

Psalms 60:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. This urgent petition acknowledges both human need and human limitation. After God's oracle declaring He will divide territories and possess nations (v.6-8), David returns to immediate need for divine intervention. The verse expresses realistic assessment of human resources and urgent appeal for divine assistance.

"Give us help from trouble" (havah-lanu ezerath mitzar, הַבָּה-לָנוּ עִזָּת מִצָּר) is a direct, urgent imperative: "Give!" Havah is emphatic, immediate command: "Give now! Provide! Grant!" This isn't polite requesting but desperate appealing—appropriate posture when facing mortal danger. "Help" (ezerath, עִזָּת) means assistance, support, aid. "From trouble" (mitzar, מִצָּר) means from distress, adversity, tight place, desperate situation—the same word as "enemy" or "adversary." Trouble personified as adversary requires divine help to overcome.

"For vain is the help of man" (veshav teshu'at adam, וְשָׁוֹא תְּשֻׁעָת אָדָם) provides the reason for the urgent appeal to God. "Vain" (shav, שָׁוֹא) means empty, worthless, false, useless, futile. "Help of man" (teshu'at adam, תְּשֻׁעָת אָדָם) uses teshu'ah for deliverance, salvation, victory, and adam for mankind generally. Human assistance, human strategies, human strength—all ultimately empty, unable to deliver from the kind of trouble Israel faces.

This isn't saying human assistance is never useful or that believers shouldn't seek help from others. Rather, it acknowledges ultimate insufficiency of human resources when facing overwhelming opposition. Psalm 146:3 warns: "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help." Isaiah 31:1

pronounces woe on those who "go down to Egypt for help... but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel."

The verse expresses a crucial biblical principle: human help fails ultimately because humans lack ultimate power. Only God possesses power to save definitively. This doesn't produce fatalism or passivity but directs primary trust toward the only truly reliable source of help. Believers use human means while recognizing that ultimate security rests in divine power, not human capability.

Historical Context

This verse reflects Israel's recurring temptation to seek security in military alliances rather than trusting Yahweh. Throughout Israel's history, various kings formed alliances with surrounding powers—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon—seeking military protection or political advantage. The prophets consistently condemned this practice, not because alliances were inherently wrong but because they represented misplaced trust.

Isaiah confronted Judah's alliance with Egypt against Assyria: 'Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many... but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel' (Isaiah 31:1). The issue wasn't military strategy but spiritual orientation—trusting Egyptian military might instead of divine power. Jeremiah similarly condemned reliance on Egypt: 'Egypt is like a very fair heifer, but destruction cometh' (Jeremiah 46:20).

The historical context of Psalm 60—wars with Aram and Edom—illustrates the principle. David didn't refuse military engagement or strategic planning. He organized armies, appointed commanders, developed tactics. But he recognized that ultimate victory came from God, not military superiority. His confidence wasn't in Israel's army size, weapon quality, or strategic brilliance but in God's covenant faithfulness.

King Asa's example illustrates both principles. When Ethiopia attacked with overwhelming force, Asa prayed: 'LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest

on thee' (2 Chronicles 14:11). God gave victory. But later, when threatened by Israel's northern kingdom, Asa hired Syria's king to attack Israel from the north instead of seeking God's help. A prophet rebuked him: 'Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand' (2 Chronicles 16:7).

For New Testament believers, this principle finds expression in Jesus's teaching about anxiety and trust. 'Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you' (Matthew 6:25, 33). Paul testified: 'We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead' (2 Corinthians 1:9).

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to cry 'Give us help!' to God rather than merely 'Please help if convenient,' and how does urgent, imperative prayer reflect proper understanding of dependence on God?
2. How can we discern the difference between appropriately using human assistance while recognizing its limitations versus relying on human help as ultimate security?
3. What kinds of 'trouble' expose the vanity (emptiness, futility) of human help, and how do such situations drive us to depend more fully on God?
4. Why is it important to acknowledge that 'vain is the help of man' without becoming fatalistic or refusing to use available human resources?
5. How does recognizing human help as ultimately insufficient free us from both excessive self-reliance and unhealthy dependence on other people?

Interlinear Text

אָדָם: תִּשְׁוֹעַת תִּשְׁוֹעַת תִּשְׁוֹעַת תִּשְׁוֹעַת
Give us help from trouble for vain is the help of man
H3051 H5833 H6862 H7723 H8668 H120

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 146:3 (Parallel theme): Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.

Psalms 108:12 (Parallel theme): Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.

Psalms 130:8 (Parallel theme): And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Psalms 25:22 (Parallel theme): Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.

Isaiah 30:7 (Parallel theme): For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is to sit still.

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.

Psalms 62:1 (Parallel theme): Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation.