

PSALMS

Chapter 54

O God, save me by your name, and vindicate me by your might. ²O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth.³ For strangers have risen against me; ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before themselves. *Selah* ⁴Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life. ⁵He will return the evil to my enemies; in your faithfulness put an end to them. ⁶With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good. ⁷For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.

Ps 54 A prayer for deliverance from enemies who want to have David killed. The prayer is short, like that of Ps 3; 4; 13; yet it is one of the most typical prayers of the Psalter. Completely symmetrical, the prayer is framed by David's cry for vindication (v. 1) and his statement of assurance that he will look in triumph on his foes (v. 7). A confession of confidence (v. 4) centers the prayer. The opening stanza has two verses, like the conclusion, while vv. 3, 5 each form a separate element in the prayer. (CSB)

Brief lament of David during another experience of betrayal (cf Ps 52) that nonetheless ends with thanksgiving and confidence in God's sure deliverance. Luther: "A psalm of prayer against the persecutors who seek the life of the godly on account of the Word of God. Thus Saul and those in Ziph had attempted to kill David on account of the Word of God, through which he had been called and consecrated to be king. He prays for deliverance from his enemies and vengeance upon them" (*PIML*, p 72). As David fled from Saul's murderous intent, he hid in the wilderness of Ziph in the southern part of Judah. In order to gain favor from Saul, the Ziphites betrayed David's whereabouts (1Sm 23:15–24; 26:1). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–2, appeal for salvation; v 3, ruthless attack; vv 4–5, God is my helper; vv 6–7, thanks for deliverance. (TLSB)

54:1–2 Prayer for God to judge his case (see Ps 17). – a fine instance of how a man in trouble casts himself wholly on the mercy of God. (Leupold)

54:1 *name* – The name of the Lord is the manifestation of his character. (CSB)

54:2 Verse 2 bolsters verse 1, for verse 1 is the petition for deliverance that will vindicate him, and verse 2 exhorts God to answer. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

54:3 The case against his enemies. (CSB)

strangers – Ziphites, from whom David did not expect such a murderous threat. The Ziphites were a clan, or family, descended from noble Caleb (Jsh 15:24; 1Ch 2:42; 4:16). (TLSB)

do not set God before themselves – Like those of Ps 53. (CSB)

Acting like those outside Israel who do not keep God in mind (cf 53). (TLSB)

These enemies were violent because they rejected God's ways; and it was against such an inverted value system that the psalmist cried out for help and vindication. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

Selah – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. “The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers” (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

54:4 The confession of confidence and the center of the poem – The center: confession of hope in all the trouble. That is, “Day-and-night [cf. v. 3] the LORD directs his love, and his song is with me.”. (CSB)

David looks to none but God. This centerpiece of the psalm expresses confidence in God, even as enemies attack. (TLSB)

54:5 The call for redress – The presence of so-called “imprecations” (curses) in the Psalms has occasioned endless discussion and has caused many Christians to wince, in view of Jesus’ instructions to turn the other cheek and to pray for one’s enemies (see Mt 5:39, 44), and his own example on the cross (see Lk 23:34). Actually, these “imprecations” are not that at all; rather, they are appeals to God to redress wrongs perpetrated against the psalmists by imposing penalties commensurate with the violence done (see 28:4)—in accordance also with normal judicial procedure in human courts (see Dt 25:1–3). 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)

God will redress the situation and mete out proper punishment for their evil. (TLSB)

54:6 The vow to praise – A vow to praise. Many prayers in the Psalter include such vows in anticipation of the expected answer to prayer. They reflect Israel’s religious consciousness that praise must follow deliverance as surely as prayer springs from need—if God is to be truly honored. Such praise was usually offered with thank offerings and involved celebrating God’s saving act in the presence of those assembled at the temple. (CSB)

freewill offering – Expression of gratitude, not required by the Law (Ex 35:29; 36:3–5; Lv 7:16). Pledged as confidently as if the deliverance were an accomplished fact. (TLSB)

name – The name of the Lord is the manifestation of his character. (CSB)

With the spontaneous offering, a vow to praise God, whose goodness is seen in this pleasing outcome. (TLSB)

54:7 Assurance of being heard – A common feature in the prayers of the Psalter is a concluding expression of confidence that the prayer will be or has been heard. (CSB)

God's deliverance will have been complete – "from all trouble." (Leupold)

Ps 54 The psalmist prays for deliverance amidst persecution by family and even strangers! He is confident that God will help as He always has. In times of sudden testing and unexpected trouble, we easily become disillusioned and wonder if God has abandoned us. However, in every trouble, God is our sure helper. The deliverance He provides in Christ, who Himself knew persecution unto death, makes us triumphant despite every appearance to the contrary. • God, thank You for being my helper, the upholder of my life. Amen. (TLSB)