

# PSALMS

## Chapter 59

Deliver me from my enemies, O God; protect me from those who rise up against me. <sup>2</sup> Deliver me from evildoers and save me from bloodthirsty men. <sup>3</sup> See how they lie in wait for me! Fierce men conspire against me for no offense or sin of mine, O LORD. <sup>4</sup> I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me. Arise to help me; look on my plight! <sup>5</sup> O LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, rouse yourself to punish all the nations; show no mercy to wicked traitors. *Selah* <sup>6</sup> They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. <sup>7</sup> See what they spew from their mouths—they spew out swords from their lips, and they say, “Who can hear us?” <sup>8</sup> But you, O LORD, laugh at them; you scoff at all those nations. <sup>9</sup> O my Strength, I watch for you; you, O God, are my fortress, <sup>10</sup> my loving God. God will go before me and will let me gloat over those who slander me. <sup>11</sup> But do not kill them, O Lord our shield, <sup>b</sup> or my people will forget. In your might make them wander about, and bring them down. <sup>12</sup> For the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, let them be caught in their pride. For the curses and lies they utter, <sup>13</sup> consume them in wrath, consume them till they are no more. Then it will be known to the ends of the earth that God rules over Jacob. *Selah* <sup>14</sup> They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. <sup>15</sup> They wander about for food and howl if not satisfied. <sup>16</sup> But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. <sup>17</sup> O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.

**Ps 59** A prayer for deliverance when endangered by enemy attacks. If originally composed by David under the circumstances noted in the superscription, it must have been revised for use by one of David’s royal sons when Jerusalem was under siege by a hostile force made up of troops from many nations—as when Hezekiah was besieged by the Assyrians (see 2Ki 18:19). (Some, however, ascribe it to Nehemiah; see Ne 4.) The enemy weapon most prominent is the tongue, attacking with slander and curses. In this psalm, too, the imagery of the night of danger (vv. 6, 14), followed by the morning of deliverance (v. 16), is evoked (see introduction to Ps 57). Regarding the structure, the two halves of the psalm (vv. 1–9, 10–17) each conclude with an almost identical refrain (vv. 9, 17), preceded by a stanza that begins with a like characterization of the enemies (vv. 6, 14). The first half of the psalm is predominantly prayer, the second half predominantly assurance of deliverance. The whole is framed by a cry for protection (v. 1) and a joyful confession that God is the psalmist’s “fortress” (v. 17, in Hebrew the same root as that for “protect” in v. 1). (CSB)

The setting of this psalm is given in 1 Samuel 19. Saul had given his daughter to David in marriage, hoping that she would help him against David. (PBC)

Vv 1–7 are a prayer for help in time of need; vv 8–17 reflect the author’s assurance of deliverance. Both end on a note of praise for God, our strength and security (vv 9, 17). *choirmaster*. Scripture does not record a specific event that fits this superscription. However, Saul’s hatred of David is well attested (1Sm 19–31). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–2, prayer for deliverance; vv 3–5, faultless; vv 6–7, my enemies are like dogs; vv 8–10, God’s protection; vv 11–13, appeal to trap but not kill enemies; vv 14–15, my enemies are like wandering dogs; vv 16–17, God is a fortress and refuge. (TLSB)

A number of psalms use curses and express themselves so violently that modern readers find them shocking and even wonder how they could appear in the Sacred Scriptures. When the psalmist’s emotions spill over into violence, it is important to understand why. (TLSB p. 879)

Christian should understand that the violent outbursts in these psalms are not prescriptions for the behavior of God’s people but illustrations of emotion that God’s people will indeed experience. Christians today who lose loved ones to war or to violent criminals will have these same feelings of anger and revenge. Praying the imprecatory psalms can help God’s people express their anguish before God rather than act out their feelings in an unjust way. Imprecatory psalms prayed with psalms of repentance and hope can guide trouble hearts through the feelings they cannot escape. (TLSB – 879)

The curses contained in these psalms are often shocking to modern readers, but such prayers are in accordance with God’s curse against sin. (PBC)

The Lutheran Study Bible lists the following psalms as imprecatory: 35; 55; 59; 79; 109; 137.

