

PSALMS 123, 124, and 125

Almost all writers would place Psalm 123 after the Babylonian captivity, when Cyrus the Persian had issued the decree that all Jews wishing to go back to their homeland might do so. After a coalition of Jews returned, they were soon disappointed in the slow progress of rebuilding the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, for they were constantly laughed to scorn and persecuted by their enemies. But we find here that great and weighty prayers may be encompassed in a few words, and every prayer is long enough if it is fervent enough and proceeds from a heart of faith.

Psalm 123 A Song of Ascents

- 1 To You I lift up my eyes, O You who are enthroned in the heavens!
- 2 Behold, as the eyes of servants *look* to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes *look* to YAHWEH our God, until He is gracious to us.
- 3 Be gracious to us, O YAHWEH, be gracious to us, for we are greatly filled with contempt.
- 4 Our soul is greatly filled with the scoffing of those who are at ease,
and with the contempt of the proud.

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Psalm 124 contains an acknowledgment of favor received by ways of special deliverance, then a grateful act of worship in blessing Yahweh. The occasion may have been during the days of Nehemiah, when there was plenty of hostility on the part of Israel's enemies but also a deliverance from the immediate danger as soon as the walls enclosing Jerusalem were finished. Lastly, there is a declaration of confidence in Yahweh for all future times of trial. We find here a delightful universality in the language which suits it admirably for an anthem of the redeemed in every age.

Psalm 124 A Song of Ascents, of David

- 1 “Had it not been YAHWEH who was on our side,” let Israel now say,
- 2 “Had it not been YAHWEH who was on our side when men rose up against us,
- 3 then they would have swallowed us alive, when their anger was kindled against us;
- 4 then the waters would have engulfed us, the stream would have swept over our soul;
- 5 then the raging waters would have swept over our soul.”
- 6 Blessed be YAHWEH, who has not given us to be torn by their teeth.
- 7 Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the trapper;
the snare is broken and we have escaped.

8 Our help is in the name of YAHWEH, who made heaven and earth.

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Here in Psalm 125 we have another occasion where the days of Nehemiah are suitable to the text. In Nehemiah chapter 6 we read of persons in position of authority among Israel's enemies who were allied with influential persons from among the Jews themselves. Together they were seeking to undermine Nehemiah and his work with the goal of creating such great discouragement among the righteous that the rebuilding of the walls would not be finished.

Psalm 125
A Song of Ascents

- 1 Those who trust in YAHWEH are as Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved but abides forever.
- 2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so YAHWEH surrounds His people
from this time forth and forever.
- 3 For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest upon the land of the righteous,
so that the righteous will not put forth their hands to do wrong.
- 4 Do good, O YAHWEH, to those who are good and to those who are upright in their hearts.
- 5 But as for those who turn aside to their crooked ways,
YAHWEH will lead them away with the doers of iniquity.
Peace be upon Israel.

PRAYER

Almighty Lord God, have mercy upon us in all our dangers. Stretch forth your right hand of power to save and defend us. Our eyes will look to you until mercy comes. Let us not be ashamed of our hope, unfaithful in our service, nor distrustful of your providence. But make us diligent laborers in our calling and good stewards of our talents, that in first serving you on earth we may at last sit down with you in your kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.