

# PSALMS

## Chapter 17

Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry! Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!  
<sup>2</sup> From your presence let my vindication come! Let your eyes behold the right! <sup>3</sup> You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing; I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress. <sup>4</sup> With regard to the works of man, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent. <sup>5</sup> My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped. <sup>6</sup> I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me; hear my words. <sup>7</sup> Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand. <sup>8</sup> Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings, <sup>9</sup> from the wicked who do me violence, my deadly enemies who surround me. <sup>10</sup> They close their hearts to pity; with their mouths they speak arrogantly. <sup>11</sup> They have now surrounded our steps; they set their eyes to cast us to the ground. <sup>12</sup> He is like a lion eager to tear, as a young lion lurking in ambush. <sup>13</sup> Arise, O LORD! Confront him, subdue him! Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword, <sup>14</sup> from men by your hand, O LORD, from men of the world whose portion is in this life. You fill their womb with treasure; they are satisfied with children, and they leave their abundance to their infants. <sup>15</sup> As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

**Ps 17** The psalmist appeals to the Lord as Judge, when under attack by ungodly foes. The psalm reflects many of the Hebrew conventions of lodging a judicial appeal before the king. The final verses of both Psalms 16 and 17 express David's eager anticipation of eternal joy in the presence of God. (PBC)

Possibly another of David's cries for deliverance during the time King Saul was trying to kill him, as recorded throughout 1Sm.

Format: Vv 1–2, prayer for vindication; vv 3–5, tested by the Lord; vv 6–7, prayer for an answer; vv 8–9, prayer for safety; vv 10–12, the arrogant attack; vv 13–14, prayer for deliverance; v 15, satisfied with the Lord. (TLSB)

**17:1–2** The initial appeal for justice. (CSB)

The theme: David pleads for vindication from God, the source of his justification. (TLSB)

**17:1** *my righteous plea*. His case is truly just, not a clever misrepresentation by deceitful lips (for a similar situation see 1Sa 24:15). (CSB)

Although David is not without sin, he is a believing child of God. David does not base his hope on primarily on his own uprightness but upon the love and faithfulness of the Lord. (PBC)

“hear,” “give attention,” and “listen, give ear to” is a threefold plea that strikes a note of urgency, and the urgency is for his vindication in the face of severe opposition. His prayer was that God listen to his just cause. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*Free of deceit* – Of course, it would do no good at all to try to lie to God; the psalmist is simply underscoring his integrity. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**17:2** *from your presence let my vindication come* – The appeal is that if God heard his case, he would see that what he is doing is right. Then God would vindicate him. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**17:3–5** David’s claim of innocence in support of the rightness of his case. He is not guilty of the ungodly ways of his attackers—let God examine him (cf. 139:23–24). (CSB)

**17:3** *visited me by night* – Surprise inspection. (TLSB)

Refers to his lying on his bed and in quiet thought contemplating his life in the light of the word of the Lord (Pss. 4:4, 6:6, 16:7). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

The examination “at night” suggests a time of isolation from one’s occupation and social relations, when one is completely alone with God, so that nothing distracts from the examination (cf. Job 7:18). The examination involves self-examination of one’s attitude, loyalty, and obedience to God’s commandments. (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

*Tested me* – David’s plea (vv. 1–2) introduces his case (vv.3–5). He testifies that the Lord has repeatedly examined his heart and tested him. (TLSB)

God examines his thoughts and decisions and not just the actions. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*Find nothing* – He is innocent before God. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**17:4** *word of your lips*. God’s revealed will, by which he has made known the “paths” (v. 5) that people are to walk. (CSB)

The Lord’s instructions and promises. (TLSB)

