



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. A



APP. B

Psalm 124

Phase 1: ORAL



Step 1: Listen

Listening to a guide translation and versions of the psalm

Listen well to the poem (notice content, emotions and interesting use of language). There are two guide translations in Appendix A:

1. **Hebrew-mirror** - copied from the Exegetical Layout and adjusted for minimal readability,
2. **Guide translation** - the literal, type 1 corresponding (but more readable) translation, exegetically the same as Hebrew-mirror.

Activity: Read the Hebrew-mirror and the Hebrew tight version in Appendix A. One reader per translation or one reader for all translations (as skills permit). Others to listen with closed books. Consider 'how to listen' – posture? With responses? In silence?



Step 2: Familiarise

Explaining and discussing the meaning and beauty of the psalm

Get an overview of the poem (the big picture) - what's the main message? Who is involved? A poem must be understood as 'a whole' (unlike a story).

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE PSALM

After listening to the guide translations, please respond to any of the following questions:

- What do you like about the psalm?
- What do you find difficult?
- How does the psalm make you feel?
- Which verse do you find particularly important in this psalm?
- What does this psalm teach you about the LORD? What is the LORD like?
- Are there any noticeable repetitions in this psalm?



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

CREATIVE RESPONSES

Activity 1: the psalm as a communal psalm

This activity helps psalmists to discover and internalise that this is a communal psalm of thanksgiving.

Listen to the psalm being read. Get all the psalmists to count up how many times there is a first person reference: *we, us* or *our*.

- Totals will vary with translations, but there's a *we, us* or *our* in every verse, some of them several times.
- Ask where the psalm tells us who the *we/us* is – start reading until someone shouts it out. **וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה יִשְׂרָאֵל** – say it, Israel! - this instruction to Israel is the only place where Israel is mentioned, but it defines the 'we/us' that has already preceded it - **לָנוּ** – to us -and the repetitions of that first plural in every succeeding verse. So the psalm is written by David, but it is a communal psalm: the *we/us* refers to the whole nation, the whole community of God.

What does that phrase – say it, Israel – also tell us?

- It is a rare occurrence of instructions on how to use the psalm, within the psalm – this psalm, these words, are what Israel is to say. The community is to **remind** themselves of how God has rescued them from danger in the past.

Activity 2: what actually happened? The key point of the psalm

This activity helps the psalmists to understand that the examples are all counterfactual.

Note that for Portuguese and French speakers, this is more straightforward, as the subjunctives indicate that the dangers did not in fact take place. The English grammatical constructions are not as transparent for non-mother-tongue speakers. However, even for Portuguese and French speakers, it is worth finding out what the natural constructions in the local language are, as these form the structure of the psalm.

Psalm 124 starts: *if the Lord had not been on our side....* and this *if* governs the whole of the first stanza, five verses, so it is worth spending time on at the beginning.

What kind of *if* is this? English *ifs* mean a lot of different things, which is very confusing. There are *ifs* that talk about real, future, events that may or may not happen – for example, if there isn't any electricity tomorrow, we will have to use the generator. But this kind of *if* in Hebrew, **לִּוְלֵי**, *lulei*, is only used to express an unreal or counterfactual condition – that is to say, *if something hadn't happened* – where the speaker and listener both know that the event *didn't* happen, but they're reflecting on what would have happened if it had.

The following activity checks on differentiation in the local language between real and unreal conditions. Ask psalmists to translate these examples, and discuss why they are different. They should then come up with some of their own examples.

- If there is electricity tomorrow, it will help our work.
- If there isn't any electricity tomorrow, we will have to use the generator.
- If there is chicken for supper, the children will be very happy.
- If the car had broken down on the way, we wouldn't have got here on time.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

If this is confusing, ask the questions: did the car break down? Did we get here on time?

- If the car hadn't broken down on the way, we would have got here on time.
Did the car break down? Did we get here on time?
- If our friend hadn't bought us sim cards, we wouldn't be able to use our phones.
If this is confusing, ask the questions: did the friend buy us sim cards? Can we use our phones?
- If our friend hadn't bought us sim cards, then we wouldn't be able to use our phones.
These last two together establish whether a particle such as 'then' is necessary or not to introduce the consequence clause. In English it can be missed out, but not in all languages. This is important for v3, v4 and v5.

Now translate:

- If the Lord hadn't been on our side, our enemies would have destroyed us.
Make sure that the agreed translation is recorded in some way, it will be needed again.

Discuss: how does the beginning of the psalm relate to the psalm as a whole?

Discovering the focus and flow of the psalm.

What actually happened? The Lord's rescue is emphasized right at the beginning of the psalm. The danger was real, but the psalm is sung from a position of security.

- **Ask:** since the psalmist is confident that the Lord is on their side, why does he start the psalm by asking about what would have happened if the Lord hadn't been? We need to look at the psalm as a whole to answer that.

Read the psalm again. It starts by telling us: if the Lord hadn't been on our side, our enemies would have destroyed us. This sets the tone for the psalm: instead of starting straightaway with the drama of the danger, the psalmist first places that danger **in the context of the Lord's help**.

- **Ask:** what two things the psalmist does in response to the rescue: *he praises God, and he acknowledges that the Lord, the one who made heaven and earth, is our help.*
- Read the psalm again and ask the psalmists to find out where the psalm moves from **remembering the danger** to **responding** to the rescue.

