

“Nimm von uns Herr, du treuer Gott” BWV 101

**1. Nimm von uns Herr, du treuer Gott,
Die schwere Straf und grosse Not,
Die wir mit Sünden ohne Zahl
Verdienen allzumal.
Behüt für Krieg und teurer Zeit,
Für Seuchen, Feur und grossem Leid.**

2. Handle nicht nach deinen Rechten
Mit uns bösen Sündenknecchten,
Lass das Schwert der Feinde ruhn!
Höchster, höre unser Flehen,
Dass wir nicht durch sündlich Tun
Wie Jerusalem vergehen!

**3. Ach! Herr Gott, durch die Treue dein
Wird unser Land in Frieden und Ruhe sein.
Wenn uns ein Unglückswetter droht,
So rufen wir,
Barmherziger Gott, zu dir
In solcher Not:
Mit Trost und Rettung uns erschein!**

**1. Take from us, Lord, you faithful God,
The heavy punishment and great distress
That we by sins without number
Have altogether¹ deserved.
Protect [us] from war and famine,²
From pestilence,³ fire, and great suffering.**

2. Do not deal with us evil slaves of sin
According to your [harsh] judgments;
Let the enemies' sword rest.
Most High, hear our pleading,
So that we do not die away
Through sinful action, like Jerusalem [did, in not accepting Jesus].⁴

**3. Ah, Lord God, through your faithfulness
Our land will be at peace and rest.
If a tempest of misfortune threatens us,
Then we, at such distress [of misfortune], call
To you,
Merciful God:
Appear to us with comfort and deliverance!**

GENERAL NOTE: Movements 1 and 7 take their texts verbatim from the two outer stanzas of the hymn “Nimm von uns, Herr, du treuer Gott.” The internal movements quote or paraphrase other stanzas.

¹“Altogether” in the sense of “entirely,” but probably also with the meaning “all of us [sinners]”—in older German, “allzumal” can mean “in jeder Hinsicht” (“in every respect”) or “allesamt; alle ohne ausnahme” (“all [of us/them] together; all, without exception”). This hymn line is presumably drawing on Luther’s rendering of Romans 3:23, “Sie sind allzumal Sünder” (“They [the Jews and the gentiles] are all sinners” [i.e., Luther’s German does not mean “They are always sinners” or “They are in every respect sinners”]).

²In older and in biblical German, the expression “teure Zeit” was a synonym for “Hungersnot” (“famine”).

³“Seuchen” (i.e., with the “n”) is old-fashioned dative singular. (“Behüten für” takes the dative; and “für” is used here, where modern German would use “vor.”)

⁴The “dying” of Jerusalem—and thus the supposed “dying away” of the legitimacy of Judaism—refers to the destruction of the city and its temple by Roman armies in the year 70, which was understood in the Lutheranism of Bach’s day as God’s punishment of Jews for not believing in Jesus. (The Lutheranism of Bach’s day also taught that God had rescued Jerusalem’s believers in Jesus by having them flee to Pella before the war broke out.) At the liturgical occasion for which this cantata was written, the Tenth Sunday after Trinity, the understanding that the Jewish religion no longer had any validity for God was reinforced by, among other things, the following prayer that was recited each year on this Sunday: “Barmherziger Gott himmlischer Vater, wir bitten dich herzlich, du wollest ... unsere harte Herzen erweichen, damit wir nicht wie die verstockten Jüden die angenehme Zeit deiner gnädigen Heimsuchung versäumen, und durch unsere Unbussfertigkeit in zeitliche und ewige Strafe geraten, sondern wahre Busse thun, aus dem Schlaf der Sicherheit erwachen, in deinem Bethaus dir angenehme Opfer bringen, und gnädige Erhörung erlangen, durch Jesum Christum deinen Sohn unsern Herrn” (“Merciful God, heavenly father, we ask you fervently that ... you may render our hard hearts penitent, so that we do not, like the obstinate Jews, miss the acceptable time of your visitation of [salvation, via Jesus, in] grace, and through our impenitence incur temporal and eternal punishment, but rather be truly repentant, wake up from our sleep of security, bring you acceptable offerings in your house of prayer, and receive gracious answer [to our pleading], through Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord”).