*Have avoided the ways of the violent* – With regard to the works of man, he asserts that he has watched (s.v. Ps. 12:7), meaning tried to avoid, or kept from the ways of the violent or destructive person. How has he done this? By the word of God’s lips. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**17:5** *my steps have help fast to you paths* – God’s word also keeps him “holding fast” to God’s ways. Accordingly, his activities in life have not moved from the ways God – he has not slipped or wavered at all. His integrity, his righteousness, is due to his living out the revealed will of God every step of the way. And because he is righteous, he could appeal to God with confidence to vindicate him. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**17:6–9** The petition: what the Lord is to do for him—motivated by David’s trust in him (“for you will answer me,” v. 6) and the Lord’s unfailing righteousness (see v. 7). (CSB)

**17:6** *call upon you* – Hbr *qara*, “to call upon,” “name,” or “summon.” “Call on God’s name” describes speaking God’s name in prayer, repentance, or consulting the Lord by Urim and Thummim, administered by the high priest. (TLSB P. 842)

Urim and Thummim are objects placed in the breastpiece of the high priest, Their exact nature is unknown. They were used, however, to determine the will of the Lord (Ex. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21). (Lutheran Bible Companion – Volume 2)

It is emphatic, as though he says “It is I who call on you.” The urgency is based on the confidence that God will answer him. The boldness in his calling on God expresses the close relationship David has with the Lord. (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

*Incline your ear to me* – It means to listen closely. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*Answer me* – This is a response to hear my speech (s.v. Ps. 119:11). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**17:7** *wondrously* – God’s saving acts, sometimes involving miracles—as in the exodus from Egypt, the desert wanderings and the entrance into the promised land—and sometimes not, but always involving the manifestation of God’s sovereign lordship over events. Here reference is to the destruction of the enemies celebrated in this psalm. (CSB)

*steadfast love* – The Hebrew for this phrase denotes befriending. Appeal to God’s “(unfailing) love, kindness, mercy” is frequent in the OT since it summarizes all that the Lord covenanted to show to Israel (see Dt 7:9, 12) as well as to David and his dynasty. (CSB)

God’s very nature is the foundation of David’s confidence. God’s love for His children and His righteous zeal for His holy law compel Him to come to the aid of His people when they are afflicted by their enemies. His love does not permit Him to be indifferent to the cries of His people. His justice does not permit Him to ignore the crimes of the wicked. (PBC)

For God to make his loyal love distinct means to demonstrate it in a new and extraordinary manner. His salvation of his people would be the outworking of his loyal love for those who put their faith in him. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*Who seek refuge* – The verb “take refuge” (s.v. Ps. 7:1) is a common figure for trusting in the Lord and stresses the idea of seeking shelter. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**17:8-9** David uses a pair of vivid images as he begs for protection from his enemies. (TLSB)

**17:8** *keep me as the apple of your eye* – This is the pupil of the eye, which is essential to vision and must be carefully protected. God guards his people with the same care with which a person guards his own eyes. (PBC)

In Hebrew it is “the little man of the eye.” The request is that God’s protective care should never let him out of sight. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*Shadow* – A conventional Hebrew metaphor for protection against oppression—as shade protects from the oppressive heat of the hot desert sun. Kings were spoken of as the “shade” of those dependent on them for protection (as in Nu 14:9, “protection”—lit. “shade”; La 4:20; Eze 31:6, 12, 17). Similarly, the Lord is the protective “shade” of his people (see 91:1; 121:5; Isa 25:4; 49:2; 51:16). (CSB)

*Wings* – Metaphor for the protective outreach of God’s power (see 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4; Ru 2:12; see also Mt 23:37). (CSB)

The cherubim of God’s throne were winged (Ex 25:20). A mother hen hides her chicks under her wings to protect them. Cf Lk 13:34. (TLSB)

Note Exodus 25:20 TLSB – *cherubim*. The “living creatures” of 1:5, having animal and human features. These beings, mentioned over 90 times in the Bible, are most commonly associated with the presence of God (cf Ex 25:22). They guard the throne of God (Ps 80:1) and are probably the “living creatures” referred to as standing around the throne in Rv 4:6. “Cherubim” is probably best understood as a common noun referring to a variety of beings (described differently in the Bible) rather than as the name of a specific type of being. The term is also known from the ancient Near East, where it is sometimes used for the mythological beasts that stand guard over the gates of cities, an example of how the truth about God and His ways is often preserved in a distorted form in ancient mythology (e.g., the widespread accounts of the flood in various cultures)

