

Psalm 124.¹⁻⁸

Battle

Background

This is another well-known and much-loved psalm, invariably associated with the evocative psalm tune which goes by the same name, “*Old 124th*”.

Part of the reason for this wide-spread affinity with the psalm is simply due to the degree to which the psalmist’s experience described in the psalm reflects their own experience: the desperate intensity of the challenges which have sometimes to be faced, the gravity of the danger to which there’s a sudden exposure, the profundity of relief when the situation is resolved, the great surge of gratitude for the deliverance afforded, and the deep-seated conviction which is formed in consequence.

The psalm has that sort of *general* application to the range of adversity which even as believers (and in some regards *especially* as believers) we experience: “*man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upwards*” ([Job.5.7](#)). In similar vein, but more specifically related to their faith, Jesus told His disciples that “*in this world you will have trouble*” ([Jn.16.33](#)).

Psalm 124 is a great comfort, accordingly, for those passing through times of trouble, when it feels as if such troubles are wholly overwhelming. There’s the comfort of *companionship*, the comfort of knowing you’re not alone, that there are others who know what it’s like and who’ve expressed so well in their words the turmoil of emotions in your heart. And there’s the comfort of a *testimony* too, the gracious re-assurance of an ‘evil day’ survivor, one who’s come through the experience alive and underlines the absolute sufficiency of God’s preserving grace.

However valid that *general* application may be, the psalm is actually more *specific*. It wasn’t just *adversity* the psalmist faced, it was, more particularly, *hostility*. It was an attack – and, more specifically still, an attack directed against the people of God with an intensity born of a deep-seated rage and anger.

It’s important to recognise this more specific aspect of the psalmist’s testimony, because, in the sequence of these ‘songs of ascent’ (understood, as I’ve tried to suggest, as a manual on following Jesus), this psalm highlights the fact, early on in the life of discipleship, that as you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and are ‘born again’, you are **born into battle** and confronted, time and again, by an angry foe. “*The dragon was enraged against the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring ..*” is how this truth is vividly described in the book of Revelation ([Rev.12.17](#)).

The story of God’s people through the OT is the record of just this persistent phenomenon – an enraged devil venting his fury through the anger of kings and commoners alike against the people of God. One endeavour after another aimed at destroying them – and destroying the promised ‘offspring’ ([Gen.3.15](#)) who would come from them. The book of Acts tells the same story in relation to the NT church in the waves of irrational persecution repeatedly directed against the believers.

Days (1), (2) and (3) deal with the psalm itself, so I suggest you use those ‘days’ (for which I’ve added ‘supplementary’ questions) as your starting point.

1) Monday 31st January – attacked

Read [Psalm 124.1-3](#)

“If the LORD had not been on our side .. they would have swallowed us alive” (Ps.123.1-3)

Following Jesus takes you onto a battlefield. Don't be surprised at the sometimes vicious anger and the many varied 'attacks' that come your way! It's because you've taken the Lord's side – but remember, He's on your side, and He comes out on top!

Why did Jesus indicate you should be worried when everyone speaks well of you ([Lk.6.26](#))?

In what ways have you been experiencing the anger of others towards you on account of your following Jesus?

How do you see this 'anger' of the 'enraged dragon' finding expression in the experience of the church today, both across the globe and in our own land?

What makes it often feel as if the odds are so stacked against believers today that we'll be simply 'swallowed up'?

Prayer: *Grant me grace, my Lord, that I may not needlessly provoke others to anger: but grant me the boldness, too, to stand for You even when that angers others.*

2) Tuesday 1st February – preserved

Read [Psalm 124.1-6](#)

“.. Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth ..” (Ps.124.6)

Like an earthquake out in the ocean, the gospel can trigger a great tsunami of hostility directed against Christ's church. But down through history, Christ has wonderfully preserved His church in the face of waves of persecution intended to destroy her.

What instances have there been in your experience of the Lord's preserving grace in the face of 'persecution' directed against you?

