

Psalm 146:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God:

Analysis

This verse shifts from the theme of perpetual personal praise to a comparative theological claim: 'Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God.' The word 'happy' (Hebrew 'ashrei') indicates not mere pleasure but deep blessedness and fulfillment from a state of grace. The phrase 'God of Jacob' is theologically loaded: Jacob, the patriarch who wrestled with God and was transformed (Genesis 32), represents the prototype of one who persists in relationship despite struggle. 'For his help' (be'ezro) emphasizes God's active assistance and sustenance. The parallel phrase 'whose hope is in the LORD' (tikvato) uses the word for hope, expectation, or confident waiting. The comparative structure ('Happy is he that...') creates the antithetical framework developed in verse 3: happiness is found not in princes or human power but in relationship with God. This verse provides the theological basis for the imperatives of verses 1-2: praising God and trusting God are not burdensome but the pathway to genuine happiness.

Historical Context

The 'God of Jacob' designation emphasizes continuity of covenant relationship across generations. In post-exilic Judaism, when Jews were dispersed and politically powerless, affirming that Jacob's God remained their help was spiritually sustaining. The life of Jacob in Genesis (deception, exile, wrestling, poverty) demonstrated that relationship with God could coexist with hardship. This verse articulates the theodicy response present throughout later Jewish thought:

external circumstances do not determine spiritual condition or access to God's help. The emphasis on 'hope in the LORD' became central to Jewish survival through persecution (Babylonian exile, Hellenistic persecution under Antiochus, Roman occupation). The Maccbeans chose to endure rather than abandon hope in God. In rabbinic Judaism, the principle emerged that anyone, regardless of national status, could access happiness through hope in God. This verse provided theological basis for Jewish resilience across centuries of dispersion and persecution.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between happiness based on external circumstances versus 'happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help'?
2. Why is Jacob specifically chosen as the representative figure for experiencing God's help?
3. How does 'hope in the LORD his God' differ from optimism or wishful thinking?
4. In what ways does this verse establish that relationship with God is the foundation of genuine happiness?
5. How should the promise of happiness through trust in God be reconciled with the reality of suffering among the faithful?

Interlinear Text

עַל שְׁבָרִים אֲשֶׁר
Happy is he that hath the God

H835

שְׁאָל

H410

וְיַעֲקֹב בְּנֵי

H3290

בְּנֵי

וְיַעֲקֹב בְּנֵי

H5828

וְיַעֲקֹב בְּנֵי

whose hope

H5921

is he that hath the God

H835

of Jacob

H3290

for his help

H5828

whose hope

H7664

אֱלֹהִים יְהֹוָה

is in the LORD

H3068

his God

H430

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 144:15 (References God): Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD.

Psalms 71:5 (Hope): For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth.

Psalms 33:12 (References God): Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.

Psalms 84:12 (References Lord): O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

Psalms 46:11 (References God): The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

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

Psalms 84:8 (References God): O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.

Psalms 39:7 (Hope): And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.

Exodus 3:6 (References God): Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

1 Peter 1:21 (Hope): Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

