if' invites contemplation of what would have occurred without divine intervention. The phrase 'the LORD who was on our side' establishes that deliverance stems not from Israel's strength but from God's partisan support. The Hebrew 'Yehovah she-hayah lanu' emphasizes past reality - 'the LORD who WAS for us' - reflecting on historical salvation. The call 'may Israel say' makes this confession corporate; the entire nation must acknowledge dependence on God. This opening creates suspense, establishing that God's presence made the crucial difference between survival and destruction. It models grateful reflection on past deliverance as foundation for present faith.

Historical Context

This psalm likely reflects deliverance from specific historical threat - perhaps Sennacherib's siege (2 Kings 18-19), Persian period dangers, or other national crises. The Songs of Ascents collection suggests use during post-exilic pilgrimages when Jews reflected on survival through exile and restoration. The pattern of reflection on past deliverance occurs throughout Israel's history (Exodus narrative, Judges cycle, prophetic remembrance).

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. Why does the psalmist frame deliverance as a hypothetical ('if it had not been') rather than direct statement?
2. What does it mean that 'the LORD was on our side,' and how does this shape confidence?
3. How does corporate confession ('may Israel say') strengthen community faith?
4. In what ways does reflecting on past deliverance sustain faith during present trials?
5. How should Christians corporately remember God's faithfulness to strengthen current trust?

Interlinear Text

לֹאֶלְּאָמַר לְנָנוּ שָׁבַע יְהָוָה
If it had not been the LORD H1961 H0 say H4994
H3884 H3068 H559

וְיִשְׁרָאֵל:

who was on our side now may Israel

H3478

Additional Cross-References

Romans 8:31 (Parallel theme): What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

Psalms 56:9 (Parallel theme): When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me.

Psalms 54:4 (References Lord): Behold, God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul.

Psalms 120:1 (References Lord): In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me.

Psalms 94:17 (References Lord): Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence.

Psalms 121:1 (Parallel theme): I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

Psalms 27:1 (References Lord): The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalms 125:1 (References Lord): They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.

Psalms 127:1 (References Lord): Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

Psalms 46:7 (References Lord): The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.