Why is it that *“everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”* ([2 Tim.3.12](#))?

Consider the experience of Job ([Job 1 & 2](#)) as an illustration of this 'attack' on believers: what was the intent of the 'dragon' (Satan)?

What means does the Lord use to preserve His people in the face of such 'waves' of hostility directed against them, and what 'resources' does He provide for His people to cope with such an experience?

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for the promise of Your preserving presence with me when I walk through dark valleys and troubled times. Help me hold onto that truth today.*

3) Wednesday 2nd February – helped

Read [Psalm 124.6-8](#)

“.. Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Ps.124.8)

Like the efforts of a snared animal trying to free itself, our own frightened struggles to sort things out only make matters worse. Remember that the Lord is not only on your side, He's *at* your side as well: you may count on Him to help you. Always.

Have there been times in your life when you've felt that you've been 'trapped'?

The imagery of the fowler's snare is indicative of the deceptiveness in the devil's 'wily' strategy: what examples of this sort of 'snare' strategy are you aware of today – in your own life and in that of Christ's church?

The 'name of the LORD' signifies all that He is: what is it about Him that gives you the confidence He'll always be able to help you?

Prayer: *My God and Saviour, sometimes I can feel desperately trapped; forgive me that too often I try in vain to sort things out myself – come to my help again today!*

4) Thursday 3rd February – called

Read [Romans 8.28-30](#)

“.. in all things God works for the good of those who love Him ..” (Rom.8.28)

In calling you to Himself, God has invested everything you: you are emphatically *His*. In Jesus He has undertaken to fulfil His good purpose for you, in the face of all your infirmity, all adversity, and all the hostility that may be directed against you.

Look back across your life: with the benefit of hindsight in what ways have you seen God working through all things for your truest good?

How has the Lord used adversity and the hostility of others in fulfilling His purpose for you in Christ?

Prayer: *Purify my heart, O Lord: cleanse me from within through the refining fires of adversity and make me holy, that I may be set apart for You, ready to do Your will.*

5) Friday 4th February – justified

Read [Romans 8.31-34](#)

“..If God is for us, who can be against us? ..” (Rom.8.31)

“We won’t fear the battle, we won’t fear the night; we will walk the valley with You by our side: You will go before us, You will lead the way, we have found a refuge, only You can save! Sing with joy now, our [God is for us](#) .. who can stand against us?”

In the face of all that God has done for us in Christ, why instinctively do we still fear?

Read [Lk.22.31-32](#) along with v.34: how does the assurance that Jesus is praying for you afford you comfort and peace?

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for the constancy of Your love: ‘You will not abandon, You will not forsake: You will cheer me onward with never-ending grace.’ How I praise You!*

6) Saturday 5th February – afflicted

Read [Romans 8.35-37](#)

“.. *In all these things we are more than conquerors ..*” (Rom.8.37)

It’s in the furnace of affliction that God’s delivering power is most evidently seen. The troubles you experience, the hardships you endure, the persecution you face – they are all alike the contexts in which Christ’s victory is displayed to the world.

What have you experienced in the way of ‘trouble or hardship’ as you have followed and served the Lord?

What’s been your experience of being ‘more than conqueror’ through such times?

Prayer: *Thanks be to You, O Lord, that You have given to Your people the victory. Help me to abound today in Your work, confident that such labour is never in vain.*

7) Sunday 6th February – loved

Read [Romans 8.38-39](#)

“.. *neither height nor depth .. will be able to separate us from the love of God ..*” (Rom.8.39)

He who is mightier than all has covenanted His love to His people in the Lord Jesus Christ. Neither sin nor Satan can thwart that love. No situation or circumstance which comes your way can alter at all that love. You are totally secure in His love!

How has the conviction that nothing can separate you from the love of God been formed in your heart and mind?

In what ways might you today assure others who gather for worship of the constancy of God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord?

Prayer: *Grant me power today, O Lord, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is Your love towards us – and to know that love myself!*