Du kannst dem feindlichen Zerstören
Durch deine Macht und Hilfe wehren.
Beweis an uns deine grosse Gnad
Und straf uns nicht auf frischer Tat,
Wenn unsre Füsse wanken wollten
Und wir aus Schwachheit straucheln sollten.
Wohn uns mit deiner Güte bei
Und gib, dass wir
Nur nach dem Guten streben,
Damit allhier
Und auch in jenem Leben
Dein Zorn und Grimm fern von uns sei.

4. Warum willst du so zornig sein?
Es schlagen deines Eifers Flammen
Schon über unserm Haupt zusammen.
Ach, stelle doch die Strafen ein
Und trag aus väterlicher Huld
Mit unserm schwachen Fleisch Geduld!

5. Die Sünd hat uns verderbet sehr.
So müssen auch die Frömmsten sagen
Und mit betränten Augen klagen:
Der Teufel plagt uns noch viel mehr.
Ja, dieser böse Geist,
Der schon von Anbeginn ein Mörder heisst,

You can repel inimical [lust for] destroying,⁵
Through your might and help/salvation.
Show⁶ toward us your great mercy/grace
And do not punish us in the very act
If [on the path of faith] our feet would falter
And we, out of weakness, should stumble.
Attend to us with your goodness
And grant that we
May strive only after the good,
So that here [on earth]
And also in the [heavenly] life hereafter
Your anger and wrath might be far from us.

4. Why do you mean to be so angry?
Already the [lightning-bolt] flames of your jealousy⁷
Clap above our head.
Ah, but set aside the punishments
And out of fatherly favor
Bear patience with our weak [sinful] flesh.

5. Sin has corrupted us greatly.
Thus even the most pious must say,
And with tear-filled eyes lament:
The devil yet plagues us exceedingly in addition.⁹
Yes, this evil spirit,
Who is called a murderer already from the beginning,¹⁰

⁵That is, the tendency to “destroy” on the part of those who are “enemies”—like those among [old] Jerusalem who do not believe in Jesus.

⁶The verb “beweisen” (usually, “to demonstrate/prove”) is apparently being used here in its sense as a synonym for the older German verb “erzeigen” (“to show,” which is used in line 6 of movement 6, below).

⁷“Eifer” here means not simply “zeal” or “fervor” but, more specifically, “jealousy.” The line takes its language and sense from Deuteronomy 4:24, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Der HERR, dein Gott, ist ein verzehrend Feuer, und ein eifriger Gott” (“The LORD, your God, is a consuming fire, and a jealous God”). Correspondingly, Exodus 34:14 says “Du sollst keinen andern Gott anbeten; denn der HERR heisst ein Eiferer, darum, dass er ein eifriger Gott ist” (“You shall worship no other god [i.e., this was the first of the Ten Commandments, whose texts are given in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21]; because the [name of the] LORD is called ‘A Jealous One,’ for the reason that he is a jealous God”). This “jealousy” was traditionally understood as analogous to the jealous and impassioned indignation of a marriage partner whose spouse is unfaithful.

⁹This line is not saying that the sum total of the devils’s own harm is a great deal larger than sin’s, or that the devil will bring more harm than he did before. The sense is that the devil will yet greatly add to the harm that has already come to “us” by sin.

¹⁰The language of this line is derived from the grim accusation related in John 8:44, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Jesus sprach zu den Jüden, ‘Ihr seid von dem Vater dem Teufel, und nach eures Vaters Lust wollt ihr tun; derselbige ist ein Mörder von Anfang, und ist nicht bestanden in der Wahrheit; denn die Wahrheit ist nicht in ihm; wenn er die Lügen redet, so redet er von seinem eigen[en]; denn er ist ein Lügner, und ein Vater derselbigen’” (“Jesus said to the Jews, ‘You are of the father the devil, and you want to act according to your father’s desire; he is a murderer from the beginning, and is not constituted in the truth, because the truth is not in him; if he speaks lies, then he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar, and a father of liars’”).

Sucht uns um unser Heil zu bringen
Und als ein Löwe zu verschlingen.

**Die Welt, auch unser Fleisch und Blut
Uns allezeit verführen tut.**

Wir treffen hier auf dieser schmalen Bahn
Sehr viele⁸ Hindernis im Guten an.