The themes intertwine: essentially stanza one describes the danger, and stanza two the response. But ask the psalmists to discuss the following:

- v 1: if the Lord had not been on our side: how does mentioning the Lord's help *before* describing the danger affect the flow of the psalm?
- v 7: the trapper's snare: does v7 continue to reflect on the danger, does it form part of the thanksgiving, or both? *The important thing here is that the psalmists are thinking about these twin aspects of the psalm and how they fit together, not what conclusion they come to.*

Activity 3: Activity for Bible-literate groups: personal experiences & Romans 8

Personal experience of rescue from danger:

Ask if there are any participants who have had personal experiences themselves, or their family, of being rescued by the Lord from immediate danger. This could be an attack, sickness, fire, etc.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

If a facilitator has such a testimony, it would be good to share it with the group. This can be an amazing, even a very moving, way into the psalm.

- Ask them to stand up and tell the story to the group, using as much drama and expression as possible.
- Ask them to finish with a statement of what would have happened if the Lord hadn't rescued them, and **all** participants should respond with: Praise the Lord!

Romans and Psalm 124

Read the following passage aloud and ask the participants to reflect on the connections between Romans 8 and Psalm 124.

Romans 8:31-32, 35-39: (NIV 84)

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this? **If God is for us, who can be against us?** ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?... ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- What is the difference between Ps 124 and Romans 8:31? *They both express confidence in the Lord in the face of danger and opposition, but Psalm 124 is giving thanks for rescue in the past, and in Romans, Paul is expressing his confident trust for the future. These are closely linked – remembering the past gives us confidence for the future.*

Note that Paul knew his psalms well (there is a quote from Psalm 44 in the middle of this section). It is quite possible that he had Psalm 124 in mind as he wrote this part of the letter.

Activity 4: the big picture

Get at least two people to **restate the big picture** of the psalm:

- *danger, would have overwhelmed us, didn't because of the Lord who rescued us, praise the Lord.*

Try to get this restated first in English (for checking), then in the local language.

ENGAGING WITH THE WHOLE PSALM

Facilitator: address the following topics:

- *The participants in the psalm, the different “speakers” and “audiences”*
- *The historical background and the context of the psalm, the story behind the psalm, if relevant*
- *The theme of the psalm*
- *The flow of the psalm*



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. A



APP. B

- *The potential big picture obstacles*
- *Emotion map*
- *The peak or peaks of the psalm*
- *The genre and purpose of the psalm*
- *Highly important poetic device(s) related to understanding the big picture*
- *How does the psalm point to Christ?*

Summary:

This is a song of ascents by David, 8 verses long, 2 stanzas. The theme is communal thanksgiving and praise for deliverance out of a specific, extreme, but unnamed danger - *if the Lord had not been with us.*

It can be used as a community psalm of thanksgiving for *remembering* any past danger and *thanking the Lord* for his deliverance.

Participants in this psalm

Activity: Discuss who are the participants are in Psalm 124. What did each one do?

Psalm 124 is a song of Zion, part of the Pilgrims' Songs, the "Songs of Ascent". Participants are the psalmist himself, the people of Israel, and the LORD as their deliverer.

Theme and flow of the psalm

Xx

xx

Genre of the psalm

Activity: What type of psalm is this? How would you describe it? Think of poems in your own language. Do you have something like this celebration in your own language and culture?"

Psalm 124 is a song of Zion, part of the Pilgrims' Songs, the "Songs of Ascent". The psalm celebrates the rescue out of some unspecified but extreme danger, out of which only YHWH could have delivered them.

Story behind the psalm

- What is the historical background to this psalm?

This psalm, however, in the context of the Songs of Ascent, more probably refers to the people of God as God's family gathering for the annual festivals in Jerusalem. This specific psalm recalls the rescue from the extreme danger the people of Israel faced. It could be an enemy attack, or a severe drought, we don't know.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

Peak of Psalm 124

INSIGHT: The poem is **xx**

Emotions in Psalm 124

Activity: Discuss: What types of emotions do you see in this psalm? Make a list of all the emotions you see.

List of emotions:

Great relief

Praise

Confidence

What does this psalm teach us about Christ?

- *If there were no divine intervention to save us from sin, from evil in the world, and from satan, we would not have survived.*
- *Christ prayed this prayer too, acknowledging that even He was in extreme danger, and even died, swallowed by evil, chewed up, trapped on the cross, but He came out of it victorious, raised by the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit.*
- *What comfort for us as believers, that our Savior did indeed pass through the most extreme dangers. He is now with us, until the end of the ages (Matthew 28:20).*

SEGMENTATION OF THE PSALM

Stanza 1: vv 1-5.

v1-3a acknowledging the Lord's rescue from danger

v3b image: being swallowed

v4-5 image: raging waters

Stanza 2: vv 6-8.

v6a praising the Lord for his help in danger

v6b image: being chewed up

v7 image: the trap has been broken

v8 affirmation that the Lord Creator is our help

FINAL SUMMING UP

To summarise the Psalm, discuss the following questions:



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

- In summary, what is the main point/message of the psalm?
- What does this Psalm teach you about the LORD?
- How could your church, or you individually, use this psalm?
- What heading or title would the group suggest for this psalm?



Step 3: Internalise

Absorbing the big picture of the psalm

‘Get the poem inside yourself’ (feel the emotions and be able to recall the main ideas).

Look at the whole psalm so that you can experience it and retell the message. This is not an attempt to memorize the psalm, but to be able to understand the whole message and to express it in the target language. Aim to do at least the first two activities.