He shelters them with the same care with which a mother bird hovers over her babies and protects them. (PBC)

**17:9** *wicked who do me violence* – This means “devastate, lay waste, deal violently with.” (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*my deadly enemies* – Quite remarkably David never once mentions Saul, his chief assailant – a notable instance of the fine restraint exercised in these so-called imprecatory (to invoke a curse) psalms, and a factor not little noted. (Leupold)

*surround me* – They assail him and surround him with the intent to destroy his life. Only God can protect him from such attacks. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**17:10–12** The accusation lodged against the vicious adversaries – Accusation (a common element in the prayers of the Psalter) and call for redress.). (CSB)

David portrays his persecutors as hard-hearted and arrogant, as predatory as a wild beast. (TLSB)

**17:10** *mouths* – (The most frequent weapon used against the psalmists is the tongue (for a striking example see Ps 12). The psalmists experienced that the tongue is as deadly as the sword (see 57:4; 64:3–4). Perhaps appeals to God against those who maliciously wield the tongue are frequent in the Psalms because only in God’s courtroom can a person experience redress for such attacks.). (CSB)

*speak with arrogance* – The arrogance with which the wicked speak (see 17:10), especially their easy dismissal of God’s knowledge of their evil acts and his unfailing prosecution of their malicious deeds, is frequently noted by the psalmists. (CSB)

These people in their strength and their greed were rebellious against God and therefore indifferent to others. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**17:11** *Our* – If David wrote this psalm when Saul was after him, David refers to the men who joined him in the wilderness (cf 1Sm 27:2). (TLSB)

Complete overthrow of him and his followers was the avowed plan of the wicked opposition. It is not as though the psalmist were trying to inform God about things that he thought the Almighty had not noted. It is rather a case of making vocal that which is the particular danger that besets our hearts continually. (Leupold)

*Surround our steps* – The psalmist finds that wherever his steps lead the enemies materialize to surround him. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*They set their eyes* – Their eyes betray them to be malicious, intent on destroying him, but the psalmist believes that God will keep him as the apple of his eye. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**17:12** *he* – Perhaps King Saul. (TLSB)

*Lion* – As a young shepherd, David had been attacked by lions (see 1Sa 17:34–35). But it is also a convention in the Psalms to liken the attack of enemies to that of ferocious animals, especially the lion. (CSB)

The enemy is like a lion hungry for prey, like a young lion, full of energy, sitting in its jiding place ready to attack. The danger the psalmist faces is therefore a planned and powerful attack intent on destroying him. The world has not changed in its opposition to the righteous and their cause. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**17:13–14a** Petition: how the Lord is to deal with the two parties in the conflict. (CSB)

**17:13** Scripture depicts God fighting on behalf of His people at the Red Sea, at Jericho, and in David’s own battle against Goliath (1Sm 17). (TLSB)

The series of imperatives in this verse – “arise (s.v. Ps; 31), confront, cast down, deliver (s.v. Ps. 37:20)” stresses the urgency of the appeal. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*arise* – Hebrew idiom frequently prefaces an imperative calling for immediate action with the call to arise. (CSB)

*bring him down* – The psalmists knew that he who has been wronged is not to right that wrong by his own hand but is to leave redress to the Lord, who says, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay.” (CSB)

Because the wicked show no mercy to others, they will receive no mercy from God. They pursue their victims as relentlessly as animals, who are driven by instinct. They show no compassion to their victims. Therefore God will cast them into eternal punishment. (PBC)

The prayer now becomes really aggressive, more than we would dare to make our prayers. But it must be remembered that the writer has an unusually clear call from God to be the leader of God’s people and in following the ways of his calling was encountering an opposition that he saw was fanned by all the forces of evil. (Leupold)