Some psalms include vivid curses which ask God to punish our enemies, as He protects and defends us from evil. In light of Jesus’ teaching to love our enemies, these prayers may seem improper and un-Christian. However, in each one the psalmist cries out for God to take revenge. The imprecatory psalms put the psalmist squarely on the side of God who hates injustice and who does indeed rescue His abused children. While we leave vengeance to the Lord, and while we yearn for the ungodly to turn from sin to the Savior, we still hate wickedness and evil. Ultimately, Satan instigates all injustice, and the imprecatory psalms find their true target as we pray them against the kingdom of darkness. (LL)

No section of the Psalter causes us greater difficulty today than the so-called imprecatory psalms. With shocking frequency their thoughts penetrate the entire Psalter (5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 16, 21, 23, 28, 31, 35, 36, 40, 41, 44, 52, 54, 55, 58, 59, 68, 69, 70, 71, 137, and others). Every attempt to pray these psalms seems doomed to failure. They seem to be an example of what people think of as the religious first stage toward the NT. Christ on the cross prays for his enemies and

teaches us to do the same. How can we still, with these Psalms, call for the wrath of God against our enemies? The question is therefore: Can the imprecatory psalms be understood as God's word for us and as the prayer of Jesus Christ? Can the Christian pray these psalms? Note carefully again that we do not ask about possible motives, which we can never fathom anyway, but rather about the content of the prayer. (Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

The enemies referred to here are enemies of the cause of God, who lays hands on us for the sake of God. It is therefore nowhere a matter of personal conflict. Nowhere does the one who prays these psalms want to take revenge into his own hands. He calls for the wrath of God alone (cf. Romans 12:19). Therefore he must dismiss from his own mind all thought of personal revenge; he must be free from his own thirst for revenge. Otherwise, the vengeance would not be seriously commanded from God. This means that only the one who is himself innocent in relation to his enemy can leave the vengeance to God. The prayer for the vengeance of God is the prayer for the execution of his righteousness in the judgment of sin. This judgment must be made public if God is to stand by his word. It must also be promulgated among those whom it concerns. I myself, with my sin, belong under this judgment. I have no right to want to hinder this judgment. It must be fulfilled for God's sake and it has been fulfilled, certainly, in wonderful ways. (Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

God's vengeance did not strike the sinners, but the one sinless man who stood in the sinner's place, namely God's own Son. Jesus Christ bore the wrath of God, for the execution of which the psalm prays. He stilled God's wrath toward sin and prayed in the hour of the execution of the divine judgment: "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do!" No other than he, who himself bore the wrath of God, could pray in this way. That was the end of all phony thoughts about the love of God which do not take sin seriously. God hates and redirects his enemies to the only righteous one, and this one asks forgiveness for them. Only in the cross of Jesus Christ is the love of God to be found. (Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Thus the imprecatory psalm leads to the cross of Jesus and to the love of God which forgives enemies. I cannot forgive the enemies of God out of my own resources. Only the crucified Christ can do that, and I through him. Thus to carrying out of vengeance becomes grace for all men in Jesus Christ. (Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Certainly it is important to distinguish in relation to these psalms whether I stand in the time of promise or in the time of fulfillment, but this distinction is true for all psalms. I pray the imprecatory psalms in the certainty of their marvelous fulfillment. I leave the vengeance to God and ask him to execute his righteousness to all his enemies, knowing that God has remained true to himself and has himself secured justice in his wrathful judgment on the cross, and that

this wrath has become grace and joy for us. Jesus Christ himself requests the execution of the wrath of God on his body, and thus he leads me back daily to the gravity and the grace of his cross for me and all enemies of God. (Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Even today I can believe the love of God and forgive my enemies only by going back to the cross of Christ, to the carrying out of the wrath of God. (*We need to remember that Bonhoeffer was being persecuted by the Nazi's.*) The cross of Jesus is valid for all men. Whoever opposes him, whoever corrupts the word of the cross of Jesus on which God's wrath must be executed, must bear the cruse of God some or another. The NT speaks with great clarity concerning this and does not distinguish itself at all in this respect from the OT, but it also speaks of the joy of the church in that day on which the God will execute his final judgment (Gal. 1:8f; 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 18; 19; 20:11). In this way the crucified Jesus teaches us to pray the imprecatory psalms correctly. (Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