CREATIVE RESPONSES

First, do Internalisation Activities 1-5 as a whole group

Internalisation Activity: Listen to Psalm X being read again. Note all the words you hear which speak of God’s power, or which are very intense/extreme language.

Internalisation Activity: Say each line of the psalm in the right order, as a group. Use your own words; there's no need to have it precisely right. Then let one or two persons say each line of the psalm, again in the right order

Internalisation Activity: Then, as a group, make gestures for each line and again say all the lines in order, but this time with gestures. Use mime/gestures to show the emotion and action.

Internalisation Activity: Lastly, as a whole group, use the popcorn method. Each line, in the right order, is said by a different person. Do this a second time to further reinforce.

Internalisation Activity (optional): The storyboard method: draw pictures of each event in the psalm as they unfold.

Then divide the group into two or three groups

Internalisation Activity: Skits—act out what’s happening in each of the lines. Make a little drama. Encourage them to use facial expressions, body language, motions, and movement to try to experience the emotions and the sequence of events. This psalm lends itself well to a skit.

Internalisation Activity: Memory song, chant or memory aid to help remember the psalm. Consider making a short poem of the song in the local language or Language of Wider Communication to help you remember the different actions in order. This song is only to help everyone remember each stanza in sequence (and the lines in sequence if it is a short psalm)



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

Other Options

Activity 1: Drama: flow of the psalm

This drama helps the group to understand the flow of statement and response in the psalm.

The group should go outside and create a drama based on this psalm. If they want to do their own drama, that would be much the best. If not, use the drama below.

They should translate it, and perform it in their own language with actions and expression. Try to get exclamations and responses in addition to the statements.

Finally, do a performance of the drama by heart. Record, to capture spontaneous expressions and idioms. (In practice, this ends up almost equivalent to an oral translation of the psalm, so check on how they are translating the different exclamations and statements – these will re-emerge in the oral translation. This activity is excellent for naturalness, but because the drama is done before any exegetical input, it may need a little tweaking.)

Psalmist:	Listen, Israel, and remember!
Whole group:	What if the Lord had not been on our side when we were attacked?
Participant no 1:	our enemies would have swallowed us alive
Participant no 2:	the floods would have swept us away
Whole group:	Praise be to the Lord!
Participant no 3:	He did not let us be torn by their teeth
Participant no 4:	We escaped like a bird from a hunter's trap
Participant no 5:	we escaped and now we are free!
Whole group:	Praise the Lord who helps us The Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Teaching point and discussion: one danger, one rescue, four amazing images

This activity helps the group to understand and retain the patterned structure of minor image, major image, minor image, major image, and the poetic effects within the major images.

For some groups it will work better using this as an introduction to the oral translation, in stage 5, rather than before the song. However, if these poetic features are understood, it will enrich the song.

There was **one danger and one rescue**, but those are presented using a **range of different imagery**, to help us in our response of thanksgiving and acknowledgement.

The first stanza repeats the line 'if the Lord had not been on our side', with the danger, then two different images for what would have happened. There's a minor image (only one line), followed by a major image, the latter repeated in a very poetic way:

- **Minor image: swallowed up:** Their anger flared (= when men attacked us) and *they would have swallowed us alive* or *swallowed us up*, an unspecified metaphor. Ask them what that





STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. A



APP. B

brings to mind: what can ‘swallow you up’ in the local language? Wild animals, a whale, or even fire, depending on the metaphors in the local language. What does this verb, swallow up, tell us about the danger? *There is a sense of being against overwhelming odds, against something much larger and fiercer than oneself.*

- **Major image: swept away in a flood:** three restatements of the water metaphor:
 - *The floodwaters would have engulfed us*
 - *The torrent would have swept us away*
 - *The raging flood would have swept us away.*

Activity 2a:

What does this image show us? These link with the idea in ancient Israelite thinking that bodies of water are dangerous, and all three mean essentially the same thing: we would have been lost (drowned).

What does this image tell us about the danger? in literal terms, we would have been completely defeated and destroyed. The repetition of the idea but in different words heightens the drama and the poetry.

Are floods, violent waters, and drowning, feared in the local culture? Can they think of an ideophone or exclamation that would refer to drowning, to being swept away by water?

The **second stanza**, although it focusses on praise and thanksgiving, continues telling us about the **same danger**. Again, we have a similar minor image, just one line, and then a major image, also repeated in a poetic way.

- **Minor image: torn by teeth:** the Lord *did not let us be torn by their teeth*: how is this similar to, but different from, the first image of being swallowed up? The idea is still being eaten, but this time being torn by teeth. Ask what can tear you with its teeth? Lions, dogs, bears etc come to mind. This is probably meant to be a variation on a theme, adding to v3 rather than presenting a new idea. It’s like saying in the first stanza, we’d have been swallowed up, and in the second, we’d have been chewed up.

Lions, roaring and prowling, are a common image in the psalms for the psalmist’s enemies, eg Ps 7:2 has the idea of being torn apart by a lion. David doesn’t actually use the word *lion* here in Ps 124, but he uses a description that brings them to mind. Again, a good place for an ideophone.

Note however that this is only one line, with the words *prey* and *teeth*. Most of the stanza is given to the final image. We might find the lion more frightening, but it’s **not the major image** in this stanza. It is very important to keep the same balance as the psalmist, so do not at this point encourage responses such as songs or dramas that focus on lions, even if those are more natural to the local culture.