Solch Elend kennst du, Herr, allein:

Seeks us, to kill our salvation¹¹
And to devour [us] like a lion.¹²

**The world, and also¹³ our [innate] flesh and blood,¹⁴
Always acts to lead us astray.¹⁵**

Here on this narrow path [to eternal life]¹⁶ we meet
Very many an impediment to the good [of the gospel].¹⁷

Such misery, Lord, you alone know:

⁸In modern German, this would be “viel,” as the noun “Hindernis” is now neuter. But in older German it could be feminine (hence the cantata’s use of the feminine-ending word “viele,” which Bach set as two notes). In the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, both of the two appearances of the word “Hindernis” are usually rendered as feminine (in 1 Kings 5:4 and 1 Corinthians 9:12). Also, given its apparent biblical connection to 1 Corinthians 9:12 (see fn. 17, below), the word “Hindernis” in the cantata is indeed most likely feminine singular, and therefore—although this does not make for a semantically significant difference—to be understood as “viele Hindernis” (“many an impediment”), not a poetically clipped version of the plural, namely “viele Hindernis[se]” (“many impediments/obstacles”).

¹¹In the phrase “Sucht uns um unser Heil zu bringen,” the “um” and “zu” are not parts of an “um-zu” (“in-order-to”) construction. The “um” and “bringen” are parts of the separable verb “umbringen” (“to kill”)—killing and lying are what “the devil” does, by nature (see fn. 10, above). That is, the logic of the phrase should be read as “Der Teufel sucht uns, unser Heil umzubringen”—the devil seeks to obstruct Christian salvation by killing both the broad idea of salvation (“Heil”) but also salvation as personified in Jesus (“unser Heil” [or “unser Heiland”]).

¹²The language of this line is derived from 1 Peter 5:8, “euer Widersacher, der Teufel, geht umher wie ein brüllender Löwe und sucht, welchen er verschlinge” (“your antagonist, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion and seeks whom he may devour”).

¹³“Auch” here does not mean “even,” as there was never any doubt in Lutheranism about the belief that one’s “[intrinsic, innate] flesh and blood” (see fn. 14, below) leads one astray.

¹⁴The expression “flesh and blood” here does not mean “one’s relatives.” It is a quasi-technical term for (fallen, intrinsically sinful) human nature. The classic use of the expression is found in 1 Corinthians 15:50, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Davon sage ich aber, lieben Brüder, dass Fleisch und Blut nicht können das Reich Gottes ererben” (“Hence I [the apostle Paul] say, however, to you dear brothers [in Christ], that [one’s essentially corrupted] flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”). It is the “spirit” that inherits the kingdom of God.

¹⁵According to Revelation 12:9, the devil is the one “der die ganze Welt verführt” (“who leads the whole world astray”).

¹⁶In Luther’s New Testament, technically, the gate to heaven is said to be “narrow” and the path “strait” (i.e., extremely narrow). Matthew 7:14 reads “die Pforte ist eng, und der Weg ist schmal, der zum Leben führt” (“the gate is narrow and the path is strait [or, ‘constricted’] that leads to [eternal] life”). The modern expression “the straight and narrow [path],” insofar as it takes “straight” to mean “not crooked,” stems historically from a misunderstanding of the renderings “strait gate” and “narrow way” found in Matthew 7 in older English Bibles. The cantata librettist gives “[hier auf dieser] schmalen Bahn” instead of the more precisely biblical wording “[hier auf diesem] schmalen Weg[e]” to accommodate a rhyme with “Hindernis im Guten an.” (“Bahn” and “Weg” are synonymous.)

¹⁷The sense of this line is derived from 1 Corinthians 9:12, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “[Wir] vertragen allerlei, dass wir nicht dem Evangelio Christi eine Hindernis machen” (“[We] bear all manner of things, that we will not make an impediment to [moving forward on the narrow path of the] gospel of Christ”). The well-known Lutheran study bible by Johann Olearius (which Bach, too, owned) explains that the biblical-Greek term underlying “Hindernis” here was “engkope”—literally, “an incision.” Figuratively, however, the “engkope/Hindernis” referred specifically, explains Olearius, to a situation where “wenn man die Strenge zerschneidet, so wird der Lauf des Wagens gehindert” (“if one cuts the ropes, then the course of the chariot is impeded”). Later biblical scholarship, somewhat similarly, has explained this use of the Greek term as “a cutting (made in the road to impede an enemy in pursuit, hence), a hindrance.”

Hilf, Helfer, hilf uns Schwachen,
Du kannst uns stärker machen!
Ach, lass uns dir befohlen sein.