**59 title** See note on Ps 56 title. (CSB)

*Do Not Destroy.* See Ps 57; 58; 75 titles. (CSB)

*When.* For the event referred to see 1Sa 19:11. (CSB)

**59:1–2** The cry for deliverance. (CSB)

**59:1** *protect me.* Lit. “raise me to a high, secure place.” (CSB)

**59:2** *evildoers ... bloodthirsty men.* Common characterizations of those who attack the psalmists out of malice. (CSB)

**59:3–5** By slander (v. 10) and lies (v. 12) the enemies seek to justify their attacks, but the psalmist protests his innocence and pleads with God to judge those who wrong him (see 58:11). (CSB)

**59:3** *lie in wait.* See 10:8–9 and note on 7:2. (CSB)

Saul sent men to spy on David to catch him in some “crime” for which execution would be the remedy. (TLSB)

The house was encircled, and David was to be taken alive when he ventured forth. (Leupold)

NO OFFENSE OR SIN – David pleads innocence. He has given Saul no reason to seek his life. (TLSB)

**59:4 I HAVE DONE NO WRONG** – David was particularly circumspect in his conduct so that he was actually innocent of all the things that Saul's jealousy charged him with. (Leupold)

*Arise.* See note on 3:7 (Hebrew idiom frequently prefaces an imperative calling for immediate action.). (CSB)

**59:5 LORD God Almighty.** See note on 1Sa 1:3. (CSB)

*Yahweh* ("I AM," Ex 3:14) is God's personal, covenant name. "God" is a general term, but when coupled with "hosts" (Hbr *tseba'oth*), it depicts God as the commanding general of all the angelic armies. (TLSB)

*God of Israel.* This appeal to the Lord as the God of Israel to punish the nations makes clear that the attack on the psalmist involves an attack by the nations on Israel. (CSB)

Recalls the personal connection between God and His people. David calls upon God, who has committed Himself to His people and has the power to intervene anywhere and at any time. (TLSB)

*rouse yourself.* See note on 7:6 (The psalmists' language of urgent prayer vividly expresses their anguished impatience with God's inaction in the face of their great need.). (CSB)

*punish ... show no mercy.* See note on 5:10. (CSB)

*traitors.* Whether Israelites had joined in the attack is not clear; the Hebrew indicates only that the enemies were treacherous. (CSB)

Not only did God's chosen leaders face enemies from within God's own people, but Gentiles also often plotted Israel's ruin. The personal relationship between God and David extends to God's faithful people. (TLSB)

**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)

**59:6–8** Confidence: Surely God mocks such a pack of dogs (see 22:16–17). (CSB)

**59:6** SNARLING LIKE DOGS – This harsh description is not surprising, since these men stooped so low as to attack him in his own home under cover of darkness and even expected David’s wife to help them. (PBC)

Dogs were unsavory, half-wild, and vicious scavengers that lay low during the day but hunted the cities at night for food. Any city in the Near East hosted such packs (cf vv 14–15). (TLSB)

*about the city.* The enemies besiege the city like dogs at night on the prowl for food (see vv. 14–15). (CSB)

**59:7** *swords from their lips.* Their “curses and lies” (v. 12). For the imagery see 57:4; see also note on 5:9. (CSB)

Pictures words as weapons. (TLSB)

*they say.* See note on 3:2. (CSB)

*hear us.* David’s enemies mock God, thinking He does not notice their lies (cf 3:2). (TLSB)

**59:8** LAUGH AT THEM – To the Lord such efforts to overthrow his saints are downright ludicrous. (Leupold)

**59:9** O MY STRENGTH – As he himself is concerned, being unable to cope with the danger that has arisen with his own strength, he makes the Lord his “Strength” and takes refuge in him as in an unassailable “fortress.”