- **Major image: rescued from a snare:** read the psalm again and ask what is the major image in this stanza. Being let out of a snare: the image here is that Israel, *like a bird*, was caught in a fowler’s snare. Ask for terms in the local language both for those who hunt birds, and for the snares or traps that they set. Probably a small bird, maybe like a quail. Don’t get into deep ornithological discussions here, but do discuss the shared experience with the psalmist’s world: traps are set for birds.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

Activity 2b:

What usually happens to a bird caught in a snare? Death for the bird, unless the snare is poorly set, or there is some intervention. And the bird may then be eaten, which links with the teeth image.

What are we told happened to the bird here? Does the psalmist explain what happened? Note that the rescue uses a passive verb: *the snare has been broken*, rather than saying it was the Lord who did it, but it is clear from v8 that this is meant. This is poetry, not a story – not all the details are given.



Step 4: Explore and compose

Explore the Hebrew and local poetry and compose a song

EXPLORING HEBREW AND LOCAL POETRY

For the facilitator: in this step, address the following topics to explore in Hebrew poetry:

- 1) Repetition of words, images, and sounds
- 2) Handling the Hebrew parallelisms
- 3) Figures of speech, like metaphors, personification
- 4) Rhythm, verse length, beat
- 5) Word order, clause order
- 6) Poetic devices that emphasize and mark something as important

Once the artist-translators have sufficiently internalised and drafted the psalm in the workshop setting, compose a song, poem, rap, chant, or prayer to capture as much of the psalm as possible.

1. Poetic devices- repetitions of words, images, and sounds

Activity: Trace all the words that are repeated. Then all the concepts/images.

2. Poetic devices - main Images or metaphors of the Psalm

- Metaphors, metonyms, similes, personifications, hyperboles, merisms,

Activity: Can you identify any images, similes or metaphors?

3. Rhythm

Activity: Listen to the psalm again and in groups, and get a feel for the rhythm. Are the lines short or long?

4. Irregular word order

- Fronting of nouns before the verbs in Hebrew is particularly in focus here





STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

Activity: Look at the Flower Garden or the Hebrew-mirror, and identify all the verses that have irregular word order, mostly (in English) nouns put before the verbs.

5. Highlighting poetic devices

Activity: Look at the Flower Garden in Appendix C or the Hebrew-mirror in Appendix A, and identify all the verses that have highlighting devices.

COMPOSING A SONG

For the facilitator: several considerations, like the big question when to start doing the song

- 1) *When to start composing a song? The guide writer and facilitator have some freedom when. Either at the end of step 4, or after step 5. There are pro's and con's to each option. One advantage of doing it in Step 4 (before the detailed exegesis) is that the team starts to think about poetry. They only start to think about poetry once they start composing a song. The risk is that when they compose something early, before step 5, that they settle on a melody they like, but need to change it or even abandon it after getting the more detailed exegetical insights. The advantage*
- 2) *Some other considerations: what about memory aid, the poem or song made at the end of Step 3?*
- 3) *Another option is to only compose a nice tune and song on one stanza with not any serious exegetical issues. That tune can then be used for the rest of the psalm at the end of Step 5. Experience with shorter sections, like one or two stanzas at a time, to compose.*
- 4) *The team needs to learn some song-writing skills.*
- 5) *It is not necessary to use the same tune for every stanza. Sometimes 3-4 tunes can be used for long psalms.*

Note the poetic devices used in the Hebrew mirror or in the Flower Garden (Appendix C). What is the psalmist trying to achieve? Consider what poetic devices are used in the local language to achieve the same functions.

Activity: NOW, COMPOSE A SONG! Participants are to choose a style or genre that is relevant for the psalm, and to set the whole psalm or sections to a rhythm or music. The song needs to cover all the main stanzas, but doesn't need to be correct in every detail (that comes later in Step 5)

Activity: Make a recording of the composition(s).



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B



Step 5: Draft

Translating stanza-by-stanza

Listen to the poem again. Orally create stanza-by-stanza a first draft of the psalm in the target language, trying to capture the poetic elements and essential details of the meaning. To take full advantage of the oral form, avoid reverting to written Biblical text at this point.

Activity: Divide into smaller groups and let one in each group read through guide translation #2: Hebrew-tight (or play a recording) while others translate. The oral draft can at that point be recorded and/or immediately written down (Step 6 merged with Step 5).

Activity: Hebrew word play linking the two stanzas: *nephesh*: ‘neck/life’

The Hebrew word *nephesh* means ‘neck’, but it also means ‘life’ (and is used much more frequently in the psalms with this meaning). The psalmist plays with these two meanings in the psalm, sometimes using it to mean ‘neck’, sometimes to mean ‘life’.

Read the psalm below aloud, and ask the psalmists to decide whether the meaning on each occasion is ‘life’, ‘neck’, or both. Disagreement and discussion is good!

- 1 If YHWH had not been on our side—
say it, Israel! —
- 2 if YHWH had not been on our side
when men rose up against us,
- 3 then they would have swallowed us up
when their anger burned against us,
- 4 then the flood would have washed over us,
the torrent would have swept over our *nephesh*,
- 5 then it would have swept over our *nephesh*
- the raging flood.
- 6 Praise be to YHWH,
who has not given us as prey into their teeth.
- 7 Our *nephesh* has escaped like a bird
out of a trapper’s snare;
the snare has been broken,
and we, we have escaped.
- 8 Our help is in the name of YHWH,
the Maker of heavens and earth.

Note that *nephesh* is used in the singular in the psalm – the *neck/life* of the whole community together – this does not work well in English, but may do in the target language.