*Deliver my soul* – This rescue would come by the Lord’s sword, a figure for military victory. The prayer is for deliverance from worldly men. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**17:14** *such men*. See 9:19–20; 10:18; 12:1–4, 8; 14:1–3. (CSB)

*Whose portion is in this life* – They amass wealth, power and fame, but they will be stripped of it all. In eternity they will have nothing but pain and regret. (PBC)

Those who despise God's Word and His ways can enjoy life only in this world. Unrepentant wickedness finally forfeits a share of heaven. (TLSB)

**17:14b–15** Concluding confession of confidence. (CSB)

A common feature in the prayers of the Psalter is a concluding expression of confidence that the prayer will be or has been heard.). – God provides for the daily needs of his children. David discusses this provision for earthly needs more fully in Psalm 37. In the Sermon on the Mount Christ assures us, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or about your body, what you will wear.... For the pagan run after all these things, and your heavenly Father know that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:25, 32, 33) (PBC)

**17:15** *in righteousness*. The righteous Judge – Very often the “righteousness” of God in the Psalms (and frequently elsewhere in the OT) refers to the faithfulness with which he acts. This faithfulness is in full accordance with his commitments (both expressed and implied) to his people and with his status as the divine King—to whom the powerless may look for protection, the oppressed for redress and the needy for help.) will acknowledge and vindicate the innocence (righteousness) of the petitioner. (CSB)

*see your face* – Note 11;7 CSB – (The Hebrew for “see the king’s face” was an expression denoting access to the king (see Ge 43:3, 5; 44:23, 26; 2Sa 3:13, “come into my presence”; 14:24, 28, 32). Sometimes it referred to those who served before the king (see 2Ki 25:19, “royal advisers”; Est 1:14, those “who had special access to the king”). Here David speaks of special freedom of access before the heavenly King. Reference is no doubt to his presence at the temple (God’s earthly royal house), but that is still the presence of the One who sits on the heavenly throne. Ultimate access to the heavenly temple may also be implied (see 16:11; 17:15; see also 23:6; 140:13). Even the pagan peoples surrounding Israel believed that man continued after death, though only in some kind of shadowy existence in the netherworld.) (CSB)

The greatest blessing God gives his children is the joy of spending eternity dwelling in the presence of God and seeing him as he is. Although the joys of eternity will be many, the presence of God alone would be enough to satisfy us throughout eternity. When we have been purified from sin, we will be able to stand in the presence of the holy God without fear. Though each of us must pass through death, like David we have the confidence that we will awake in God’s presence and reign with him for ever and ever. (PBC)

David is thinking forward to eternity (1Jn 3:2) (TLSB)

*when I awake*. From the night of death – in radical contrast to the destiny of the “men of this world.” (CSB)

As so often, also here the troubles that completely surround a man are conceived as likely to continue as long as one lives; so complete deliverance from them will be possible only when this present life has run its course. From that point of view it should seem quite natural that the hope of the great deliverance that all saints cherish comes to the forefront here. (Leupold)

**17:15** *I shall behold your face* – Since the “face” of the Lord is associated with divine favor (compare the blessing of Numbers 6:22-27), seeing his face would mean witnessing his divine favor. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

*With your likeness* – There is no reason why the psalmist could not extend his confidence in the Lord's immediate deliverance to include his ultimate vindication beyond death (whether he thought in terms of the resurrection or simply a future existence beyond death in the presence of God). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

**Ps 17** David begs for protection from a bloodthirsty enemy. A tragic consequence of the world's fall into sin is that we often suffer through no particular fault of our own. Job is the classic case of one who suffers innocently. God's ability to turn injustice into good is best illustrated by Jesus' innocent death on the cross. That horrible miscarriage of justice worked life and salvation for all people. • Lord, keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. He saved us by enduring great injustice and now sits at Your right hand. Amen. (TLSB)