*watch.* Hebrew *shamar* (see note on v. 17). The psalmist watches as one who longingly waits for the morning (of salvation); see 130:6. (CSB)

**59:10–13** The prayer renewed. Confident that the Lord will hear his prayer (v. 10) and will punish the nations (v. 5), the psalmist prays that God will not sweep them away suddenly but will prolong their punishment so that Israel (“my people,” v. 11) will not forget God’s acts of salvation, as they had done so often before (see 78:11; 106:13). Nevertheless, the psalmist asks God not to allow the enemies to escape the full consequences of their malice (vv. 12–13). (CSB)

**59:10** *loving.* See note on 6:4. (CSB)

*meet me.* God will come to his aid and stand beside him. (TLSB)

**59:11** *Kill them not.* People forget easily. If all enemies are swept away, God's people will be tempted to forget God. Cf 1Sm 24; 26. (TLSB)

*shield.* See note on 3:3. (CSB)

Psalm is both personal and corporate, including all of God's faithful people. Cf 28:7. (TLSB)

*wander about.* Like vagabonds, with no place to settle (see Ge 4:12; 2Sa 15:20; La 4:15) and having to hunt for food (like dogs, v. 15; see 109:10; Am 4:8). (CSB)

**59:12** See note on v. 7. (CSB)

*caught in their pride.* Let the pride with which they treacherously attack the Lord's servant and his people be the trap that catches them. (CSB)

(v 6) may be caught and domesticated. (TLSB)

*curses and lies.* See 10:7 and note. (CSB)

Calling down misfortune on another by magical incantations or other supernatural means (cf 10:7; curses, lies, and threats were used as weapons by the enemy). (TLSB)

**59:13** CONSUME THEM IN WRATH – These are harsh words, but they agree with God's own verdict on impenitent sinners. (PBC)

*Then it will be known.* When God has thus dealt with Israel's enemies, all the world will acknowledge that the Judge of all the earth (see 58:11) is the God of Israel. (CSB)

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH – The same principles of judgment and justice which applied to God's dealings with Saul and his cronies apply to all evildoers and persecutors of all time. (PBC)

*Jacob.* See note on 14:7 (Also Israel). (CSB)

Special covenant relationship between God and Israel ("Jacob") foreshadows special relationship God has with His people that forms the foundation for the Good News of a Savior who will give His life for all people of every nation. (TLSB)

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**59:14–16** Assurance of being heard (see note on 3:8). Just as God mocks the defiant pack of dogs (vv. 6–8), so the psalmist will sing for joy at God’s triumph over them. (CSB)

**59:16** *strength ... love ... fortress*. See the refrain (vv. 9, 17). (CSB)

*morning*. See introduction. (CSB)

*day of my distress*. Time of trouble, danger, and fear. (TLSB)

**59:17** The vow to praise (see note on 7:17). (CSB)

*sing*. Hebrew *zamar* (see note on v. 9). The play on words in the refrain marks an advance from watching during the night of danger to singing in the morning of salvation. (CSB)

**Ps 59** When surrounded by enemies (or difficult circumstances), we turn to God in confidence and trust. Whatever He wills for us is best, even if we don’t understand it at the time. The world and all that is in it is passing away. Empires come and go. Only God and His promise of salvation in Jesus Christ stand firm, stand fast, and stand forever. • O mighty Fortress, our trusty Shield and Weapon, deliver us from the snaps and snarls of the wicked. Trap them with Your Law and turn their hearts by Your Gospel. Let Your people know peace amid strife. Amen. (TLSB)