Discuss whether there is a word or idea in the target language that could be used to translate *nephesh* in this psalm.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. A



APP. B

STANZA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Often it speeds the work to have different groups do different stanzas. If you do this, make sure you all hear the psalm from top to bottom and to make suggestions to other groups when you come together...

Stanza 1: Verses 1-5

<p><i>Song of the ascents. Of David</i></p> <p>1 If not that YHWH who was for us let Israel he say</p> <p>2 If not that YHWH who was for us In rising against us mankind</p> <p>3 then living they have swallowed us in the burning of their anger at us</p> <p>4 then the waters have washed us away a torrent has passed over our neck/life</p> <p>5 then it has passed over our neck/life the raging waters.</p>	<p><i>A song of ascents. Of David.</i></p> <p>1 If YHWH had not been on our side— say it, Israel! —</p> <p>2 if YHWH had not been on our side when men rose up against us</p> <p>3 then they would have swallowed us up when their anger burned against us,</p> <p>4 then the flood would have washed over us, the torrent would have swept us away,</p> <p>5 then it would have swept us away - the raging flood.</p>
---	--

Verse 1: if... what? The delayed danger

What is the danger? The opening of the psalm starts with an *if*. We know that it's saying if the Lord hadn't been on our side.... but what is the danger?

Read the psalm and ask for hands to be raised when we find out what the *if* is about, where we get the explanation for the *if*. It's not until v2b: if the Lord had not been on our side – *when men rose up against us*. So the danger is attack by enemies.

But: is the long introduction to the problem an issue? Is it ok to start a poem this way in the local language?

It may be tempting, because of this long introduction, to take the context first – when men attacked us, what if the Lord had not...? It's much better if we can keep it the same as the psalm, so that the **focus of the psalm begins and ends with the Lord**, not with the danger, important though that is.

Verses 3, 4 and 5 all start with: תֵּן *azai* 'then'

In English the repetition of 'then' does not sound poetic, as it does in Hebrew; the NIV doesn't translate any of the verses with 'then': it uses 'when' in v3 and no further connectives. ESV uses 'then' in each case – less concerned with poetry, more with accuracy.

Ask if there is a way in the local language to start those three verses with the same word or construction - perhaps just a particle or exclamation, rather than a connective - to maintain the parallelism. (Note: *then* is in both of the guide translations, so it has been heard several times already.) Check back to the original translation exercise in step 2 to find out whether a particle is in fact obligatory before the consequence, or whether some marker can optionally be put in; and if the



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. A



APP. B

latter, how that affects the poetry. The pattern of repetition may already be present in the verb and no other marker needed.

Verses 4-5: floods, torrents, raging waters

In the NIV, the three **water images** are all translated by different words in English - flood, torrent, raging waters. In the original Hebrew however there are only two different 'water' words, with the first and third artistically repeated (first the word *waters* on its own, then second time round amplified with an adjective):

The waters.....

the stream/river/wadi/torrent....

the raging waters.

For some languages, coming up with lots of different ways of describing water that can rush and drown is difficult; however, if they follow the second guide translation rather than the NIV or a major national translation, this shouldn't be a problem. Explain that this is actually a fairly simple structure, complicated by English translations. There are reasons for English translations doing this which are explained in the footnotes to the Hebrew text.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 2: Verses 6-8

6 Blessed be YHWH

who not he has given us
prey to their teeth

7 Our (neck)/life like bird that has escaped

from snare of trappers,
the snare was broken
and we, we have escaped.

8 Our help in name of YHWH

maker of heavens and earth.

6 Praise be to YHWH,

who has not given us
as prey into their teeth.

7 We have escaped like a bird

out of a trapper's snare;
the snare has been broken,
and we, we have escaped.

8 Our help is in the name of YHWH,

the Maker of heavens and earth.

Verse 7: breaking the snare

There may well be a range of ideophones for breaking, and also for escaping – see what fits best here. The exact ideophone or verb will depend on what type of snare they have decided to use.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Activities:

- 1) Listen again to the recordings of each verse or section.
- 2) Think about how to include relevant parts from previous steps and to use ideas from the previous creative activities.
- 3) Put everything together to make a poetic oral representation of the complete psalm, and then record it.

Phase 2: TEXT



Step 6: Transcribe

Make a written draft

Activity: Transcribe the recording/s of the oral draft onto paper or a computer.

Before moving on to the checking steps, check the transcribed draft for the following. This should be done as a whole group, looking at the psalm projected onto a screen or wall. Doing this now will help the exegetical and poetical checks that follow to stay focused on essential matters.

1. **Versification:** put the verse numbers into the psalm.
2. Check that the number of the psalm, and any **superscription**, are in place at the top. (Superscriptions are often left out completely according to team policy, but they are recommended to be put in the written text but not the song.)
3. Put in the **stanza breaks** (blank lines usually).
4. Correct the **punctuation**, in particular finding out where the sentences should end. Different groups use different approaches. Our recommendation is to use capital letters only for the beginning of sentences, not for the beginning of each poetic line.
5. Correct the **spelling**. You may find that there is a lot of discussion over this. The group needs to have consistency but also needs to abide by any government guidelines.
6. Raise any questions you have about the **back translation** at this point. The back translation just needs to be comprehensible; it does not need spell checks etc. You, the facilitator, are the only person who needs it. However, without a good back translation you cannot understand what is going on. As a bonus, at least a couple of exegetical questions you've prepared usually turn out to be unnecessary after this step.
7. Check the **line divisions** (this refers to how the power is broken up into lines and where to make those breaks).



