

"Wär Gott nicht mit uns diese Zeit" BWV 14

1. **Wär Gott nicht mit uns diese Zeit,
So soll Israel sagen,
Wär Gott nicht mit uns diese Zeit,
Wir hätten müssen verzagen,
Die so ein armes Häuflein sind,
Veracht von so viel Menschenkind,
Die an uns setzen alle.**¹

2. Unsre Stärke heisst zu schwach,
Unserm Feind zu widerstehen.
Stünd uns nicht der Höchste bei,
Würd uns ihre Tyrannei
Bald bis an das Leben gehen.

3. Ja, hätt es Gott nur⁵ zugegeben,
Wir wären längst nicht mehr am Leben,
Sie rissen uns aus Rachgier hin,
So zornig ist auf uns ihr Sinn.
Es hätt uns ihre Wut
Wie eine wilde Flut
Und als beschäumte Wasser überschwemmet,
Und niemand hätte die Gewalt gehemmet.

4. Gott, bei deinem starken Schützen
Sind wir von⁷ den Feinden frei.
Wenn sie sich als wilde Wellen
Uns aus Grimm entgegenstellen,
Stehn uns deine Hände bei.

5. **Gott Lob und Dank, der nicht zugab,**

1. **Had God not been with us [until]² this time—
So shall Israel³ say—
Had God not been with us [until] this time,
We would have had to despair,
We who are such a wretched little band,
Despised by so many children of humankind,
Who all set upon us.**

2. Our [own] strength is too weak
To withstand our enemy.
If the Most High⁴ did not help us through,
Their tyranny would
Soon put our life at stake.

3. Yes, had God simply allowed it,
We would, long since, be alive no more;
Out of thirst for revenge they would have dragged us off,⁶
So wrathful is their disposition toward us.
Their rage would,
Like a wild flood
And like foaming waters, have overwhelmed us;
And no one would have curbed their might.

4. God, through your strong defense
We are free of the enemies.
When they set themselves against us
Out of fury like wild waves,
Your hands help us through.

5. **Praise and thanks to God, who did not allow**

¹The first stanza of the hymn.

²“Diese Zeit” (“this time”), as opposed to “dieser Zeit” (“[at/in/during] this time”), is presumably a curtailed form of “bis auf diese Zeit” (“until this time”).

³This hymn is Luther’s metrical rendering of Psalm 124, which was taken to be an expression of the spiritual and physical persecution of “the true [i.e., Lutheran] church” by its various enemies, especially Roman Catholics and Muslims. In this understanding, the Psalm’s word “Israel” refers to the “we/us” who make up the hymn-singing church.

⁴“Most High”—*elyon* in Hebrew, *hupsistos* in Greek—is used in the Bible as a name for Israel’s God, who dwells on high. In nonbiblical Greek, *hupsistos* was used for Zeus as the most high god.

⁵Bach’s original performing part (but not his score) and some modern editions here read “Ja, hätt es Gott *nicht* zugegeben” (“Yes, had God *not* allowed it”), which in context makes no sense. The phrase “Gott, der nicht zugab” (God, who did not allow”) in line 1 of movement 5, however, does make sense in its context.

⁶“Hinreissen” here means “to ravish” in its now obsolete sense of “to drag off by force,” more specifically its figurative sense of “to drag off to death.”

⁷In this line, Bach’s own materials continually vacillate between the readings “vor” (“before”/“from”/“of”) and “von” (“from”/“of”).

**Dass ihr Schlund uns möcht⁸ fangen.
Wie ein Vogel des Stricks kömmt ab,
Ist unsre Seel entgangen:
Strick ist entzwei, und wir sind frei;
Des Herren Name steht⁹ uns bei,
Des Gottes Himmels und Erden.¹⁰**

**That their throat might take us [as prey].¹¹
[Just] as a bird comes out of the snare,
Our soul has escaped:
[The] snare is [broken] in two, and we are free;
The name of the Lord,
Of the God of heaven and earth, helps us through.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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⁸Bach's own materials here give "mögt," which may look like a different wording, but it is simply an alternate spelling of "möcht" that was used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

⁹Here the hymnbooks of Bach's day read not as a statement, but as a plea: "Des Herren Name steh uns bei" ("May the name of the Lord help us through"). Three of Bach's original four performing parts read "steht," and one reads "steh."

¹⁰The final stanza of "Wär Gott nicht mit uns diese Zeit."

¹¹The words "as prey" were presumably taken for granted here on the basis of the correspondences of lines 1–2 with Psalm 124:6, "Gelobet sei der HERR, dass er uns nicht gibt zum Raube in ihre Zähne!" ("Praise be to the LORD that he does not give us [over] as prey into their teeth"). The language of line 2, with its reference to the "throat," is also partly derived from Romans 3:13, "Ihr Schlund ist ein offen Grab" ("Their [the sinners'] throat is an open grave"), which in turn alludes to Psalm 5:10, "Ihr Rachen ist ein offenes Grab" ("Their [the enemies'] mouth is an open grave"); "Rachen" is a word used for the mouth of an animal.