Help/save, helper/savior,¹⁸ help/save us weak ones;
You can make us stronger [in faith].¹⁹
Ah, let us be entrusted²⁰ to you.

6. Gedenk an Jesu²¹ bitterm Tod!
Nimm, Vater, deines Sohnes Schmerzen
Und seiner Wunden Pein zu Herzen,
Die sind ja für die ganze Welt
Die Zahlung und das Lösegeld;
Erzeig auch mir zu aller Zeit,
Barmherzger Gott, Barmherzigkeit!
Ich seufze stets in meiner Not:
Gedenk an Jesu bitterm Tod!²²

6. Remember Jesus's bitter death.
Take to heart, father, your son's sorrows
And his wounds' pain,
Which are indeed the payment and the ransom
For the [sin of the] whole world.²³
At all times show also to me,
Merciful God, mercy.
I sigh constantly in my distress:
Remember Jesus's bitter death.

7. Leit uns mit deiner rechten Hand
Und segne unser Stadt und Land;
Gib uns allzeit dein heiliges Wort,
Behüt fürs Teufels List und Mord;
Verleih ein selges Stündlein,

7. Guide us with your right hand²⁴
And bless our city and land;
Grant us always your holy word;
Protect [us] from the devil's cunning and murderousness;
Bestow on [us] a blessed hour [of death],²⁵

¹⁸The language of this line is derived from Psalm 79:9, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Hilf du uns, Gott, unser Helfer, um deines Namens Ehre willen; errette uns und vergib uns unsere Sünde" ("Help/save us, God, our helper/savior, for the sake of the honor of your name; rescue us and forgive us our sin"). In the Hebrew text of the psalm, there are two different words underlying the passage: "azar" ("to help") for Luther's "hilf," and "yesha" ("[our] salvation") for Luther's "Helfer." Knowing that "Jesus" is the Greek form of the name "Yeshua," which means "the LORD is salvation," Lutheran interpretation understood Psalm 79:9 to be speaking of Jesus as the savior who effects forgiveness of sin.

¹⁹The sense of this line is derived from 1 Timothy 1:12, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Ich danke unserm HERRN Christo Jesu, der mich stark [im Glauben] gemacht ... hat; ... ich zuvor war ein Lästere[r] ...; aber mir ist Barmherzigkeit widerfahren, denn ich hab's unwissend getan, im Unglauben" ("I [the apostle Paul] thank our Lord Jesus Christ, who has made me strong [in faith/belief]; I was prior to this a blasphemer [against Christ] ...; but [God's] mercy befell me, for I did it [the blaspheming] ignorantly, in unbelief [in Christ]").

²⁰The verb "befehlen" is being used here in one of its older German senses, as a synonym for "empfehlen" in the sense of "to commend" or "to entrust." The word is used this way, e.g., in Jeremiah 11:20, "HERR ..., ich habe dir meine Sache befohlen" ("LORD, ... I have entrusted my cause to you").

²¹The two syllables of the original hymn text here read "deins Sohns," words the librettist saved for the four syllables of "deines Sohnes" in the troping line that immediately follows. Bach, for his part, treats this as a quoted chorale line.

²²The repetition of this line does not occur in the hymn.

²³As is proclaimed in 1 John 2:2, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "[Jesus] ist die Versöhnung für unsere Sünde, nicht allein aber für die unsere, sondern auch für [die Sünde] der ganzen Welt" ("[Jesus] is the propitiation for our sin; not only, however, for the [sin] of ours, but also for [the sin] of the whole world").

²⁴The "right hand of God" is a common biblical expression for God's power and honor.

²⁵This line does not mean "Grant us one single blessed hour." The word "Stündlein" (i.e., the diminutive of "Stunde" ["hour"]) was very often used in older German as a synonym for "Todestunde" ("hour of death"). It is used this way, e.g., in Sirach 11:19, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Er weiss nicht, dass sein Stündlein so nahe ist, und muss alles ändern lassen, und sterben" ("He [who sets out to enjoy his old age after retiring from his life's work] does not know that his hour of death is so near, and [that he] he must leave all [the things that he has acquired] to others, and [must] die"). By "a blessed hour of death" the libretto means a death with the blessedness of eternal salvation.

Auf dass wir ewig bei dir sein.

So that we may eternally be with you.

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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