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B



Step 7: Contents Check

Checking exegetical faithfulness

Check the exegesis of the oral translation. Consider whether the correct meaning has been translated and if the wording used can be improved. The purpose of this step is to check the content of your draft for faithfulness and trustworthiness.

Activity: Review the draft translation in detail, using the oral recording of Step 5 or the transcription of Step 6. Do an exegetical check by comparing the draft with the guide translations given in Appendix A and the exegetical layout in Appendix B and adjust the text as necessary.

EXEGETICAL CHECKLIST

Select which of these would be useful; not all of them will be needed.

- **Superscription**

The superscription, ‘song-of ascents-of-David’ places Psalm 124 in the group of songs of ascent, psalms 120-134, and like three of the others – 122, 131, 133 – David is named as the author. See the information box in [Appendix B](#).

- **vv 1 & 2: ‘staircase parallelism’**

The psalmists have probably already learnt that Hebrew poetry uses parallelism, where the second line is connected with the first, but adds some change. In Psalm 121, for example, the change was intensification. Here there is additional information: the second line repeats the first and then adds ‘when man rose up against us’. This is called staircase parallelism. Without the additional information, we wouldn’t know what the danger was.

If the Lord had not been on our side (let Israel say)

If the Lord had not been on our side *when men rose up against us...*

Make sure the repeated lines in 1a and 2a remain exactly the same.

- **v 1b: ‘na’**

The *na* in אֲמַרְנָא may denote urgency, which seems likely here, as the whole psalm has a high emotional load. Say it, Israel! Let Israel say it (urgently)!

Find out if they have some kind of exclamation or particle that adds urgency to an instruction, or a different way of giving an instruction.

- **v 1b: ‘Israel’**

Israel in 1b is singular, as in many of the psalms. See if the participants can use a singular rather than saying ‘Israelites’.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

- **v 2:** ‘mankind/men’

What is usually translated ‘men’ in English translations is actually *adam*, mankind. Try to avoid making this too specific, for example ‘enemies’. This generalisation adds to the sense of being overwhelmed on all sides.

- **v 4b-5:** chiastic structure

We looked earlier at the words for water above (waters; wadi/torrent; raging waters).

The second and third *water* words in this group of three are tied together in a close chiastic-type structure:

The flood	would have passed over	us/our neck/life (<i>nephesh</i>)
Would have passed over	us/our neck/life (<i>nephesh</i>)	the raging waters.

This is not easy to do in English. The various English translations have attempted to give parallelism through variation in vocabulary rather than word order. Find out if, at least in poetry, the local language can reverse the natural word order in this way.

- **v 7:** the fowlers’ snare

Fowlers is plural in the Hebrew, usually taken to singular in English as it sounds more natural that way – the fowler’s snare. Either a singular or a plural works for the fowlers, but the snare should remain singular.

- **v 7:** the snare was broken

Note that the agent is not specified – we know it was the Lord, but that is not said directly. The poetry is as brief as possible, two words: the-snare was-broken. A good place for an ideophone.

- **v 7:** repetition & chiastic structure

‘escaped’: it (our *nephesh*, ‘life/soul’) has escaped; we have escaped. Use the same verb.

Note the chiastic structure in this verse:

escape	snare
snare	escape

We have escaped like a bird (lit: *our nephesh has escaped*)

out of the fowler’s snare;
the snare has been broken,
and we have escaped.

Chiastic structures give prominence and balance, and are easy to remember, so try to keep that if possible.

- **v 8:** the Maker of heaven and earth

It’s important to translate the same word the same way *within* a psalm, but it’s also important to maintain links from one psalm to another.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. A



APP. B

The final line of this psalm, at the end of v8, occurs three times in the songs of ascent: here, the second verse of Ps121, and the final line of Ps 134:3 - the final verse of the songs of ascents. These are all the same in Hebrew, although the English translation in the three psalms may differ slightly because of the grammar. 'The maker of heavens and earth': עֹשֶׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ



Step 8: Poetry Check

Compare and weigh the poetic features

Check if the Hebrew poetry is all accounted for in the translation through equivalent poetic features in the target language. Consider if the poetry of the translation can be improved, for example, look at the length of lines and the use of rhythm and ideophones.

Activity: Consider the poetic features of your translation. Do they reflect the purpose of the Hebrew poetic features, drawing attention to the correct parts? Experiment a bit with different word-orders and see what sounds the most beautiful, the most poetic.

POETIC CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- Rhythm and pulse
- Eliminating wordiness
- Word order
- Metaphors and similes
- Exclamations and ideophones. Note that psalmists may be reluctant to add ideophones because they are not in the guide translations: explain why they are not there.

Feel free to raise and discuss other poetic features during checking, especially line length, repetition, chiasms, elision, or anything you have observed in their own poetry.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B



Step 9: Finalise

Preparing the final version of an authenticated translation

Prepare the final version which will serve as an authorized translation, that in turn will serve as the basis for performing the psalm in the community (audio, visual and written).

Activity: Re-check the spelling of your transcription, the punctuation, in-setting, and the layout of paragraphs to represent stanza segmentation.

Activity: Re-check the essential accuracy of the back translation (not worrying about spelling).

Activity: In AVTT, ensure that the final text of your psalm is uploaded with a back translation, check that the recordings from different steps are in the correct place, and do a final audio recording.

Activity: If possible, copy the final written text into Paratext.

Phase 3: PERFORMANCE



Step 10: Perform

Performing the psalm in your community

Convert text into performance (dramatic reading/song/chant) to both perform and share this psalm, ensuring the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible).

You now want to convert your written translation into a performance (song or chant) so that you can share it with your community. You need to make sure that the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible). The genre - lament or praise or thanksgiving or other - should be similar to songs of the same genre in your culture.

Psalm-specific ideas:

- ...

Activity: Identify any relevant genres or styles or performance and put the psalm to music. You can put the whole psalm to music, word-for-word, or you can use creative licence to adapt the psalm for the performance.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

Activity: Complete a transcript and back translation for the lyrics of any song created by the team to be checked before recording.

FINAL CHECKLIST

In the end of each psalm, there should ideally be four products:

1. Transcription: An authorized, authenticated, or officially written draft in AVTT and Paratext.
2. Dramatic Reading: A recording of a dramatic reading or recitation of the whole psalm, using the authenticated version word-for-word, recorded in AVTT.
3. Whole Psalm Performance: A recording of a performance of the whole psalm, using the entire authenticated version but with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance, including poetic and dramatic features beyond the authenticated version, recorded in AVTT.
4. Song or Hymn: A recording of a performance of part of the psalm including the main idea of the psalm, in the form of a song, hymn or chorus, with or without drama, with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance and to make it easy to sing and remember, recorded in AVTT. An improved version of the Step 4 composition could be used here.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

Bibliography

- Leslie C. **Allen**, [*Psalms 101–150 \(Revised\)*](#), vol. 21, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002). (available on Logos)
- Robert **Alter**, [*The Book of Psalms*](#). (WW Norton & Company, 2007) (available on Kindle)
- Robert G. Bratcher and William David Reyburn, (**TH**), [*A Translator’s Handbook on the Book of Psalms*](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991). (available on Logos)
- Walter **Brueggemann** and William H Bellinger Jr, [*“Psalms”*](#), Cambridge University Press 2014. (available on Kindle)
- Frank Lothar Hossfeld and Eric Zenger (**Hossfeld & Zenger**), [*“Psalms 2”*](#), Hermeneia, Fortress Press Minneapolis, 2011.
- Benjamin J. **Segal**, [*“A New Psalm: the psalms as literature”*](#), Jerusalem 2013 ISBN 978-965-220-618-4 (available on Kindle)
- Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner (**NICOT**), [*“The Songs of the Ascents: Psalms,”*](#) in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014). (available on Logos)
- Ernst R. **Wendland**, [*“Analyzing the Psalms”*](#), SIL International 1998 (available on Logos).
- Gordon J. **Wenham**, [*“Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Song ethically”*](#), Baker Academic 2012. (available on Kindle)
- Lynell Zogbo and Ernst R. Wendland (**Zogbo & Wendland**), [*Hebrew Poetry in the Bible: A Guide for Understanding and for Translating*](#), Helps for Translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 2000). (available on Logos)



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. A



APP. B



Appendix A: Guide Translations

Hebrew-mirror	Guide Translation
<p><i>Song of the ascents. Of David</i></p> <p>1 If not that YHWH who was for us let Israel he say</p> <p>2 If not that YHWH who was for us In rising against us mankind</p> <p>3 then living they have swallowed us in the burning of their anger at us</p> <p>4 then the waters have washed us away a torrent has passed over our neck/life</p> <p>5 then it has passed over our neck/life the raging waters.</p> <p>6 Blessed be YHWH who not he has given us prey to their teeth</p> <p>7 Our (neck)/life like bird that has escaped from snare of trappers, the snare was broken and we, we have escaped.</p> <p>8 Our help in name of YHWH maker of heavens and earth.</p>	<p><i>A song of ascents. Of David.</i></p> <p>1 If YHWH had not been on our side— say it, Israel! —</p> <p>2 if YHWH had not been on our side when men rose up against us</p> <p>3 then they would have swallowed us up when their anger burned against us,</p> <p>4 then the flood would have washed over us, the torrent would have swept us away,</p> <p>5 then it would have swept us away - the raging flood.</p> <p>6 Praise be to YHWH, who has not given us as prey into their teeth.</p> <p>7 We have escaped like a bird out of a trapper's snare; the snare has been broken, and we, we have escaped.</p> <p>8 Our help is in the name of YHWH, the Maker of heavens and earth.</p>





STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. A



APP. B



Appendix B: Exegetical Layout

This psalm is one of the *Songs of Ascent*. Psalms 120-134 are all given this title in the Bible, and were probably sung by the people of Israel as they went up to Jerusalem to celebrate a number of annual festivals, including Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

In Jewish tradition, these fifteen psalms are linked to the fifteen steps of the temple, where the Levites may have stood to sing these songs. This is not mentioned in the Bible, however.

SUGGESTED HEADING

...

Coding for TAM Verbs and Hebrew features:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qatal perfective = blue • Yiqtol imperfective = red | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infinitive construct = purple • Wayyiqtol waw+imperfective = pink • Jussive/cohortative = light brown | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imperative = brown • Participle = green • Weqatal = navy |
|--|---|--|

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת לְדָוִד	Song of the ascents. Of David
לֹאֲלֵי יְהוָה שְׁהִיָּה לָנוּ	1 If.not ¹ YHWH who.was for.us
יֹאמַר־נָא יִשְׂרָאֵל :	Let.him.say ²³ Israel
לֹאֲלֵי יְהוָה שְׁהִיָּה לָנוּ	2 If.not YHWH who.was for.us ⁴
בְּקוֹם עָלֵינוּ אָדָם :	in.rising against.us mankind

¹ The Hebrew word לֹאֲלֵי opens the psalm with a condition-consequence sequence, where the condition (the protasis) is repeated at the beginning of v2, and then the three (unreal) consequences (the apodosis) are set out in vv 3-5.

² The verb here is a qal jussive, indicating intention or will. Jussive verbs often (although not always) look identical to yiqtols.

³ The TAM marking in this chart is as follows: qatal is blue; yiqtol is red, wayyiqtol is pink; imperatives are brown, participles are green, jussives/cohortatives are orange, and infinitive constructs are purple. Frontshifting is in bold.

⁴ This line, 2a, is exactly the same as 1a.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

אֲזֵי חַיִּים בְּלַעֲנוּ	3 Then ⁵ living ⁶ they.have.swallowed.us ⁷
בְּתַרְוֹת אַפַּם בָּנוּ	in.the.burning.of anger.their at.us
אֲזֵי הַמַּיִם שָׁטְפוּנוּ	4 Then ⁸ the.waters ⁹ they.have.washed.us.away
נַחְלָה עָבַר עַל־נַפְשֵׁנוּ:	¹⁰ river ¹¹ it.has.passed over.neck/soul.our ¹²
אֲזֵי עָבַר עַל־נַפְשֵׁנוּ	5 Then ¹³ it.has.passed over.neck/soul.our
הַמַּיִם הַזֹּדֵדוֹגִים:	the.waters the.raging
בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה	6 Blessed.be YHWH
שֶׁלֹּא נָתַנּוּ	who.not he.has.given.us
טֶרֶף לְשֵׁנֵיהֶם:	prey to.teeth.their
נִפְשָׁנוּ כְּצֹפֹר נִמְלְטָה	7 ¹⁴ Soul.our like.bird it.has.escaped
מִפֶּחַ יֹקְשִׁים	from.snare.of trappers ¹⁵
הַפֶּחַ נִשְׁבַּר	the.snare was.broken

⁵ The first of the consequence connectives, *then*. See also vv 4 & 5.

⁶ חַיִּים can be either a noun, *lives* (or sometimes *life*, in English), or an adjective, *living*. Here the recommended interpretation is as the adjective.

⁷ *adam* אָדָם 'mankind', at the end of v2, is a collective noun, using plural agreements in v3: *they* have swallowed us, *their* anger.

⁸ The second of the consequence connectives, *then*.

⁹ This is just 'waters' rather than floodwaters, flood etc, but is often amplified because of the connected verb, washing away.

¹⁰ Note the chiasm in 4b and 5, see steps 7 & 8.

¹¹ *Nahala* has a wide range of meanings, from stream or river, to flooded river. The danger is highlighted in it being 'up to our necks'.

¹² This is the first use of *nephesh*. See v5b below, v7a, and the activity on this Hebrew wordplay in step five.

¹³ The third of the consequence connectives, *then*.

¹⁴ Note the chiasmic structure of this verse, see step 7.

¹⁵ The image of the Lord saving from a fowler's snare is also used in Ps91:3 (although there fowler's is singular). A fowler is a trapper specialising in birds, so if there is no specific word for fowler, trapper can be used.





STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



APP. A



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. B

וְאִנְחָנוּ נִמְלֹטָנוּ:	and.we we.have.escaped
עֲזֹרָנוּ בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה	8 Help.our in.name.of YHWH
עֹשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:	maker.of heavens and.earth ¹⁶

¹⁶ Note the identical line in Ps121:2 and Ps134:3.



STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



STEP 4



STEP 5



STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



APP. A



APP. B



Appendix E: Portuguese guide translations

Primeiro guia de tradução, interlinear
hebraico, ligeiramente modificado

Segundo guia de tradução, perto do
hebraico original

Canção das subidas de Daví.

- 1 Se não YHWH que estivesse por nós
diga-lá Israel
- 2 Se não YHWH que estivesse por nós
no levantamento contra nós homem,
- 3 Então as vidas eles nos engoliram
Na queima de ira deles connosco,
- 4 Então as águas nos arrastaram,
Torrente passou em cima de nosso
pescoço/alma
- 5 Então passou em cima de nosso
pescoço/alma
As águas violentas.
- 6 Bendito YHWH
que não nos deu presa a dentes deles
- 7 Nosso pescoço/alma como pássaro escapou
De armadilha passarinhos,
A armadilha foi-quebrada
E nós, nós-escapamos.
- 8 Nossa ajuda em nome YHWH,
Ele-fazendo céus e terra.

Canção das subidas. De Daví.

- 1 Se não YHWH estivesse por-nós—
Diga-lá, Israel! —
- 2 Se não YHWH estivesse por-nós —
Quando se levantou contra nós homem
(adam),
- 3 Então vivos eles teriam engolido-nos
No incêndio de ira deles contra nós,
- 4 Então as águas nos teriam arrastado,
A torrente teria passado sobre nossa
alma,
- 5 Então teriam passado sobre nossa alma
as águas furiosas.
- 6 Abençoado YHWH,
Que não nos deu vítima aos dentes
deles.
- 7 A nossa alma como pássaro escapou
Da armadilha do passarinho,
A armadilha foi quebrada,
E nós – nós escapamos.
- 8 A nossa ajuda – no nome de YHWH
Criando os ceus e a terra.